CHAPTER 2

Assessing Reading Instruction for Cultural Responsiveness
Suzanne teaches fifth grade in a suburb east of Cleveland, Ohio. For the first 22 years of her career, the district was considered upper middle class, with a solid school tax base and high student achievement overall. Then things began to change. Suzanne explained:

It wasn’t gradual. It seemed to happen overnight. Families started migrating eastward from the inner city. Not only did that mean more students from lower-income families, but also it meant more students with English as their second language. The first year that some of our subgroups did not meet No Child Left Behind requirements, we knew we had to do things differently.

Suzanne’s superintendent brought in a nationally known speaker for a three-part series on teaching children of poverty. He sent teachers to workshops focused on English language learners (ELLs), and he purchased books on culturally responsive instruction (CRI) for teachers’ after-school book clubs. The following fall Suzanne was ready—or so she thought. She had read voraciously, attended every professional development opportunity offered, and spent long hours in the summer preparing lessons to address cultural diversity. Her heart was in the right place; her lesson plans were written; her materials were gathered. Unfortunately, Suzanne had sidestepped a most important principle: You have to know your students before you can plan instruction for them.

In years past (and unfortunately in some classrooms still), teachers planned instruction in the following sequence: (1) Determine lesson objectives, (2) plan activities to teach the objectives, (3) gather materials, (4) teach, and (5) assess. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) propose that we begin with the last step instead—that we assess students first so that we know what objectives, activities, and materials they need. The three-step planning process Wiggins and McTighe advocate, known as \textit{backward design}, involves these steps: (1) Identify desired results, which you will determine through pre-assessment; (2) determine acceptable evidence; and (3) plan learning experiences and instruction.

In the spirit of backward design, we have placed the assessment chapter before the strategies chapter in this book. In this chapter, we will provide strategies for getting to know your students’ and their families’ cultures, literacy histories, and learning needs; assessing various aspects of your classroom instruction; and assessing whether the school as a whole is situated for addressing the reading needs of diverse learners. Then, in Chapter 3 we will share instructional strategies you can use, once you know what your students need.
Big Ideas of Assessment

In each of the books in this series, we have identified several “big ideas” to guide your thinking about assessment. These big ideas apply to assessing all aspects of literacy learning (indeed, to all learning), but the comments and examples below frame them in the context of CRI.

- **Focus on critical information.** Aim for a direct connection between the assessment tools/strategies you use and what you need to know. You can identify the critical information you need to know by considering the broad definitions of culture, diversity, and CRI presented in Chapter 1 with your own students in mind. You may also find other books in this series to be helpful in determining broad definitions for phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

  So, for example, if you determine that information about a student’s home culture is critical, you might use the cultural interview approach discussed in this chapter and read some books related to that child’s culture. If you decide that you need to know more about an ELL’s level of social vocabulary, you might look for situations where the student is talking with peers, rather than just observing teacher–student interactions. If, on the other hand, you need to know about that child’s level of academic vocabulary, you might want to use some of the vocabulary assessments suggested in this chapter.

- **Look for patterns of behavior.** Tierney (1998) notes that assessment “should be viewed as ongoing and suggestive, rather than fixed or definitive” (p. 385). Think of the ongoing process of looking for behavior patterns in two steps: first, collecting the information and, second, documenting the information. Collecting the information can involve several methods. Among the more common are observing and interviewing—that is, watching for behavior and asking children directed questions that they answer orally. Common ways to document the information are anecdotally (i.e., in written notes) and in a checklist.

  For example, while observing an ELL during silent reading, you notice that she skips pages. But the next day you notice that she is not skipping pages. In a one-to-one oral interview, you ask her to describe people, places, or events of the two stories she read during silent reading. She describes the people and places in one of the stories and the events in neither story, and you follow up with prompts...
about particular vocabulary associated with the people and places. You then create an entry in your notes regarding which books she had read and perhaps note on your checklist which questions she answered. Over time, you will be able to discern patterns that answer such questions as these: Is she interested in the text? What vocabulary does she know? How does she comprehend while reading silently?

These questions address the student’s culture—her background knowledge and experiences—and how successfully she is able to apply knowledge and experiences to the process of comprehending what she reads. It would be impossible for us to address every culture you might encounter in your classroom. Therefore, you should carefully document the data that you collect through methods that are formal and informal so that you can look for patterns that will help you understand each child’s needs.

