



PaSLP Guiding Principle 2

Guiding Principle 2: Diversity

Diversity (e.g., linguistic, cultural, race and socioeconomic status) should be acknowledged, valued, and respected in our schools and classrooms. Students should have educational experiences that enable them to learn about their own culture as well as the culture of others, to make connections between what they know and what they are learning. By valuing and acknowledging diversity in our curriculum and instructional practices, student learning, motivation, and access to educational opportunities will be increased.

Where PA Stands

In 2014-15, there were 51,919 English learners in PA schools. In 2015-16, there were 52,689 students, 243 different languages reported, with Spanish being the most commonly represented language (32,308 students). In 2016-17 there were 59,674 students, 256 different languages reported, with Spanish being the most commonly represented language (37,530 students). In 2017-18 there were 65,991 students, 248 different languages reported, with Spanish remaining the most commonly represented language (41,370 students).

Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS)

According to Coleman, Negrón, and Lipper (2011), diversity is a “multidimensional broadly inclusive concept that acknowledges and embraces the richness of human differences...the term ‘diversity’ is not code for race, ethnicity, or gender by themselves” (p. 20). Instead, it encompasses many different attributes that influence learning, including language, reading achievement and so forth (Bean & Ippolito, 2016). In addition to the diversity found in students, the diversity in teachers, staff, and the community has profound effects on the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written/unwritten rules of the school and educational practices.

Increasingly, more classrooms are culturally and linguistically complex: they include students who represent many different cultural backgrounds, those who are second-language learners, or speak one or more languages. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2010), it is estimated that by 2025 approximately one of four students in the United States will be English learners.

In too many schools, students who live in poverty or children of color are affected not only by conditions within the school (e.g., lack of resources and services, inexperienced teachers), but also by out-of-school factors (e.g., family education, living conditions, income). Too often, educational practices are based on a deficit-based perspective that assume students arrive at school culturally deprived rather than understanding and appreciating the “funds of knowledge” (Long, et al., 2014) that they bring to the classroom. As Duncan-Andrade (2009) wrote in his article, *Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses in Concrete*, educators have the responsibility to connect academic rigor with students’ lives, and to establish caring relationships with their students that encourage and promote student learning. Gay (2014) described the importance of culturally responsive teaching as a means of improving educational



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experiences for students; she identifies two pathways, one in which instruction “uses cultural knowledge about ethnically diverse students” to teach them effectively; the other pathway is focused on providing all students with “more knowledge about the cultures, experiences, challenges, and accomplishments of diverse groups” (p. 357).

Language and culture shape learning styles and behaviors. Students of various cultural and linguistic backgrounds bring diverse cultural orientations to learning, unique to what they have experienced in their homes (Philips, 2003). Students influenced in more collectivist cultures may be more oriented toward collaboration, group interaction, and oral discourse, while students raised in individualistic cultures may be more oriented toward personal achievement, competition, and ownership (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2000). A multicultural education approach that explicitly values diversity and supports culturally contextualized teaching will help students access curriculum (Charity-Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Gay, 2004; Gay, 2010; Gay, 2014). Immigrant students educated in their home countries may also bring with them the varied histories, knowledge, and experiences specific to that country and its education system. By using the rich “funds of knowledge” students bring to the classroom, educators can foster the attainment of new knowledge while validating the students’ home knowledge (Long, et al., 2014).

Valuing the language of the home is important to the success of students. Language is tied to culture and to identity. It is tied to family and rich histories. According to Fishman (2007), culture is expressed through language, and when language is lost, those things that represent a way of life, as well as values and human reality are also lost. In the classroom, native language can be utilized as a resource for clarification of difficult tasks and as a means of enriching the learning experience for all students. Specific information about language variation and language development of English Learners follows.

Language Variation

(e.g., African American English, Southern English Varieties, Chicano English). Research in the field of linguistics maintains that language variation is to be expected, and that while some educators may view non-standardized varieties of English as informal, mis-educated, or error-ridden, differences in non-standardized English varieties of English, such as African American English (AAE), are “not the same as language deficits, errors, mistakes or confusions. Non-standardized varieties of English are as rule-governed, patterned and predictable in their linguistic structure as are standardized varieties” (Charity-Hudley & Mallinson, 2011, p. 2). Yet, research indicates that listeners often rank speakers of standardized varieties as being smarter and of a higher status, while speakers of non-standardized varieties of English are often viewed as less intelligent, having less social status, and are often associated with more negative traits than standardized speakers of English (Lippi-Green, 1997). Non-standardized English speakers are also shown to perform lower on standardized tests (Charity-Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). Valuing and understanding the diverse linguistic experiences and skills of culturally and linguistically diverse students are the first steps to engaging students and supporting their success; additional preparation in understanding language variation and development is



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important for all educators in supporting the success of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Development of English Learners

English Learners (ELs) must learn content and language simultaneously; thus, they have “double the work” (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). According to World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, second language development occurs along a language development continuum ranging from entering (level 1) to bridging (level 5), each with specific linguistic characteristics. For ELs to progress in language development and content mastery, they must have access to meaningful language and concepts (Lau vs Nichols, 1974; Krashen, 2004; Vogt, 2014). Meaningful access to the curriculum requires that students have access to reading materials and content at their proficiency level, thereby providing multiple opportunities for success. Misperceptions of language variation, second language development, and cultural orientations to school can lead to detrimental experiences and lowered opportunity for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse, as evidenced by over-representation of African Americans and ELs in Special Education, lower track classes, and dropout rates (Coutinho & Oswald, 2006; NCES, 2016). This disparity has critical implications for educators who, to help eliminate the achievement gap, or as Darling-Hammond (2010) described, an “opportunity gap”, must understand the importance of language and culture as they impact school interactions, literacy development, identity development, and academic achievement. When educators believe the language variation students bring to the classroom is wrong, their beliefs have negative effects on students’ identity and learning and may suggest something is wrong with the students or their family (Delpit, 2006). At the same time, having an appreciation for, and understanding of language variation does not, “preclude the need for students to be taught Standard or Academic English, not as a replacement for their home, first, or indigenous languages, but as a complement to them” (Gay, 2010, p. 84). Smitherman (2006) summarized as follows:

“...I know of no one, not even the most radical minded linguist or educator (not even the kid herself!) who has ever argued that American youth, regardless of race/ethnicity, do not need to know the language of wider communication in the U.S.” (aka “Standard English”) (p. 142).

To value and acknowledge diversity in Pennsylvania schools, the Pennsylvania State Literacy Plan identifies Recommendations for Action for those involved with improving diversity learning of students.