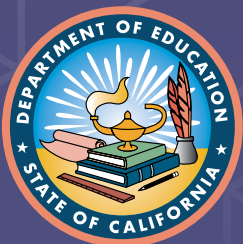




Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE



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Asset-Based Pedagogy: Student, Family, and Community Engagement for the Academic and Social-Emotional Learning of Multilingual Students

Students' families and communities are very important. I make sure to integrate knowledge about students' lives in my class because they need to see themselves in the curriculum. It affirms their identity. It makes school relevant. It encourages their sense of purpose.

–Mr. González, seventh-grade social studies teacher, April 8, 2018

Mr. González captures the essence of what asset-based pedagogy is and why it is important. Although known by various names (culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy, funds of knowledge, and many others), practices that affirm students' cultural lives—both family and community—and incorporate this knowledge into the classroom, collectively deem students' lived experiences as assets. Indeed, prioritizing assets and access are central and emphasized in all four principles of the *California English Learner Roadmap: Strengthening Comprehensive Educational Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners (CA EL Roadmap)*:

Principle One: Assets-Oriented and Needs-Responsive Schools

Principle Two: Intellectual Quality of Instruction and Meaningful Access

Principle Three: System Conditions that Support Effectiveness

Principle Four: Alignment and Articulation Within and Across Systems

This chapter is directly situated in Principle One: Assets-Oriented and Needs-Responsive Schools (located on the California Department of Education [CDE] EL Roadmap Principle One web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link1>), which acknowledges that by affirming students' lives, asset-based pedagogy promotes social-emotional development, as well as academic learning and ethnic identities, across the content areas and grade levels. Assets-oriented schools view language and culture as assets (EL Roadmap Element 1.A), are responsive to the varying characteristics and experiences of multilingual students (EL Roadmap Element 1.B), are affirming (EL Roadmap Element 1.C), value community and family partnerships (EL Roadmap Element 1.D), and use collaborative, evidence-based practices for inclusiveness (EL Roadmap Element 1.E). To enact asset-based pedagogy, educators require much more than a set of practices to engage in. Assets-oriented educators have developed a critical consciousness: knowledge and awareness that resist simple explanations for things like achievement disparities (e.g., "if only students were more motivated, they could achieve") and replace them with an understanding of the systemic inequities that shape the lives of historically, racially, and culturally marginalized youth.

Critical consciousness involves deep understanding of the historic and systemic inequities that shape the lives of racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally marginalized youth; the types of knowledge and language that are considered valid in school; and how much of the curricula in schools serves to replicate the power structure in society. It calls for educators to challenge simple explanations for things like achievement disparities and instead adopt more complex explanations that reflect societal inequities. Put simply, critical consciousness requires educators to persistently question why things are the way they are and to examine how oppression, racism, and other "systems" that perpetuate inequities have influenced the way they see themselves, their world, their students, their students' families, and their students' communities. In other words, it is the development of a deep awareness and critique of the historical roots and contemporary social dynamics that sustain the marginalization of most ML students.

For ML students who are members of marginalized groups, critical consciousness includes an understanding of the root causes of societal deficit perceptions of their linguistic trajectory. It involves asking the question: Why is bilingualism and multilingualism celebrated for other students but not these students? Critical consciousness is not merely a suggestion for improved teaching and student outcomes. As expressly stated in the *The Superintendent's Quality Professional Learning Standards*, it is an essential part of being an effective educator, that requires ongoing development:

In order to help every student meet new and more rigorous performance expectations, educators must understand the challenges and opportunities each student faces in achieving them. When educators have access to quality professional learning, they gain new knowledge and skills to extend their own experiences related to different equity perspectives, including race, gender, language, sexual orientation, religion, special abilities and needs, and socioeconomic status, on learning. Quality professional learning supports educators in examining their personal attitudes and biases and understanding their roles in creating equitable student learning and performance outcomes.

–California Department of Education 2014, 13

This chapter provides an overview of why asset-based pedagogy is an educational imperative for multilingual students and, in doing so, provides the background support for *CA EL Roadmap* Principle One. The chapter begins with a discussion on evidence showing how asset-based pedagogy promotes the social–emotional and academic development of ML students. It then discusses the tenets of asset-based pedagogy, which include critical consciousness and empathy, why asset-based pedagogy is important, and how teachers can develop this essential knowledge to engage in asset-based practices. The chapter then examines the associated problems of practice and specific pedagogical needs that educators of ML students often encounter. It then turns to a description of multiple examples, tools, and resources that have been successful for engaging multilingual students, families, and communities

throughout California. Some of these include language-centered courses and curriculum; ethnic studies courses; youth participatory action research; and oral history, migration story, and personal story projects.

Some of the ideas and content in this chapter may be challenging for some readers to process at first pass. In part, this is because the kind of knowledge that leverages the assets of marginalized communities has often been left out of teacher preparation programs, though there certainly is a focus on this area in teacher preparation programs in California (López and Santibañez 2018). The work of developing critical consciousness is challenging and often leads to uncomfortable realizations about one's own biases, privileges, and complicity in systems and ideas they would not consciously choose to reinforce. Similarly, efforts to face sociopolitical challenges like systemic racism or implicit bias can lead to defensiveness in one's self, one's colleagues, one's students, and one's students' families.

These are not, however, reasons to avoid this important work. As the *California EL Roadmap* makes clear, it is a goal throughout the state that all students see themselves as having inherent value and potential as individuals and believe in their capacity to effect positive change in the world around them. A first step in accomplishing that goal is accepting the reality that many students have not received this message before. For students to believe in their own worth and potential, their teachers must believe and radiate these ideas, as well. To do so, successful educators develop the skills and mindsets discussed in this chapter. Mastering these skills and ideas is not easy or quick work, just as developing pedagogical mastery in a content area does not happen overnight. Patience, humility, and the willingness to grow are critical tools for educators who wish to develop their expertise in the ideas presented here.



Take a moment to reflect on your own privileges, biases, and complicity in systems and ideas you would not consciously choose to reinforce. What “uncomfortable realizations” come to mind?

Who Are California's Multilingual Learner Students?

As discussed in chapter 1 of this book, California's population of multilingual learners is large and diverse. Indeed, there is substantial heterogeneity within multilingual communities that may speak the same non-English language. For example, although Spanish is spoken by the largest population of ML students in California, there is great diversity within the ethnicities, cultures, customs, communities, and experiences of these children and youth. In addition to extensive heterogeneity among multilingual students, the vast majority of teachers do not share the cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds of their students and may not have received the kind of training that would provide them with the knowledge needed to best prepare for multilingual contexts (Faltis and Valdés 2016). This is in part an artifact of reform efforts that have largely reduced the requirements for teacher preparation, as well as policies that fail to consider the unique needs and strengths of multilingual students (López and Santibañez 2018). In their research, López and Santibañez (2018) found that even in states where standards for teacher preparation are rigorous, educators often struggle with knowing how best to serve students who are newcomers to the United States, who come from households where English is not the primary language, or whose lived experiences differ from their own. Given that schools and districts throughout the state are becoming more and more diverse and have growing populations of new immigrants, as well as students whose parents or grandparents were immigrants, ensuring that teachers have the essential knowledge and skills to address ML students' needs is urgent.

What Is Asset-Based Pedagogy and Why Is It Needed?

Asset-Based Pedagogy

Asset-based pedagogy (which includes culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy) seeks to address and redress the inequities and injustices in school systems that harm culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, especially those who are ethnically diverse and people of color. It teaches to and through the strengths of CLD students and is therefore validating and affirming.

- It recognizes and uses in daily classroom practice the cultural and linguistic knowledge, home and community experiences, frames of reference and worldviews, and learning styles of CLD students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them.
- It integrates the history and culture of students into the curriculum in all disciplines, providing accurate and positive depictions and counter-narratives to damaging and pervasive negative stereotypes.
- It promotes CLD students' healthy perceptions of their cultural and linguistic identity, along with a sense of inclusion and belonging in school.
- It supports students in sustaining their cultural and linguistic identity while they simultaneously develop advanced academic proficiency and critical awareness of the codes of power in school and beyond.
- It is focused on issues of social justice for all marginalized and oppressed people. It empowers students by supporting their development of personal efficacy and cultural pride.

