Teaching the Truth

It's November—the time of the school year that many elementary teachers teach about American Indians and Thanksgiving, even though the traditional story is not true. Mrs. Starkes was no different. She was setting up her PowerPoint presentation to introduce the unit to her fourth graders in rural Texas.

"Are we going to talk about Indians today?" Joe asked excitedly.
"Yes," Mrs. Starkes replied.
"I am so excited," the petite blond girl in the first row squealed.
"My great, great grandmother was Cherokee."

Mrs. Starkes was always surprised at how many of her students claimed to have American Indian ancestors, especially in November. She was determined to break the stereotypes that her students had of American Indians. She knew that some of the other teachers were teaching the Thanksgiving story with toothpick tips, feathered headdresses, and paper-bag Indian vests. She wanted to break the Disney World view of American Indian princesses who saved early European settlers.

How could she break the myth that the Pilgrims provided a great feast for their American Indian neighbors to celebrate the harvest? It's the same story that the parents of most of her students learned when they were in school. The truth was difficult and depressing. Do her students have any idea that the Cherokees were driven from their homes in the Southeast and forced to walk the "Trail of Tears," which killed one in four of them, to their new government homes in Oklahoma?

"Do you know where Indians live today?" she began the lesson.
"In tips," a number of students shouted. "In a longhouse," another student offered.

Questions for Reflection
1. How would you respond to the stereotypes the students have about American Indians and help them develop a better understanding of the real history and current experiences of American Indians?
2. What is appropriate to teach fourth graders about the history of Thanksgiving?
3. Why do many myths and untruths about ethnic groups persist in our classrooms?

To respond to these questions online, go to the Book Specific Resources section in the MyEducationLab for your course, select your text, and then select Reflect on Diversity for Chapter 7.


LIFESTYLES
Lifestyles, parents routinely expose their offspring to survival routines, often immersing the children in decision-making situations in which they must interpret new experiences in light of previous ones. Unfortunately, a majority of teachers recognize neither Indian students’ knowledge nor their considerable learning strategies. Thus, not only is potentially important content knowledge ignored but well-developed ways of knowing, learning, and problem solving also go unrecognized. (Nelson-Barber & Estrin, 1995)

Some parents and communities have become so upset at schools’ unwillingness to respect and validate their cultures that they have established charter or private schools grounded in their own rather than the common culture. Afrocentric schools exist in a number of urban areas. Some Hispanic and American Indian groups have established schools in which their cultures are at the center of the curriculum. Jewish, Islamic, Black Muslim, Lutheran, Catholic, Amish, and other schools reinforce the values, beliefs, and behaviors of their religions in private schools across the country.

LANGUAGE
Language interacts with our ethnic and socioeconomic background to socialize us into linguistic and cultural communities. Children learn their native or heritage language by imitating adults and their peers. By age five, they have learned the syntax of their language and know the meanings of thousands of words. When cultural similarities exist between the speaker and listener, spoken messages are decoded accurately. But when the speaker and listener differ in ethnicity or class, miscommunication can occur. Even within English, a word, phrase, or nonverbal gesture takes on different meanings in different cultural groups and settings. You will need to recognize that miscommunications between you and your students may be due to inaccurate decoding rather than the lack of linguistic ability.

Language Diversity
More than 54 million U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, 2008b). One in five school-aged children live in homes where
language other than English is spoken (Planty et al., 2008, Indicator 7). While the majority of the population whose native language is not English speak English very well, you may have in your classroom new immigrant students who know little or no English and have very limited school experiences in their home countries. Around 6 percent of the nation’s children have difficulty speaking English (Planty et al., 2008, Indicator 7).

As immigrants assimilate into the common culture of the United States, their native language is often replaced by English within a few generations. The native language is more likely to be retained when schools and the community value bilingualism. As commerce and trade have become more global, professionals and administrators have realized the advantages of knowing a competitor’s culture and language. They are encouraging their children to learn a second language at the same time that many of our educational policies are discouraging native speakers from maintaining their native language while learning English. The movement in some states for English-only usage in schools, in daily commerce, on street signs, and on official government documents highlights the dominance of English desired by some citizens. Seven states (Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin) ban or restrict the use of student’s native languages for instruction.

In addition to English-language learners (ELLs), your classroom may include a student with a hearing disability. Hearing disabilities affect 0.2 percent of the population (Planty et al., 2008, Indicator 8). The language used by many of these students is American Sign Language (ASL) with its own complex grammar and well-regulated syntax. As with oral languages, children learn ASL very early by imitating others who use the language. To communicate with people without hearing disabilities, many individuals with hearing disabilities also use signed English, in which the oral or written word is translated into a sign. ASL is a critical element in the identity of people with hearing disabilities. The language can be more important to their identity than their membership in a particular ethnic, socioeconomic, or religious group.

**Dialectal Diversity**

The majority of the population uses Standard English for official and formal communications. However, numerous regional, local, ethnic, and class (or SES) dialects are identifiable across the country. Each has its own set of grammatical rules that are known to its users. Although each dialect serves its users well, Standard English is usually viewed as more credible in schools and the work world. For example, most individuals involved in the media use Standard English. Although teachers may be bidialectal, they are expected to use Standard English as the example that should be emulated by students.

Many Americans are bidialectal or multidialectal in that they speak Standard English at work but speak their native or local dialect at home or when they are socializing with friends. Social factors have an influence on which dialect is appropriate in a specific situation. At one time, students were not allowed to use a dialect other than Standard English in the classroom. Some schools have proposed using the dialect of the community as a teaching tool, but such proposals usually have limited public support. Today, students are generally allowed to speak their dialects in schools but are encouraged to learn Standard English to provide them an advantage when they later seek employment.