- **Recognize developmental progressions [can’t, can sometimes, can always] and children’s cultural or linguistic differences.** Tierney (1998) advises that assessment “should be more developmental and sustained than piecemeal and shortsighted” (p. 384). It should “build upon, recognize, and value rather than displace what students have experienced in their worlds” (p. 381). For example, research overwhelmingly supports the practice of using the child’s first language to accelerate English acquisition (Greene, 1999; Krashen, 1996; Krashen & McField, 2005; Oller & Eilers, 2002). Doing so provides schemas in the first language so that English is more comprehensible. Applying this principle to literacy, starting with students’ reading strengths in the home language allows them to “bootstrap” into English literacy (Genesee, 2005).

Children of poverty will have different language needs than do ELLs. Sussman (2009) calls these children “Kids from Chaos” because of the turmoil that may reign in their homes due to unemployment, substance abuse, or a myriad of other social factors. These children often lack the basic necessities such as food, clothing, and nurturance. Perhaps more significantly, they lack substantive relationships with responsible peers and adults. Because these children often lack appropriate oral language skills to connect to and negotiate with others or to express themselves, they may exhibit behavior problems or depression, lack time-management skills, and struggle academically. Lectures or teacher-talk are usually lost on kids from chaos because they lack a sufficient academic vocabulary to easily process information.

As you can see from these two examples, determining a student’s developmental progress will always be intertwined with the cultural context.
• **Be parsimonious.** The question: How much assessment information do you need? The answer: only enough to help you make good instructional decisions. Simply put, if the student continues to struggle after you have assessed him or her and carried out subsequent instructional plans, then you probably need more information. One way to conceptualize the quantity of information needed is to think in terms of three layers of assessment information, as shown in Figure 2.1 (Rasinski, Padak, & Fawcett, 2010).

Begin with a broad plan to assess all students’ reading at the beginning of the year and then perhaps quarterly. After each assessment cycle concludes, think about results: What [or who] do you still have questions about? This is the point where you move to the second layer of the triangle. Here, you will do more targeted (and time-consuming) reading assessments. You might work individually with a student, perhaps doing more of what you’ve already done or using a more comprehensive assessment.

For example, once you have assessed all students and have further questions about an ELL, you might assess that student’s comprehension by using picture cues for a story retelling. Or you might assess comprehension with a different text and with words at another grade level. This more focused assessment in the second layer of the triangle is also related to the Response to Intervention (RTI) model for which there is a separate text in this series (Wisniewski, Padak, & 

![Figure 2.1](image-url)
Rasinski, 2011). In RTI, Tier 1 assessments (the bottom layer of the triangle in Figure 2.1) are for all students. Tier 2 is targeted for students for whom you need more information. Tier 3 is reserved for students with the most need for more assessment information. If you still have questions after Tier 2 assessment, don’t hesitate to ask for outside help. A student or two in the class may benefit from a diagnosis by a reading specialist or other highly specialized professional. Don’t delay. Every lost day represents lost opportunities for that student’s learning. Above all, keep assessments at these different layers related to one another, focused on the same key reading issues.

- **Use instructional situations for assessment purposes.** Tierney (1998) notes that ideally “[a]ssessments should emerge from the classroom rather than be imposed upon it” (p. 375). We can think of two good reasons for this stance, one conceptual and the other practical. From a conceptual perspective, you want to know how students behave in typical instructional situations. After all, a major purpose of assessment is to provide instructional guidance. And practically, gathering assessment information from instruction saves time for your teaching and students’ learning. Students don’t learn much of value during testing sessions.

  Much can be learned by simply listening. For example, paying close attention as students of diverse backgrounds talk about a story can provide significant information about their background knowledge. Listening to ELLs talk with their peers on the playground or in the cafeteria can provide information you cannot get by listening to them talk in classroom discussions. Taking note of words used in a student’s writing can give you insight into his or her vocabulary development. Above all, take West’s (1998) advice to heart: “I want instruction and evaluation to be in meaningful authentic contexts” (p. 550).