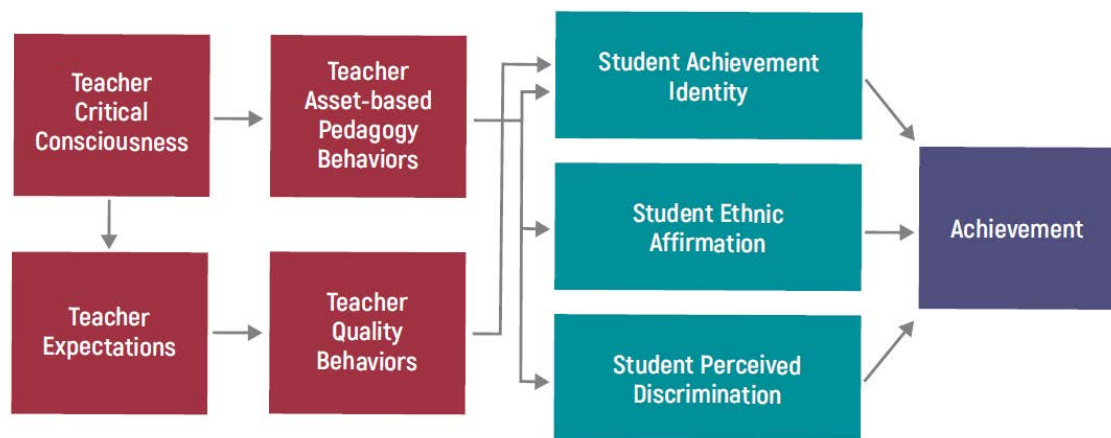
Source: California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities 2019, 58–59¹

Educators often enter the field of education to make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth, but the task of engaging with increasingly diverse families, communities, and students may feel daunting. Educators may feel underequipped with knowledge, skills, strategies, and practices

that are responsive to diverse students and their families. Even with the best of intentions, conscious and unconscious biases can inhibit educators' engagement with multilingual families and communities in ways that do not inform and reflect asset-based pedagogy.

As summarized in figure 2.1, research evidence (see, for example, López 2017) has contributed to our understanding that asset-based pedagogy requires unique knowledge (critical consciousness) to mitigate biases that can be detrimental to teachers' expectations. Teacher knowledge and beliefs, in turn, inform their behaviors, which are internalized by students in ways that affect their ethnic identities and beliefs about their own abilities (one of many social-emotional learning outcomes viewed as integral to a whole child approach by the State of California²). These student beliefs have been shown to be robust predictors of their achievement outcomes (López 2010; López 2017). In other words, critical consciousness promotes high teacher expectations and asset-based behaviors. These behaviors, in turn, predict enhanced student identities and beliefs that promote school achievement. This body of evidence supports why asset-based pedagogy is of the utmost importance to marginalized youth.

Figure 2.1 Asset-Based Pedagogy



Source: López 2017

[Long description of figure 2.1](#)

The following example uses student artifacts to illustrate how asset-based pedagogy may manifest itself.

VIGNETTE
2.1

An Example of Asset-Based Pedagogy in the Elementary Grades

Norma González has been an educator for over 25 years. She would routinely begin the school year by asking her primary grade students to draw a self-portrait (a typical example is shown in fig. 2.2). At first glance, many might not see anything remarkable about the drawing. However, while developmentally appropriate, the student who drew the self-portrait is of Mexican descent with dark brown eyes, dark brown hair, and brown skin. Ms. González routinely saw children drawing images that did not align with their appearance during this activity and would ask them why they drew themselves in this manner. Consistently, the response was something like: “I want to be beautiful. Blue eyes and yellow hair are beautiful.” At such a young age, her Latinx students had internalized societal messages—as all people do—and very much wanted to fit into the standard of what is considered beautiful in society. Luckily for these students, Ms. González is an expert practitioner in asset-based pedagogy. She developed activities that engaged students’ identities such that by the end of the year, they drew images like the one on the right in figure 2.2. The self-portraits by students in Norma González’s classroom are from before and after she has had the opportunity to engage in asset-based pedagogy that affirmed students’ lived familial, cultural, and community experiences.

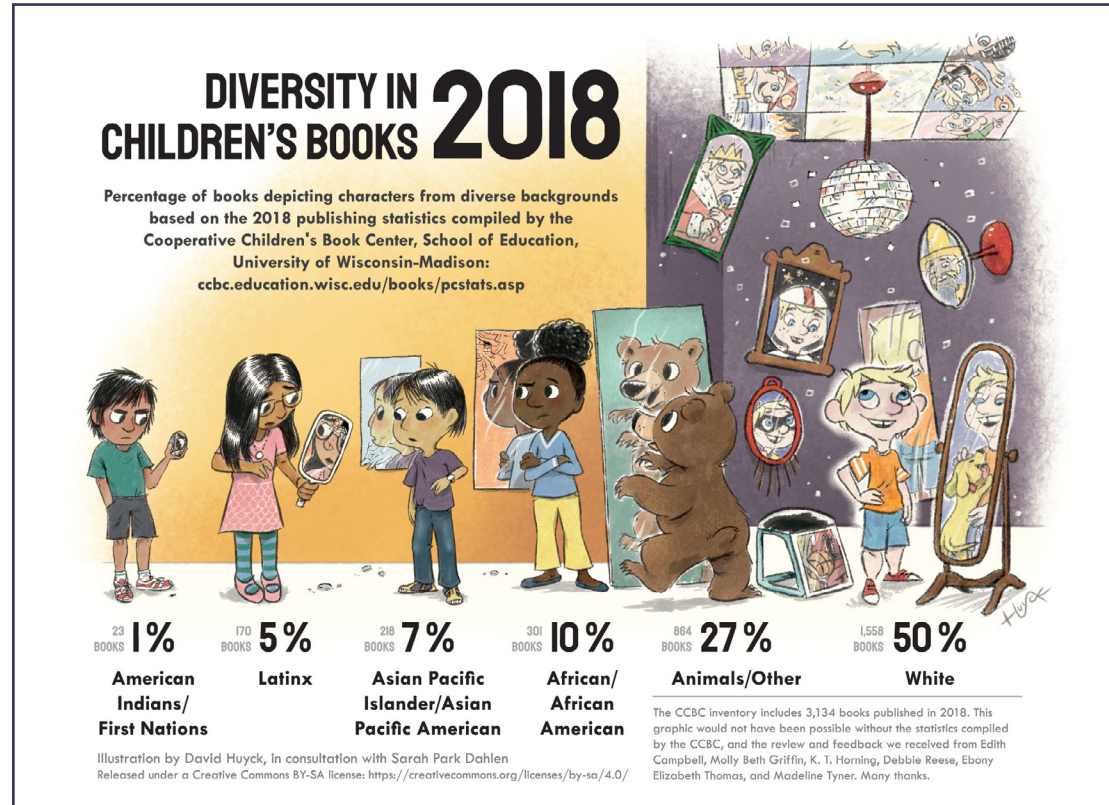
Figure 2.2 Self-portraits by students in Norma González’s classroom



[Long description of figure 2.2](#)

Everyone receives messages about societal ideals through media, film, books, toys, and so on. The reasons marginalized youth must be provided with asset-based pedagogy—even at such a young age—are not limited to the beauty standards that are all around us. Every day, marginalized students are inundated with deficit views about their language(s), cultural values, and ways of being. The US Department of Education refers to children in school who are still developing proficiency in English as “English learner (EL) students” which focuses on learning English rather than on what they *really* are: bilingual and ML students. The difference in terminology enhances the focus on their language assets. Moreover, ML students are often missing not only from the curriculum, but also from materials we urge parents to use to have children “ready for school,” such as picture books (see fig. 2.3). The lack of representation in curricular and other educational materials often translates into the requirement that teachers enhance materials so that their students see themselves and feel valued in the curriculum.

