

Supporting Multilingual Learners

Oregon Department of Education

<https://youtu.be/FN9g3RYoh4>

Narrator: In this video, we will hear educators respond to the question, how do you incorporate culturally responsive practices in your classroom during literacy instruction? We will first hear from Bekah Sabzalian, education consultant, then Melissa Standley, first grade teacher, then Francesca Aultman, district language arts specialist, and then Marissa Quesada, kindergarten and first grade teacher. Knowing your students.

Bekah: How I incorporate culturally sustaining or culturally affirming practices in the classroom I think goes back to my experience in the classroom. And I grew up in Oregon, in rural Oregon in the 80s and 90s. And I do know what it is like to not be included in the classroom community as a Native American woman or child at the time and Chicana Mexican-American. Who I was didn't exist in any of the curriculum, any visual in the classroom, any bit. It was part of the reason I became a teacher was to make sure that every student felt valued. And even though I have a specific background that I'm bringing that had been invisible in the classroom, that helps me to understand what another student who may be, you know, an immigrant from Ethiopia or from India or from Fiji; how they may feel, not being represented in the classroom.

Francesca: When I think about culturally responsive practices, the first thing that comes to mind for me is that culturally responsive teaching practices are just good teaching. So I think that sometimes those can be seen as something more complex than they even need to be. So when I think about things like wait time, knowing students' names, greeting students, bringing in multiple perspectives—all of that is part of culturally responsive teaching.

Marissa: In my classroom, I have four different languages spoken. However, across our school district we have 67 different languages spoken. So it's very important for me and all of the teachers in our district that we have supports in place for our multilingual learners. So specifically in my classroom, I do a lot of sentence frames for almost everything. If I'm having the students answer a question, I give them a sentence frame. I include visuals almost with every question I give.

Narrator: Creating an inclusive classroom environment.

Bekah: Making sure that you're bringing in diverse authors and diverse literature, and that those stories are told by the communities or peoples that they're representing so that they're really authentic and they actually do support some cultural learning as opposed to cultural misunderstandings. I think that the environment and the visuals that we use in our classroom are really important, too. So as much as you can, knowing who's in your classroom and representing that all over the walls and the space, bringing language in, and just learning a few words that might make students feel affirmed and at home, and, "Oh, I belong here."

Melissa: Before I think about incorporating culturally responsive practices into literacy, I think about figuring out who my kids are first: where they've come from, who they are, and what experiences they bring and that their families bring. This past year, we've had a set of books that were about libraries around the world. And I changed a few of them, found different books that were set in countries where my kids had gone to or been recently instead of the ones that were in the program. And I found that to

be really powerful because their little eyes would light up when they saw pictures of places they had been or words that they knew. So I changed where the curriculum told me to pick the places so that we could see where kids in our classroom had been, where their families had been. And we researched those instead of the ones that were in the curriculum. Because your families feel like it is not school versus home trying to help their kids grow and develop. That it's a teamwork process helping their kids develop. And I think kids really want to feel invested in what they are learning. And it's deeper than "I see myself in a book," and it's more than, "oh, that poster has people that look like me."

Narrator: Making intentional instructional decisions.

Francesca: One of the things that's really special about the district that I'm in is that we have a BIPOC staff affinity group who has developed freedom dreams for our district, and one of those is to have a curriculum that centers our black and brown students. And so that became one of the driving factors for our curriculum adoption and continues to be front and center for all of our curriculum adoptions, as well as our implementation. And I think that's really powerful because it lays the foundation for everything else that we do. For example, if I'm looking at my week and I have to decide something has to go, there's not enough time. Can I use an equity lens to help me make those decisions of what goes out? Can I be a little more intentional than just saying, "I got to the end of the week and I ran out of time. Whatever was at the end is going to go." But to think about what are those pieces that we're exploring this week that are really going to elevate the identities of my students. And being able to look at it through that lens, I think, is such a powerful instructional tool that is really integrated into the work that we do in our district, which I'm really, is something I'm really proud of.

Narrator: To learn more, visit the framework website at oregoninstructionalframeworks.org and download the Early Literacy Framework.