- **Include plans for (a) using assessment information to guide instruction and (b) sharing assessment information with students and their parents.** The last step of your assessment planning might be to double-check ideas against their primary purposes: to help you teach more effectively and to communicate your insights to students and their parents. With regard to the former, it may be particularly important to think about how you can adjust instruction for students from diverse backgrounds. How can you match instruction better to the student’s background knowledge and experiences? What texts might you use that would reflect your students’ cultures and, thus, create interest in reading? What kind of participation might provide opportunities for students to talk about the text in order to improve vocabulary learning?
Moreover, consider how you can share information about reading with students and their parents. Knowing that they are making progress will keep students engaged in their learning. Assessment conversations are also good ways to help students develop more abstract concepts about reading. Remember that CRI extends to the family as well. When communicating with parents of culturally diverse students, it is important to understand the social structure of the family in that particular culture. In Chapter 1, we talked about the fact that not all cultures respond to parental involvement in education as teachers sometimes expect, but it doesn’t mean the parents don’t care. In the pages that follow, we provide some suggestions for getting to know about the child’s home culture. Tierney (1998) reminds us that it’s important to keep parents not only informed but also, more than that, involved. This can be a challenge with parents who do not speak English, parents who are working several jobs just to make ends meet, or parents who feel it is not their place to teach their child. However, “[r]ather than keep the parent or caregiver at arm’s length... , we need to embrace the concerns that parents have and the contributions they can make” (p. 380).

The assessment strategies in this chapter are divided into four sections: (1) assessing student cultures, (2) assessing reading skills (vocabulary and comprehension), (3) assessing your instruction, and (4) assessing your school’s readiness for culturally responsive instruction. These sections are in no particular order. Determine an area where you are lacking information and start there.

**Assessing Student Cultures**

Meyer (2000) uses the term *culture load* to refer to the way language and culture are related and the amount of cultural knowledge required to comprehend meaning or to participate in an activity. Culture load includes how teachers expect interaction to occur in a classroom—when to speak, when to stay silent, when to raise hands, and when to write. Such expectations vary from one culture to the next. Culturally diverse students do not acquire these classroom behavioral norms independently; they must be taught. This requires a conscious knowledge of students’ cultures and the classroom culture so that a plan can be made for bridging the two.

The best way to get to know your students’ cultures is to embed your inquiry into everyday instruction and learning activities. Talk with them in the classroom. Play with them on the playground.
Observe them working and playing with others. Invite family members in to share aspects of their culture with your class. Most importantly, never assume.

A cultural interview with your students and their parents can help you gather information and simultaneously build trust and rapport. The purpose of your interview is to gain information about a school-aged student’s likes and dislikes in school and/or out of school within the student’s current culture. This knowledge informs your use of the culture and experiences of different ethnic groups as a launch pad to teach more effectively (Gay, 2000).

The cultural interview in Appendix B provides a list of questions within multiple categories: reading, computer use, music, games, and other activities. These categories reflect different types of texts that 21st century children and adolescents use outside of school. For example, in its report released in January 2010 on the media use for youth from ages 8 to 18 (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), the Kaiser Family Foundation reported an average 38 minutes spent a day on print, as compared to an average of four and a half hours with television content, two and a half hours with music and audio content, and one and a half hours with the computer. The averages for television, music, computer time, and video games increased from 2004 to 2009. Because of this increase, selecting from the questions in Appendix B will not only ascertain student interests that enable you to be responsive with instruction but also provide information that enables you to respond to student cultures using multiple texts.

Conducting the interview involves several steps that are based on the time you have available, the relationship you already have built with the student or group of students you will interview, and the information you want to know. We suggest the following steps while planning the interview.

Step 1  **Decide whom you will interview and why.** You may want to choose your whole class and divide them in groups. Or you may select a student who is particularly quiet, is new to the classroom, is not participating as you had expected, or seems to have difficulties with the learning tasks in your classroom.

Step 2  **Determine the purpose of your interview.** The general purpose of this interview is to gain more information about students’ backgrounds and experiences in order to inform teaching practice in a diversity context. Is there a specific lesson, unit, or literacy center that you have in mind when conducting the interview?
Step 3 Obtain informal permission for your interview. Permission is based on the purpose of your interview. When the purpose is to inform teaching practice, the interview includes questions that you would normally ask as you get to know students within the scope of your professional role. Permission, then, becomes a matter of respect for the student. Ask something like “May I have permission to ask you questions about your interests?”