Figure 2.3 Diversity in Children’s Books



Source: Huyck and Dahlen 2019

[Long description of figure 2.3](#)

Socially transmitted messages from curricular materials and educator behaviors inform identity (Valenzuela 1999) and prompt students to ask: *Who am I? Where do I belong? What is possible for me?* When multilingual children and youth consistently receive messages that omit them or reflect deficit views about them, they may feel excluded from school learning and believe that their potential is limited by who they are. Asset-based pedagogy activates teachers' power to disrupt and counteract these negative societal messages and have a positive impact on students and student outcomes. Specifically, asset-based pedagogy includes the following overarching practices, which are discussed in the next section:

1. **Social–Emotional Learning:** Prioritize social–emotional learning outcomes for whole child success
2. **Critically Conscious Empathy:** Develop a critical consciousness that frames empathy for ML students as a way to challenge cultural deficit thinking
3. **Community Responsiveness:** Enact community responsiveness with a focus on centralizing students' context

Social–Emotional Learning

As depicted in figure 2.1, extant research has contributed to our understanding that teachers who develop a critical consciousness are more likely to engage in asset-based pedagogy that influences students' identities and outcomes (López 2017). Some of these identities and outcomes are considered facets of social–emotional learning (SEL) that collectively refers to knowledge, attitudes, and skills about the self and others, which are important precursors to academic outcomes (Grant et al. 2017). Some key SEL outcomes and student attributes are summarized in figure 2.4, recognizing that there are numerous conceptualizations of SEL with tremendous overlap among the different nomenclature used.

Figure 2.4 Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes and Student Attributes

SEL Outcomes	Student Attributes
Relationships	Communication, cooperation, empathy
Emotional self-regulation	Stress management, impulse control, positive behavior
Intrinsic motivation	Initiative, persistence, self-direction
Self-concept	Knowing one's own strengths and limitations, believing in one's own ability to succeed, believing that competence grows with effort
Critical thinking	Problem-solving skills, metacognitive skills, reasoning, and judgment skills

Source: California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities 2019, 53–54³

Asset-based practices align with California SEL guiding principles of whole child development, equity, and partnering with families and communities. As such, SEL should be approached as a set of skills that are nurtured through asset-based practices. Although often presented as important due to their role in predicting achievement, SEL outcomes are important in and of themselves because they reflect a focus on the whole child. Schools can nurture a whole child approach by using two CDE resources: California's Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Guiding Principles available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link2> and *CDE Social and Emotional Learning in California: A Guide to Resources* available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link3>. These resources offer the following SEL guiding principles, which are intended to empower teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to continue to advance SEL in ways that meet the needs of their specific contexts and populations:

1. Adopt whole child development as the goal of education
2. Commit to equity
3. Build capacity
4. Partner with families and communities
5. Learn and improve

To successfully enact these principles with a whole child approach, it is essential to adopt an asset-based perspective that acknowledges unique factors that influence SEL in ML children and youth. For example, unchecked assumptions about what students are perceived to lack (e.g., requisite knowledge or language, attitudes, and skills) may lead to ineffective educational interventions. Alternatively, asset-based, student-centered approaches promote whole child success. Below we provide specific examples of how asset-based pedagogy promotes SEL outcomes.

Cariño: Authentically Caring Relationships. One of the key artifacts of asset-based pedagogy is building authentic, caring relationships between teachers and students (Valenzuela 1999). This is an extension of what is known about attachment. From a developmental perspective, attachment reflects the bond between caregiver and child that promotes healthy relationships across a person's lifetime, and it affects students' sense of belonging, social awareness, and relationship skills. In schools, this translates into educators fostering contexts that promote authentic, caring relationships that incorporate students' lives in the classroom to promote a sense of belonging.

Emotional Self-Regulation. Asset-based pedagogy also has at its core the relevance of school. Rather than insisting that traditional schooling is something marginalized students must fit into, asset-based pedagogy asserts that students have assets that must be honored in the classroom. Relevance of school speaks to a pedagogy that respects students' experiences and integrates them into the formal instruction and pedagogy of the classroom. In doing so, asset-based pedagogy demonstrates to students the numerous ways they are resilient and fosters their critical awareness. Marginalized students exposed to asset-based pedagogy that fosters their critical consciousness are more likely to

set and work toward achieving personal and academic goals (Dee and Penner 2017). Setting and working toward goals requires emotional self-regulation, particularly stress management.⁴ Many marginalized students may reject schooling that they perceive “erases” them and in contrast thrive in assets-oriented classrooms that “see” them. Students may develop stress management when teachers integrate an understanding of students’ assets and systemic inequities into how they support students in handling stress.

Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Concept. Asset-based pedagogy creates a space where student voice and a positive self-concept are central. This promotes students’ sense of purpose and intrinsic motivation (López 2017). Asset-based pedagogy fosters a growth mindset and rejects a fixed one: if students are told that ability is something one is born with, students may believe this is a fixed trait they may not have and behave accordingly (Dweck 2015). But simply teaching students about a growth mindset without an asset-based approach is insufficient for lasting effects. It is also important to consider that historically marginalized students have spent a lifetime receiving socially transmitted messages that tell them they are unlikely to graduate and unlikely to be high achievers. They have rarely, for example, seen themselves reflected in the curriculum as examples of success (Valenzuela 1999). Asset-based pedagogy, then, addresses this by integrating a growth mindset stance with an asset-based orientation, for example by intentionally incorporating into the curriculum the accomplishments of individuals with whom students share a cultural, ethnic, or linguistic background.

Critically Conscious Empathy

Although most educators are well aware of the importance of high expectations, many have not received the training and knowledge about just how very susceptible their beliefs are to unconscious or implicit biases. An abundance of research demonstrates, however, that when forced to make day-to-day decisions, people’s brains rely on a lifetime’s worth of socially transmitted messages that might suggest marginalized students have deficits. This begins to happen in the earliest years of schooling. For example, a recent study involving 135 preschool teachers illustrates biases in a salient manner: participants wore

eye-tracking glasses and were asked to view a video clip of four preschool children (an African-American boy, an African-American girl, a white boy, and a white girl) and attempted to anticipate challenging behavior. The eye-tracking glasses showed that participants anticipated challenging behavior from (i.e., watched) the African-American boy far more than the other children, even though there was no challenging behavior from the child (Gilliam et al. 2016).

This study illustrates that bias is all around us. It can be identified in statements such as: “The problem with students is that they are unmotivated” or “Parents just don’t care about education” or “They don’t have any language.” Contrast these statements with the statement made by Mr. González at the beginning of this chapter, which exemplifies an understanding that allows teachers like Mr. González to transform their educational practice. Educators can engage in asset-based pedagogy, like Mr. González has, when they develop a critical consciousness and resist implicit biases toward marginalized children and youth.

Without critical consciousness, the true transformative potential of empathy cannot be actualized. Many believe that empathy is a necessary disposition in order to be an effective educator. Empathy is the ability to deeply understand and feel another’s emotions and experiences, such as joy and hope, as well as fear, pain, and trauma. Empathy has been shown to foster positive relationships, create stronger classroom and school communities, lead to higher academic achievement, and even empower students to be community leaders (Jones et al. 2018; Owen 2015). It is a disposition that seeks to understand the experiences of others in the context of their previous experiences and their relationship to power. ML students, their families, and their communities, who have been historically marginalized and asked to conform to a system that excludes their voices and lived experiences (Yosso 2005), benefit from authentic empathy related to the many ways that schools may feel unwelcoming.