One instructional approach is to systematically teach the communication patterns necessary to work effectively within the common culture. In this strategy, students’ communication patterns are still valued, but they learn when it is to their advantage to use Standard English. In other words, they become bicultural—they are able to function in the different cultures of the school and their home. Teachers who also learn to function effectively in more than one culture will gain respect from students and begin to genuinely model a multicultural pedagogy.

**Education for Language Diversity**

A growing number of English-language learners are populating schools in large cities. However, the majority of them live in six states: Arizona, California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois. California itself educates one in three of the ELLs in the country. Even small cities and rural areas are now home to immigrant families and their children. Since 1995, the number of ELLs has grown by more than 300 percent in Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee (Educational Testing Service, 2008). ELLs in our schools are diverse with
most of them being Hispanic as shown in Figure 7.6. More than 450 languages are spoken in the nation’s schools. The most common native or heritage languages are Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Tagalog, Hmong, German, and Russian.

The growing number of ELLs in U.S. schools calls for educators to understand language learning and how to help students learn English while they are learning mathematics, science, and other subjects. Differences between the languages used at home and at school can lead to dissonance between students, their families, and school officials. Many students who enter school with limited English skills are not only trying to learn a second language but also adjusting to a new culture.

Members of Congress, state legislators, and school board members regularly debate strategies for teaching English-language learners. The debate centers on whether to use students’ native languages in instruction. One instructional strategy is bilingual education, which uses both English and the native language. Another strategy immerses English-language learners in English-only classrooms. Other strategies bridge the two. Many school districts and some states require bilingual education if a specific number of students who speak the same native language are enrolled in a school. This approach requires teachers who are fluent in both English and the native language.

No Child Left Behind calls for ELLs to become English proficient and meet standards as measured by standardized tests. Voters in some states have passed state initiatives that limit language assistance to ELLs to one year. The problem with this approach is that research shows that one year of English instruction is generally not enough time to develop proficiency for academic success in classes taught only in English. The amount of time required for English proficiency “depends on multiple factors, including the child’s age, level and quality of prior schooling of the child, parents’ education level, type and quality of instruction provided, the child’s exposure to English in his or her community, and quality of the teachers” (Civil Rights Project, 2002). For most ELLs, at least five years is required to develop language skills and academic achievement equal to that of native English speakers (Civil Rights Project, 2002). The result is that these students may fall further behind their classmates in conceptual understanding of the subjects being taught. For example, the number of English-language learners who are at the proficient or above level on NAEP’s reading and mathematics tests is 25 percent less than their English-speaking classmates (Two lenses, 2009).

At least six different approaches are used to teach academic content to English-language learners (Genesee, 1999). Sheltered instruction, newcomer programs, and transitional bilingual education approaches are designed to integrate students into the common culture. Although the native language may be used for instruction early in the program, the goal is to move to English-only instruction as soon as possible, usually between one and four years. In sheltered instruction, teachers teach the academic subjects at the same time that they are teaching English to students. The newcomer programs are designed for new immigrants who have limited or no experience with English.
and often have limited literacy skills in their native language. These programs are sometimes found within a school; some large school districts have one or more schools specifically for new immigrants. The most successful programs are those which students attend for as many as four years (Genesee, 1999). Teachers using these two approaches—sheltered and newcomer—should have knowledge and skills in teaching English as a second language (ESL).

In transitional bilingual education, academic subjects are taught in the native language as students learn English. Gradually, more and more of the instruction is conducted in English. After a few years, students in transitional bilingual education move into classes with instruction in English only. Developmental bilingual education, by contrast, supports bilingualism and literacy in both English and the native language. Both languages have equal status, and both are used for instructional purposes.

Two immersion language programs use a second language for instruction and help students understand and appreciate a second culture while maintaining their own native culture and language. World languages immersion is designed for English speakers who want to learn a second language in a classroom that uses Spanish, French, Japanese, Farsi, or another language for instruction. Issues around students becoming competent in two languages are debated in the Teacher Perspectives feature on the next page. Two-way immersion is used to develop bilingualism in all students as language training is integrated with academic instruction. Classes usually have an equal number of English speakers and speakers of another language.

As a school decides the appropriate approach for teaching English-language learners, parents must be involved in the discussions and decisions. Together, educators and parents will have to decide whether they want to promote bilingualism among all students or only among the English-language learners. Is the goal for English-language learners to become competent in both English and their native language or to move into English-only instruction as soon as possible? Each approach has learning implications for students and cost implications for school systems.

**GENDER**

We are culturally different because of our gender even when we are members of the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious group. We often segregate ourselves by gender at social gatherings, seek different types of jobs, and are expected to take on different family roles. The ways we think and act are defined by both biology and the expectations of our culture and society. Our gender may also influence the way we treat boys and girls and young women and young men in our classrooms.

**Differences between Females and Males**

Learning the gender of a baby is one of the important rites of parenthood. However, the major difference between infant boys and girls is the way adults respond to them. There are few actual physical differences, particularly before puberty. The socialization process in child-rearing and schools is a primary determinant of gender identity and related distinctive behaviors.

By age two, children realize that they are a girl or a boy; by five or six, they have learned their gender and stereotypical behavior. In most cultures, boys are generally socialized toward achievement and self-reliance, girls toward nurturance and responsibility. Differences in the expectations and behaviors of the two genders may be rooted in their groups’ ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status.

In schools many girls and boys perform differently in academic subjects and behave differently in the classroom. For years boys outperformed girls in mathematics, but the latest data show