Step 4 Choose interview questions. Read through the interview samples, select appropriate questions and edit them, and/or develop your own questions based upon what you would normally ask within the scope of your teaching.

Step 5 Determine the setting and materials for the interview. Choose a place that will be comfortable for the interviewee. Materials for the interview may include a laptop if you are typing the answers or a pen/pencil if you are writing them. Have notes if you need them as well.

Step 6 Conduct the interview. Include an introduction and a closure. Decide what you will say when introducing the interview to set the tone. This may include a restatement of the purpose of the interview as well as an introduction statement. An opening might be: “Have you ever been interviewed before?” or “I will ask you several questions about your interests inside and outside of school. Ready?” Make sure the student understands that you will not be “grading” his or her answers. During the interview, keep in mind prompts like “Tell me more about that,” “What do you mean by. . .?” and other clarifying questions offered within the interview in Appendix B. Repeating what your student says also helps to either clarify a response or encourage an extended response. Select a closure appropriate to your relationship with the student, such as “Thank you” or “Anything you would like to ask me?” Selecting information that you learned about the student (“I especially liked your comments about. . .”) or a strength that you noticed helps to solidify your relationship, while also transitioning from the interview to the next task.

Notice that the interview addresses interests based on what the child does. Understanding home behaviors gives information on the symbolic or deep level of culture that we introduced in Chapter 1. In addition to gathering information from students themselves, you can expand your cultural assessment to the greater community where your students live. Observations made by walking through the
community and visiting the local library and merchants can provide information about what your students see every day outside of the school that you can also use in your curriculum. The following interview questions (Sleeter, 2005) can be posed not only to the families of your students, but also to others who live in the community:

- What are the main assets of the community?
- What are people in the community especially good at?
- Describe how you would like this community to be 10 years from now.
- What does this community have going for it that will help reach that goal?
- What are the main barriers to reaching that goal? What is the community doing to address those barriers?
- What needs does the community have?
- As a teacher, how can I best serve this community?

Another excellent way to become familiar with the cultures of your students begins with a trip to your favorite bookstore or public library. There are novels, both contemporary and historical, and true stories that will satisfy your desire to read for pleasure and at the same time give you insight into your students’ cultures. For example, the book Among Schoolchildren, Tracy Kidder’s (1990) haunting account of the inner-city life of two young boys, will give you insight into children of poverty. In Ordinary Resurrections, Jonathan Kozol (2001) gives us a look at schoolchildren of South Bronx’s most dismal neighborhood, Mott Haven. Three Cups of Tea, a New York Times bestseller by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin (2007), is a captivating story about life in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Be sure to read Shirley Brice Heath’s classic studies of language learning in two culturally different communities only a few miles apart in the southeastern United States (Heath, 1983, 1994). Heath lived among families in “Roadville,” a white working-class community steeped for four generations in the life of the textile mills, and “Trackton,” a black working-class community whose older generations grew up farming but whose younger generations worked in the textile mills.

In tracing the children’s language development, Heath found deep cultural differences between the two communities and the teachers who taught the children. One example among many in the book Ways with Words tells how babies in the two communities learn to talk. In Trackton,
[c]hildren do not expect adults to ask them questions, for in Trackton children are not seen as information-givers or question-answerers. This is especially true of questions for which adults already have an answer. Because adults do not consider children appropriate conversational partners to the exclusion of other people who are around, they do not construct questions especially for children, nor do they use questions to give the young an opportunity to show off their knowledge about the world. (Heath, 1983, p. 103)

In Roadville, on the other hand,

[y]oung mothers themselves begin to use question-statements in their talk with their baby, usually within the first month for the first child and almost immediately with subsequent children. . . . Questions in which the questioner knows the answer, indeed often has a specific answer in mind, are frequent throughout the preschool years. . . . (Heath, 1983, pp. 129, 131)

In addition to mainstream and educational books, articles on diversity in the classroom abound in professional journals. You will find additional suggestions in Chapter 5, “Resources.” Teachers who read books and articles about other cultures, particularly cultures represented in their classrooms, will be fascinated by the richness and diversity of the human race. And for CRI, Guthrie, Rueda, Gambrell, and Morrison (2009), in their review of research on connecting cultures to the classroom, remind us that “classrooms that provide a closer match to the conditions with which students are familiar and comfortable improve students’ engagement and produce better achievement.” (p. 208)