Educators begin to humanize their students when they deeply understand the multiple instances of marginalization and dehumanization that their students and students’ families and communities have experienced. Educators cannot truly develop empathy, however, without nurturing their critical consciousness. This is because unexamined biases inhibit empathic dispositions. Effective,

assets-oriented teachers have developed **critically conscious empathy** with the help of the following actions:

1. Understanding their power over their students and their families, as well as their students' relationship to power
2. Critically examining and challenging their perceptions of their ML students and students' families and communities
3. Learning about the complex historical factors that brought ML students to the US, to California, and to that particular community
4. Listening to ML students' stories about their experiences (in first person)
5. Developing meaningful and authentically caring relationships that are rooted in empathy versus sympathy

One of the ways critically conscious empathy manifests itself is when educators engage students in developing their own critical consciousness. As teachers assist students in this endeavor, they may face resistance from their students or their students' families. This is not unanticipated and is a natural part of the process. For example, when students first engage with the idea that they possess biases, they may feel upset, threatened, or defensive. Teachers can support students in being open to the idea that, as members of society, all people may have internalized socially transmitted messages that reflect deficit views about different groups of people. Helping students to work through this discomfort and fostering their awareness in an empathetic way creates an entry point for students to develop critical consciousness.

From a systems perspective, teacher preparation coursework is one of the principal ways in which much of this essential knowledge is developed. Expanding coursework in areas relevant to critical consciousness beyond those for individuals seeking specialist certification (Valenzuela 2016) increases the extent to which all pre-service teachers have opportunities to develop critical consciousness. Teacher educators themselves have demanded making accessible the essential coursework that helps pre-service teachers develop sociopolitical awareness and understanding about systems of oppression, stratification, social movements, and other related knowledge. The need for in-service teachers' professional learning that addresses the

various sociopolitical factors that influence the lives of ML students is also urgent. Developing deep knowledge takes time and requires ongoing work throughout a teacher's career. The following framing questions can assist teachers in developing critically conscious empathy:

- In what ways do I feel powerless in society?
- In what ways do I have power in society?
- In what ways do I feel powerless as a teacher?
- In what ways do I have power as a teacher?
- In what ways do I have power over my students?
- In what ways do my students and their families feel powerless?
- How can I empower my students in the classroom?
- What are the strengths my students bring into the classroom?
- How can I affirm those strengths to empower my students?

Teachers can continue to develop critically conscious empathy when they learn about the historical trajectories of marginalized groups, civil rights issues, and other related topics (Valenzuela 2016). They can also learn about and listen to the experiences of their students and families and intentionally reflect the lived experiences of the students they serve. When teachers, as well as whole school systems, implement these practices, it acknowledges that some ML students and their families may be apprehensive about speaking out on school matters, while also supporting and encouraging them to do so. Educators who develop critically conscious empathy often begin to view teaching as a political act (Sacramento 2019). They become critically aware of their position of power over their students and students' families and of their role in challenging and transforming the status quo. The last section of this chapter provides additional examples, tools, and resources to support teachers as they develop critically conscious empathy.



In what ways are you already practicing (or have you observed other teachers practice) critically conscious empathy? In what ways might your students benefit from your professional growth in this area?

Community Responsiveness

Asset-based pedagogy takes into account a student's context, which invariably includes family and community. Community responsive pedagogy centralizes a community's context in the education of children and youth. It is responsive to the material conditions that are particular to a student's lived experience in a community and the histories that created that experience. Below is a description of how community responsive pedagogy focuses on the following three domains of pedagogical practice: relationships, relevance, and responsibility (Tintiango-Cubales and Duncan-Andrade 2020). While these domains are part of quality instruction for all students, what is unique for ML students is how teachers focus on students' cultures, languages, social-emotional needs, and identities, rather than strictly on their academic learning.

Relationships: A community responsive educator is committed to building meaningful, caring relationships with students and families, understanding that students do not care what educators know until they know that educators care. These relationships are the foundation for teachers, students, and families to create solidarity with one another. Strong relationships begin with acknowledging the community's cultural and linguistic wealth that students and families bring with them to school. Strong relationships promote a connectedness where all students, especially those who have been marginalized, feel valued instead of marginalized.

Relevance: A community responsive educator is committed to developing curriculum and pedagogy that centers on students' daily lives, their communities, families, and ethnic, cultural, and linguistic histories. This connection must avoid the reduction of culture to "trivial examples and artifacts of cultures such as eating ethnic or cultural foods, singing or dancing, reading folktales, and other less than scholarly pursuits of the fundamentally different conceptions of knowledge or quests for social justice" (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2000, 61). By centering on students and their families, communities, and ancestors, a relevant pedagogy acknowledges their stories as assets that provide cultural wisdom and pathways to freedom and justice.

Responsibility: A community responsive educator is committed to understanding and responding to the wide range of needs (social, emotional, and linguistic) that impact a student’s capacity to be at their best. This requires schools and individual educators to find effective ways to identify what students need when they need it and to measure the degree to which those needs are being met. Schools and educators also have the responsibility to acknowledge and leverage student strengths to develop and maintain their well-being and overall achievement.

Developing community responsiveness takes time and involves an openness and willingness to engage with students’ families and communities. The following framing questions support teachers in these efforts:

- Who are my students? Who are their families? Who are their communities?
- How do I see my students, their families, and their communities? How do they see themselves? How do they want me to see them?
- How have they been historically seen by society? How are they currently seen by society?
- How do they see me? How do I want to be seen by them?
- What are the assumptions that society has placed on my students, their families, and their communities?
- What are the assumptions I may have had about them?
- What are the strengths they bring into my classroom?
- How can I affirm and engage their strengths in my classroom? How can I allow them to feel seen in the ways they want to be seen?

How Do Educators Practice Asset-Based Pedagogy?

The previous sections in this chapter have provided numerous insights into why asset-based pedagogy is essential to the ability of teachers to serve ML students. California’s *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework (CA ELA/ELD Framework)* chapter “Access and Equity” (CDE

2015) asserts that simply immersing ML students in English-medium instruction and ignoring differences between the language of the classroom and the languages and dialects of English that students use, as well as any cultural differences, is ineffective and not conducive to a positive and productive learning environment. The framework describes some of the issues such as poverty, citizenship status, and trauma that students may face and that have a direct impact on their learning and development in our classrooms. The *CA ELA/ELD Framework* also asks us to be aware of the following:

- Teachers have particular and often unconscious expectations about how children should structure their oral language, and these expectations are not always transparent to students.
- A perspective that both acknowledges all the cultural and linguistic contexts in which students learn and live and seeks to understand the relationship between language, culture, and identity promotes positive relationships and improves educational outcomes.
- It is important to underscore language varieties (e.g., varieties of English) as a common phenomenon that naturally occurs when languages come into contact with one another over a long period of time.
- Instead of taking a subtractive approach, teachers should give clear messages that languages other than English, and so-called “nonstandard” varieties of English that students may speak or hear in their home communities, are equally as valid as the English used in the classroom. Different languages and forms of English should be understood as sociolinguistic assets and not something in need of eliminating or fixing.
- It is important to understand and frame other registers of English as cultural and linguistic resources, rather than as dialects subordinate or inferior to so-called “standard English,” because these other forms of English are intimately linked to identity, empowerment, and a positive self-image.

The *CA ELA/ELD Framework* also includes the guidance with examples of best practices to challenge the ways teachers describe or frame English to ML students. One example is provided in figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5 New Ways of Talking about Language

Instead of	Try this
<p>Thinking in terms of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proper or improper language • good or bad 	<p>See language as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more or less effective in a specific setting
<p>Talking about grammar as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • right or wrong • correct or incorrect 	<p>Talk about grammar as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • patterns of language • how language varies by setting and situation
<p>Thinking that students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make mistakes or errors • have problems with plurals, possessives, tense, etc. • “left off” an -s, -’s, -ed 	<p>See students as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following the language patterns of their home varieties of English • using grammatical patterns or vocabulary that is different from academic English
<p>Saying to students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “should be,” “are supposed to,” “need to correct” 	<p>Invite student to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try out and take risks with new language • code-switch or translanguage (choose the type of language most effective for the setting and situation)
<p>Red notes in the margin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • correcting students’ language 	<p>Lead students to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore how language is used in different settings and situations • compare and contrast language • build on existing language and add new language (e.g., academic English), understand how to code-switch or translanguage

Source: Adapted from CA ELA/ELD Framework figure 9.12, p. 919

Effective teachers also think beyond specific language learning strategies and consider their instructional approach and priorities more generally. They engage their students' families and communities with what is happening in the classroom and ensure that their students' histories, cultures, languages, families, and communities are reflected in the content being taught. When students, particularly those from marginalized and immigrant communities, start to see themselves reflected in classroom content, they no longer feel invisible and will share what they learn in school outside of the classroom with their peers, families, and community. Critically conscious asset-based educators ask themselves the following questions:

- What is my purpose in working with my ML students?
- What is the primary end goal in giving my ML students the tools to improve their academic English skills? Is it merely for a grade or to get a job? Is there a larger purpose for me in this?
- Who do I want my students to become? How can I support them to contribute as positive members in society?
- What aspirations do I want my students to have for themselves?
- What do I want my students to be able to envision for themselves, their families, and their communities?

Successful teachers come to know and value the cultural wealth of their students' families and communities and challenge some of the biases and negative beliefs about them that they may have unknowingly internalized. The following resource (fig. 2.6) can help educators challenge some of their potential biases in order to better engage with their ML students' families and communities.

Figure 2.6 Asset-Based Tool for Engaging with Multilingual Families and Communities

Instead of thinking ...	Try asking yourself ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families do not care about their child's education or school. Parents and families do not value education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can I alter my approach to be more welcoming to my multilingual families? What barriers may be preventing my students' families and communities from accessing education themselves?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and guardians just do not show up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What barriers may be preventing parents and guardians from participating in school meetings and events? How can I adjust the format, times, or days of events to allow more multilingual families to participate?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The families and communities see me as an outsider and do not want to engage with me. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some new actions or behaviors I can adopt to show families and communities that I care and want to work with them? Is there someone at my school or in my community who already has a good relationship with this community that can help me bridge the divide?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My students' families and communities are unsafe or high risk. The culture of my students' families and communities is not conducive to schooling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the context of my students' families and communities? What traumas have my students and their families endured? What is their cultural wealth?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and communities cannot understand me because of language barriers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some approaches I can learn to effectively communicate with families and communities?

According to the *CA ELA/ELD Framework's* chapter “Access and Equity” (2015), schooling should help all students achieve their highest potential. To accomplish this, students should be provided (1) equitable access to all areas of the curricula; (2) appropriate high-quality instruction that addresses their needs and maximally advances their skills and knowledge; (3) up-to-date and relevant resources; and (4) settings that are physically and psychologically safe, respectful, and intellectually stimulating.

The following subsections provide examples, tools, and additional resources that show how asset-based pedagogy can be implemented in classrooms. Although the following examples illustrate all three pursuits and practices of asset-based pedagogy (social–emotional learning, critically conscious empathy, community responsiveness), one example is highlighted per practice. Figure 2.7 previews the examples.

Figure 2.7 Asset-Based Pedagogy: Three Practices with Illustrative Examples

Three Practices of Asset-Based Pedagogy	Illustrative Examples
1. Supporting social–emotional learning	Multilingual-centered classrooms Ethnic Studies curriculum
2. Developing critically conscious empathy	Oral history projects
3. Fostering community responsiveness	Youth participatory action research

Practice #1: Supporting Social–Emotional Learning Through Multilingual-Centered Classrooms and Ethnic Studies Curriculum

As described earlier in the chapter, SEL builds a student’s capacity to develop authentically caring relationships and emotional self-regulation with issues like stress and anxiety, intrinsic motivation, self-concept, and critical thinking. Ethnic studies courses and multilingual-centered classrooms have practiced and supported these competencies from their inception.



As you read about each practice, consider specific support you (if you are a teacher) would need to develop high levels of competence with specific practices. If you are an administrator, what could you do to support all staff in your school or district to grow in a specific practice?

Multilingual-Centered Classrooms. One way to engage the families and communities of ML students is to value their linguistic capital in the classroom. This can be done through language-centered courses and curriculum, which provide an opportunity for educators to sustain the “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism” of their multilingual classrooms (Paris and Alim 2014, 88). Various language-centered programs used in California are discussed in more detail in chapter 3 of this book. As highlighted in that chapter, effective educators ensure that ML students and their families are encouraged to see the value of their native and heritage languages and also have opportunities to perpetuate them in educational spaces without fear of judgement. One way that educators do this is by subverting the dominance of English in their daily classroom practices and allowing for translanguaging practices. Translanguaging is where students are encouraged to use their full language repertoire, or all of their languages, in classroom learning. García and Wei argue that translanguaging spaces “enable students to construct and constantly modify their sociocultural identities and values, as they respond to their historical and present conditions critically and creatively” (2018, 67). Translanguaging promotes the ML student’s use of their unitary language system. (See chapters 3 and 6 for longer discussions on translanguaging.)

Language-centered courses and curriculum are a way to help validate students' identities in the classroom. Social-emotional learning emphasizes the importance of focusing on the whole child, particularly their knowledge and attitudes about themselves and others and the social skills needed to interact positively with others. As described by Tara Yosso as “linguistic capital,” ML students have “the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (2005, 76). As Yosso explains, the concept of linguistic capital reflects the stance that ML students come to school with rich language resources and communication skills, which may be unfamiliar to teachers who do not share the same cultural and language backgrounds.

In addition, these children most often have been engaged participants in a storytelling tradition, that may include listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, stories (cuentos), and proverbs (dichos). This repertoire of storytelling skills may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme.

–Yosso 2005, 78

Understanding and valuing the home and heritage languages of ML students and incorporating them into language-centered content directly supports social-emotional learning outcomes by considering the whole child, including the linguistic and cultural assets they bring to the classroom.

Ethnic Studies Courses and Curriculum. A powerful way that educators can implement asset-based pedagogy is through ethnic studies courses and curriculum. Ethnic studies provides students of color with a powerful educational experience that redefines the lives of people of color from their own perspectives. It aims to provide “safe academic spaces for all to learn the histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions of Native peoples and communities of color in the US in the first-person and also practice theories of resistance and liberation to eliminate racism and other forms of oppression” (San Francisco State University College of Ethnic Studies 2019). Ethnic studies

inherently focuses on building relationships to foster a sense of belonging and social awareness for both the teacher and the students. Building on asset-based pedagogy, this centering of people of color in the classroom has had positive achievement effects, along with the possibility of positively impacting the SEL of students of color (de los Rios 2019, Curammeng 2017, Dee and Penner 2017, Milne 2020, Tintiangco-Cubales et al. 2014).

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) was one of the first districts in California to develop a districtwide curriculum that is currently being used as a model for ethnic studies in the state and throughout the nation. The focus of this program is to develop student identity, critical consciousness, and agency. Research on SFUSD's pilot ethnic studies program (Dee and Penner 2017) demonstrated that it had positive effects on student achievement: the GPA of students in the course rose 1.4 points, and their attendance improved by 21 percent. These positive results have impacted the growth of ethnic studies courses in California and throughout the nation. Currently, California is creating an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum as a guide that schools and districts may use when developing an ethnic studies course and curriculum that best address student needs. Many schools and districts already offer ethnic studies electives or programs and many of those courses meet the University of California's A–G requirements.⁵ Figure 2.8 provides an example overview of such a course from SFUSD.⁶

Figure 2.8 San Francisco Unified School District
Ethnic Studies Course Overview

UNIT 1	UNIT 2	UNIT 3	UNIT 4	UNIT 5	UNIT 6
Key Concept(s) Identity & Narrative	Key Concept(s) Systems & Power	Key Concept(s) Hegemony & Counterhegemony	Key Concept(s) Humanization & Dehumanization	Key Concept(s) Causality & Agency	Key Concept(s) Transformation & Change
Cross-Cutting Values Love & Respect • Hope • Community • Solidarity & Unity • Self-Determination & Critical Consciousness					

The definitions for the key concepts in figure 2.8 are provided below.

Identity: Identity formation is a process by which we, as well as others, define our sense of membership and belonging. Identity consists of the chosen and assigned names we give ourselves and/or are given. Identity is connected to our history or histories, and it is varied, multifaceted, and dynamic.

Systems: An organized way of doing something. In society, there are three types of systems that work together to cohere large numbers of people into a unified whole: economic, political, social-cultural.

Hegemony: The dominance of one group over another, supported by legitimating norms, ideas, and expectations within the existing system(s) in power. When oppressed people submit to these norms, ideas, and expectations, they perceive their life condition as unchanging or unchangeable reality, ultimately benefitting those in power.

Counterhegemony: Challenges values, norms, systems, and conditions that have been legitimized and promoted as natural and unchanging or unchangeable by the dominant class in society.

Humanization: When power is used to uphold and restore dignity and self-worth. When power is used to help people attain their self-determining potential.

Dehumanization: When power is used to distort one's humanity.

Causality: The relationship between cause and effect. The principle that there is a reason(s) phenomena occur.

Agency: One's ability to determine the outcome of their life. (Self-determination.)

Transformation: The liberatory process, through critical consciousness and agency, of uncovering, reclaiming, revaluing, and maximizing the potential of one's humanity in opposition to oppression and dehumanization.

Change: The act or instance of making or becoming different.

As shown in figure 2.8, ethnic studies fosters the development of students' identity, critical consciousness, and self-determination. ML students' growth in these areas provides them more than language development alone; it also centers their development as humans, connection to community, and potential as agents of social change. In other words, ethnic studies consists not only of the content that is relevant to students, but all elements of asset-based pedagogy must be included for it to be effective. Effective ethnic studies courses have a clear purpose, a consideration of students' context, content that is relevant, and methods that are engaging, challenging, and build on the assets and cultural wealth of each student. The following outlines the elements of ethnic studies pedagogy specifically for ML students.

Purpose: The purpose of ethnic studies is to eliminate racism and other forms of oppression. The goal is to provide a space where native peoples and communities of color are centralized in the curriculum—within a critical discussion around power, systems, and self-reflection. ML students benefit when educators commit to the purpose and goals of ethnic studies, thus countering deficit thinking rooted in racist logic. The majority of ML students come from communities of color, and the more their histories and experiences are centralized, the more they feel seen and heard. This engagement of their narratives combats marginalization and feelings of isolation.

Context: It is essential for ethnic studies to be responsive to students and their communities. Although there may be some major commonalities among students of color and ML students, it is damaging to assume they are all alike and their needs are equal. Eliminating a one-size-fits-all approach can be beneficial in exposing the nuances of a student’s personal experience. An inventory or inquiry project that allows educators to learn more about their students can provide essential information about students, their families, and their communities that can shift what educators teach and how they teach. This type of initial “getting to know” students and families is complemented by a continuous and ongoing process of relationship building with students and their families.

Content: Related to the purpose, the content of ethnic studies centralizes the histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions of communities of color in the US. Effective teachers ensure that content is relevant and responsive to the lives of ML students by delivering it in ways that are engaging and assets-oriented and that draw on interdisciplinary methods, such as media literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, participatory action research, Socratic seminar, oral history projects, civic and community engagement and organizing, critical leadership development, critical performance pedagogy, and personal narrative/auto-ethnography projects. Some of these methods are described in the vignettes below.

For ethnic studies to be equitable and responsive, it is essential for the pedagogy and the curriculum to be responsive to specific students and their communities. The following vignettes illustrate different ways ethnic studies can positively impact the educational experiences of ML students.

VIGNETTE

2.2

Ethnic Studies with Multilingual High School Students

Ms. Connie So, a Cantonese and English-speaking ethnic studies teacher, has a large population of ML students who are newcomer EL students (i.e., students who have been in US schools for only one or two years and are at the Emerging level of English language proficiency). She believes that it is very important to integrate speaking, reading, listening, and writing with intellectually rich content learning, as this tends to motivate students and help accelerate their language and literacy development. What Ms. So loves about teaching ethnic studies is that students engage meaningfully with grade-level content and academic English and feel connected to a curriculum that is not only relevant for them but also about them. She sees ethnic studies as a place where students' experiences are valued and everyone has something to contribute. She is working with other teachers in her district in a community of practice to implement the ethnic studies course.

In the first unit, Ms. So focuses on identity and narrative, which is particularly important for her ML students who are mostly immigrants. It centers the experience of ML and immigrant students by asking them to develop an autoethnographic project that delves into their lives and their journeys to the United States. Using the following framing questions, she has the students look at three major parts of their identity: (1) How has your homeland culture shaped your ethnic identity? (2) Has your identity changed by being in the United States? If so, how? (3) Have you been able to maintain your homeland culture? If so, what parts? (4) Has school contributed to the maintenance of your ethnic identity? If so, how? If not, explain why not.

Ms. So invites the students to discuss the questions in small groups and then facilitates a whole-group discussion so students can share ideas and learn from one another. Later, students will use their notes from these conversations, as well as notes and resources from other activities designed to scaffold academic writing, to write an autoethnography about themselves. She encourages students to include their home language(s) for parts of their essay (i.e., to use translanguaging). She provides example essays from writers, like Gloria Anzaldúa, who write in English but are not afraid to include Spanish to express themselves. She uses these essays as mentor texts for students to learn from, explore, and emulate. The students are engaged in Ms. So's class because not only are they learning to read, write, listen, and speak in English, but they also feel seen and heard, and they feel valued as thinking people who are able to engage in grade-level academic learning.

VIGNETTE

2.3

Ethnic Studies with Multilingual Young Children

Ms. Tagumpay, a Tagalog and English-speaking kindergarten teacher, has primarily African American, Latinx, and Filipino students, some who speak Spanish with their families at home. Her school began investing in ethnic studies teachers and curriculum development. While attending one of the monthly professional learning sessions, she was asked to explore how ethnic studies can be implemented with young children.

Ms. Tagumpay focused on creating assignments where her students could answer the following questions:

- Who am I?
- What is the story of my family and community?
- What can I do to make positive change and bring social justice to my family and the world?

Ms. Tagumpay and her colleagues realized that to answer these questions, they needed to involve parents and families, so they each called a meeting with their students' families to explain the project. After Ms. Tagumpay explained the project to the families of her students, she invited them to pair up with each other to discuss the questions. Some paired up with each other based on home language and shared their answers in their common languages, while others paired up across different languages and discussed the questions in English. After these discussions, they shared with the whole group one thing they learned about the family they were paired with and one thing they had in common besides their children being in the same classroom. Ms. Tagumpay took notes so she would have a record to refer to later during lesson and unit planning.

Throughout the meeting, Ms. Tagumpay learned a great deal about the families, their cultural and linguistic assets, and their resilience, and she learned about the many experiences they could bring into the classroom. Most importantly, she saw the need to support families in having relationships with each other. She decided to have bimonthly ethnic studies gatherings where families could come together. Each gathering would highlight one family who would share their story with photos and important family mementos. Ms. Tagumpay created a schedule and invited each family to elaborate on the three questions they had discussed during the meeting so that other families would have a fuller, richer idea of the cultural wealth in the classroom. After each family presented there was time for questions, and Ms. Tagumpay would always end with, “What can we do as a community to support your family?”

After surveying the families, she found that the best time to have the meeting was 30 minutes after pick-up time. Childcare would be provided so that while the kindergarten children participated, younger children would have a fun and engaging place to play. Everyone agreed to take turns bringing food to share. These gatherings were well attended, and Ms. Tagumpay observed that during school time her students were highly motivated to engage in extended discussions about what they learned in the meetings and then write about and draw retellings of the stories.

The My Name My Identity Initiative <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link4> Teachers can foster a sense of belonging and build positive relationships in the classroom, which are crucial for healthy social, psychological, and educational outcomes. This small step goes a long way to strengthen ML students' sense of belonging and cultural pride.

Practice #2: Developing Critically Conscious Empathy Through Oral History, Migration Story, and Personal Story Projects

ML students, their families, and communities benefit from projects that validate their histories and embodied experiences. Oral history is one of the most effective ways for students to learn about their families and communities. An oral history is a collection of testimonies and stories about the events that happened in a person's life. Oral history is also about the passing down of stories by verbally sharing them with other people. Oral history and migration story projects encourage students to reflect on and share their family members' stories and experiences. These projects allow teachers and students to practice empathy by listening to and understanding the personal histories that impact the lives and experiences of everyone in the classroom. They are an effective way of deepening relationships and fostering a greater sense of belonging that can extend beyond the classroom. Additionally, projects like these allow students and their families to reflect on their personal examples of cultural wealth. Oral history projects, in particular, can document the histories of exploitation, displacement, resistance, and survival that multilingual communities of color may have experienced (Mabalon 2013, Mirabal 2009). Students and their families with these forms of cultural wealth are recognized and valued in educational spaces. Furthermore, the connection between the curriculum and the lived experiences of students' families can provide a way for families to feel more included and welcomed in school spaces.

It is important to not assume that all oral history projects are happy ones. Migration stories can often be painful, traumatic, and sometimes triggering

for students. While there are many benefits to having students explore their families' histories, it is essential to understand that they may bring up painful and difficult conversations with which students may need support. Some students may not be able to write about their migration stories, let alone share them in front of a class. When assigning oral history or personal story projects, inclusive teachers also recognize that some students may come from nontraditional families or may be emancipated youth and are the only ones from their immediate family in this country. Students benefit when assignment guidelines and examples do not privilege the traditional family structure or otherwise make students feel like outsiders. Furthermore, some students or their families may be undocumented immigrants and feel vulnerable around a project like oral histories. Empathetic and inclusive teachers ensure students know they can choose not to respond to particular questions or prompts that may make them vulnerable.

In many cultures, people relied on the tradition of storytelling when there was no written language or when their native language was prohibited from being recorded. Oral histories were often the only means to record historical events, experiences of people, and cultural teachings. It is an important way of remembering the lives and experiences of those who are often not in textbooks, movies, and television (Tintiangco-Cubales and Mabalon 2007).

In oral history projects, students are often assigned to interview a family member or elder in their community about experiences in their life. It is a way of capturing and preserving the stories and perspectives of their elders. Oral histories that require students to contextualize their family's stories in relation to power, legislation, and political or social movements provide students with opportunities to develop their analytical skills. They also allow students to put their experiences "in conversation with history," that is, to situate their personal experiences in an informed historical context. When multiple oral histories are combined, a community can get a fuller understanding of its history, motivations, development, hopes, and dreams.

There are multiple ways that oral histories can be conducted. One example of the project description and questions that students can use is provided below (fig. 2.9).

Oral History Project Assignment

Description: You will be conducting an oral history on a family or community member who is thirty years old or older. This history will look at three significant events in their life. The oral history should connect the person's story to larger historical events that occurred during the time the person is talking about. If you are multilingual, you are encouraged to do the interview in the language that makes the interviewee feel most comfortable. The oral history project has three parts: (1) Oral History Paper, (2) Oral History Visual Representation, and (3) Oral History Presentation.

Figure 2.9 Sample Questions (each set of questions could be its own project)

<p>Three Events</p>	<p>If you could choose the three most important events in your life, as a(n) _____ (insert an ethnic, racial, gendered, or other identity), what would they be? Why were they significant?</p> <p>Follow-up questions: <i>(You may need to ask follow-up questions based on the three events.)</i></p>
<p>Growing up in the US or in another country</p>	<p>Describe your earliest childhood memory. How do you think this has shaped your life?</p> <p>Follow-up questions: Describe your family members and their personalities. Who took care of you? What were the different roles of everyone in the family? Who were you close to? What national or world events had the most impact on you when you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?</p>

Language History

Describe what it was like growing up speaking multiple languages in the United States. How has this influenced your identity? How did this impact the way you were seen?

Follow-up questions: How were you treated at school? By your teachers? By your peers? How were students who spoke multiple languages cared for and “seen” at your school?

Community History

Describe the community you grew up in and especially the neighborhood. How did you see yourself in this community? How has it shaped who you have become?

Follow-up questions: How did you identify your neighborhood? What did you call it? What were its boundaries? Where did you get news of what was happening in your neighborhood? Where did you shop? What was the largest city or town you remember visiting when you were young and what were your impressions of it?

VIGNETTE

2.4

Oral History with Multilingual Students at the High School Level

Ms. Daus, a high school English teacher, has her students do an oral history project that is a bit different from other oral history projects. She has students interview each other about their history in the United States. She begins by having students read the oral histories written by and about students from another district. After reading and discussing these stories, the students work together to create questions they will use to interview another student in the class. They are usually paired up with students who speak the same language, so that they can conduct the interview in their home language and then translate it into English or use translanguaging as they choose.

The students enjoy being able to tell their own stories and learn about the stories of their classmates, and addressing something that is so familiar to them in an academic context helps them gain confidence as scholars. The students help each other in the translations since they are invested in having their own stories represented well. After they finish the final editing of their stories, they prepare to co-present them orally to the class. Before the students share, Ms. Daus models by presenting her own oral history and inviting students to ask questions afterward. In reflection, she acknowledges that this modeling not only provides an example for students, it also makes them feel more willing to share their own experiences and gives them more confidence to speak in front of the class.

Practice #3: Fostering Community Responsiveness Through Youth Participatory Action Research

As discussed earlier in the chapter, community responsiveness focuses on understanding students' contexts, including their families and communities, and helps teachers understand who their students are, as well as their learning strengths and needs. Many ethnic studies programs in California schools, in order to be community responsive, implement youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects that help transform the way youths see themselves and their community. YPAR is a project approach that is centered on the strengths of the students and their communities, and the projects develop the critical consciousness of students and educators. The research process is organized around Freire's (1970) concept of praxis, or the synthesis of theory, reflection, and action, and has the following five steps: (1) identify the problem, (2) analyze the problem, (3) create a plan of action, (4) implement the plan of action, and (5) reflect.

YPAR curriculum interrogates the multiple power structures that affect students both in and out of school. It challenges students to begin to reframe the way they understand, interpret, and interact with their school, their community, and the world. The "action" part of YPAR is crucial, in that students must address the issue in an effort to transform the situation. YPAR "decenters the power in research from adults by allowing youth to explore their identities and power structure while also engaging in action that challenges structure" (Desai 2018, 61). This allows students to see themselves as both scholars and community leaders. Additionally, because the "participatory action research" part of YPAR requires community stakeholders to be involved, YPAR projects incorporate the voices and perspectives of students' families and communities in the scope of the research process.

YPAR helps build the capacity of students and teachers to be community responsive because it entails learning about and transforming the root causes of a community issue that directly impact the students. "YPAR nurtures a positive youth identity, develops critical consciousness and empathy for the struggles of others, and engages youth in social justice activities informed by

students' lived experiences" (Tintiango-Cubales et al. 2014, 12). YPAR can transform the way teachers see their role, their students, and the communities their students come from. YPAR cannot happen without already having fostered a safe space where students have started to build strong relationships through practicing empathy and trusting one another. Figure 2.10 outlines the implementation of a YPAR project, and the vignette that follows illustrates how YPAR looks in action.



What types of YPAR issues might students in your school or community be interested in investigating? How might you facilitate this type of research?

Figure 2.10 Outline of a YPAR Project

Steps of YPAR	Questions for Students
Identify the Problem	<p>Describe your earliest childhood memory. How do you think this has shaped your life?</p> <p>Follow-up questions: Describe your family members and their personalities. Who took care of you? What were the different roles of everyone in the family? Who were you close to? What national or world events had the most impact on you when you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?</p>
Analyze the Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the problem impact our community? • Where else does this problem occur? What has been done about it in those places? • What is currently being done to understand or address the problem? • What are the root causes of the problem? What are the symptoms of the problem? What are the differences between the root causes and the symptoms? • Are the root causes being addressed or are current solutions only looking at the symptoms of the problem?

<p>Create a Plan of Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is our vision for change? • What are our hopes and dreams for our community? • What is our capacity to engage with our community? • How can we address, challenge, or impact the root causes of this problem? • What are the steps we need to take to implement an action plan to address this problem? • What is our capacity to enact that action plan?
<p>Implement the Plan of Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What shifts or adjustments do we have to accommodate for in our action plan and its implementation as we roll this out? • What is happening to our community as we implement this action plan?
<p>Reflect on the Problem and Plan of Action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the action plan impacted the problem? • How has the action plan impacted us individually and collectively? • How has the action plan impacted our community? • What new things have we learned about ourselves, each other, and our community through this process? • What have we learned about the problem, its symptoms, its root causes, and the impacts on ourselves and our community through this process? • What would we do differently next time? • What new action plan(s) do we find are needed to better address the problem? • How has our relationship to the problem changed in this process? • How has our relationship to each other changed in this process? • How has our relationship to the community changed in this process?

VIGNETTE

2.5

YPAR Project Co-Taught at a High School

Teachers in San Francisco who were co-teaching a course led a group of seniors in a YPAR project. The students were having trouble narrowing down the issues they wanted to study, so the teachers asked them to list the most important community issues that they experienced or witnessed regularly. The students began to list many things such as feeling stressed, female students feeling harassed on the bus and while walking in the street, Chinese students being bullied on campus by other students of color, feeling unsafe in certain San Francisco neighborhoods, and ineffective school practices around restorative justice, to name a few. After the teachers wrote the list on the board, they had students vote for their three most pressing issues. The majority of students chose issues that were connected in some way to violence.

After agreeing upon the topic, one of the teachers placed an empty coffee can in the middle of the room and said: “This can represents violence. Let’s all stand up and position ourselves as close to it as we think violence is to our lives.” The students did not move closer to the can. No student wanted to say that they were experiencing violence, even though the majority of topics brought up by the students themselves had to do with violence at school, on the bus, in the community, and at home. The students and their teachers discussed the issue for two days before coming up with these questions: “How do race/ethnicity, class, and gender affect the experiences of students at this school around violence? Are they normalizing or internalizing this violence?”

To research the questions, students viewed and discussed documentaries, read and analyzed articles, and explored other sources addressing violence in urban communities and in communities of color. After lengthy discussions around the root causes of violence, the students started to reframe their understandings as to why violence existed in

their community. They then surveyed the entire school and conducted 30 interviews, with students, faculty, and administrators, to get a deeper understanding of how the larger school community was witnessing, experiencing, and understanding violence. After they analyzed the data and compared it to their previous readings and discussions, they began to develop a deeper understanding of violence in their community.

Although initially planned as a seven-week unit, the YPAR project ended up stretching out to ten weeks. The coteachers agreed that no matter how much planning one puts into YPAR, the project is very dynamic and usually lasts a little longer than initially planned. When the students completed their research and could discuss new language and theories around violence, the teachers repeated the activity with the can. The results were drastically different as more students moved closer to the can. What was also different was both the way that students were able to articulate their experiences in their community and how they supported one another when students shared their experiences of violence. These same students who initially did not want to even discuss violence in class with one another, chose to create a public service announcement on violence that could be shown in the daily morning video broadcast and on YouTube. They also volunteered to teach a violence prevention workshop to students from the nearby middle school that fed into their high school. These students went from being afraid to open up about their experiences to becoming community leaders trying to facilitate change in their community.

YPAR projects are usually conducted around a topic of the students' choosing. Another project, conducted in a ninth-grade English classroom with a large number of newcomer English learner students at the Emerging level of English language proficiency, examined the root causes and impacts of violence both at the school site and in the community. The students read academic articles on youth violence that were slightly modified to be challenging (see fig. 2.11) yet understandable for the students who were still developing their English language skills. Students then discussed the readings with partners and in small groups (in both English and their home languages) before engaging in class discussions on the causes of violence in the community. The teacher was surprised by how well his students were able to engage with the peer-reviewed articles. In his desire to not set them up for failure, he inadvertently assumed that they were incapable of engaging with such advanced academic language.

Figure 2.11 Example of an Academic Text Modified for High School EL Students

For people living in **low-income** [poorer] communities, a **scarcity** [lack] of **material** resources [wealth] organizes behavioral choices and influences people's efforts to become middle class. **Consequently** [as a result], many people who live in low-income communities have to fight their environment to find relief from the **burdens** [difficulties] it **imposes** [puts/creates]. One of the products of this effort is the development of a "defiant individualist" personality. According to Fromm (1970), this personality characteristic combines dominant social values—i.e., a stress on being socioeconomically mobile and on **accumulating capital** [getting rich]—with a **paucity** [lack] of resources available for people living in lower-income communities to achieve these **objectives** [goals]. Accordingly, "defiant individualism" leads people to become involved with money-producing economic activities whether legal or not; the trait carries along with it an edge that "defies" any and all attempts to **thwart** [prevent] it.

Source: Sánchez-Jankowski 2003, 201

In an example from Pin@y Educational Partnerships (PEP), an ethnic studies educational project in San Francisco that has teacher interns at various school sites, multiple forms of YPAR are conducted over the course of the school year, and students do a culminating YPAR study at the end of the year. PEP has not only developed a way to have youth conduct research on their communities but has also developed two methods that support teachers and leaders in doing research about their students with the goal of better serving them in the classrooms and schools.

Through LPAR (Leadership Participatory Action Research) and TPAR (Teacher Participatory Action Research) in PEP, leaders and teachers build the following skills and mindsets and become a model for youth: sense of purpose, self-direction, curiosity, relevance, social awareness, and self-awareness. PEP's development of LPAR, TPAR, and the guiding of YPAR is built on valuing of students' prior knowledge and experiences, meeting students where they're at, and designing relevant inquiry projects that aim to solve real-life problems. This authentically engages educators in a process of culturally and community responsive research that aims to improve their effectiveness and their service in their classrooms.

–Daus-Magbual, Daus-Magbual, and Tintiangco-Cubales 2019

In PEP, these participatory action research projects develop the critical consciousness of both students and educators. One of the greatest aspects of YPAR is the ambiguity of the research topic and the process. Since it is student centered, the instructor cannot do much preplanning. YPAR requires the instructor and the students to show their vulnerabilities. Sometimes, depending on the research topic, the students are the experts and not the teacher. It is beneficial for educators to not fight this and instead use this as a time to show vulnerability. Saying things like “I don’t know, but let’s find out together” can be incredibly helpful in getting students to humanize their teacher and build a deeper, more authentic relationship. The same is true when engaging with students’ families and communities. Trust can be nurtured with students’ families and communities when everyone is viewed as an expert, not just the teacher.

Concluding Comments and Suggested Next Steps

This chapter discussed why asset-based pedagogy is an educational imperative for ML students. Working collaboratively, every educator can develop deep knowledge and skills for implementing asset-based pedagogy. To support these efforts, readers are encouraged to try out some of the ideas from this chapter and deepen their knowledge with the resources available on the CDE website, including the Asset-Based Pedagogies web page available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link5>.

Teachers and administrators are highly encouraged to engage in learning with other educators. One thing all educators can do is meet for a book study group using one or more of the following titles:

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Endnotes

- 1 *California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities* is available on the California Department of Education website at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link14>.
- 2 Guidance on social–emotional learning is available on the California Department of Education Social and Emotional Learning web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link15>.
- 3 *California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities* is available on the California Department of Education website at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link16>.
- 4 For more information on how this looks in middle and high school, see the 2015 CASEL Guide, available on the CASEL web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link17>.
- 5 Information on California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum is available on the California Department of Education Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Frequently Asked Questions web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link18>.
- 6 San Francisco Unified School District now provides an “Equity Studies Infusion Framework” for its ethnic studies courses. Resources can be found on the SFUSD website at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/ch2.asp#link19>.