Assessing Reading Skills

In other books in this series, you will find many assessments and strategies for teaching the elements of reading as identified by the National Reading Panel (2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Those strategies have been found effective through research and can be used or adapted
as part of your instructional routine with culturally diverse students as well. In this book, we focus on two of the five areas, vocabulary and comprehension. That does not mean we consider the other three elements to be less important for culturally diverse learners; it means those two areas are often especially problematic for them. Some of the strategies that follow can be used to assess both vocabulary and comprehension. Many can be used as instructional activities as well.

Assessing Vocabulary/Word Recognition

There is a confluence of research showing that vocabulary is a strong predictor of comprehension and overall reading proficiency (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Bromley, 2007; National Reading Panel, 2000; VanDeWeghe, 2007). Of course, that makes perfect sense to teachers. If children don’t know the words, how can they understand the text? Or if they can read the words but don’t know what key words mean, how can they comprehend the text? The vocabulary book in this series (Newton, Padak, & Rasinski, 2008) identifies the following critical indicators of vocabulary/word recognition:

- Decodes words already in meaning vocabulary,
- Learns new concepts (or labels for concepts),
- Uses new vocabulary orally and in writing,
- Applies strategies to learn new words (structure, semantics, metacognition), and
- Uses reference works and other resources to learn new words.

The following assessments can help you determine where your culturally diverse students stand in regard to these critical indicators.

Cloze Procedure

The cloze procedure is good for assessing both vocabulary and comprehension. It is called cloze because it is based on the psychological principle that the human brain seeks closure or completeness to incomplete illustrations or objects. In the cloze procedure, the reader attempts to impose closure by using context clues to fill in blanks in an incomplete text.
The following are steps for assessing a student with the cloze procedure:

1. Find a passage that is of suitable length for your learner’s reading ability and age.

2. Delete words throughout the text and replace them with a blank line. Here is a guide for the number of words to delete:
   - If the text is approximately 300 words, delete every fifth word.
   - If the text is shorter, delete proportionately fewer words. Leave the first sentence and last sentence intact.

3. Have the student read the passage and use context clues to identify the deleted words.

The following cloze was taken from *Barack* (Winter, 2008), a story for children ages 4–7 about the rise of U.S. President Barack Obama:

Looking back, it’s hard to believe how far he has come, the man whose name the world now knows—Barack Obama. This is a journey ______(1) began in many places. ____ (2) began in Kansas, home ______(3) Barack’s mother. It began ______ (4) Africa, home of Barack’s ______(5).

[Answers: (1) that, (2) It, (3) of, (4) in, (5) father.]

For assessment purposes, record the words that you deleted from the passage in a checklist to keep track of student progress. The checklist below shows the list of words from the example from *Barack* above with a column where you can indicate whether or not the student identified the deleted word. The comments column could include your observations of the reading (e.g., whether the student identified all deletions on the first reading, whether the student needed help in identifying a particular deletion, or the strategy that the student used to identify the unknown word). Add columns for multiple readings if needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deleted Word</th>
<th>Correct Identification of Deleted Word</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<td>in</td>
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<td>father</td>
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The cloze procedure has several variations. If your student needs more support, you can place possible answers next to each blank or list all the deleted words at the end of the passage. The activity is then called a maze or multiple-choice cloze.

Sometimes it was a ______(1) journey. When Barack was ______(2) a toddler, his father ______(3) far away. Sometimes it ______(4) an enchanted journey. When ______(5) was only six years ______(6), his mother brought him ______(7) Indonesia to live with ______(8) new husband. [Choices: just, moved, Barack, was, old, to, her, sad]

[Answers: (1) sad, (2) just, (3) moved, (4) was, (5) Barack, (6) old, (7) to, (8) her.]

If you want to see how your students employ both context and letter information for word recognition, you can give the initial letter (or blend) for each missing word.

On the other side o___(1) the world, there w____(2) half brothers, half sisters, a____(3), and uncles. They wore d________(4) clothes. They spoke a d________(5) language. And yet, they w_______(6) his family. [Answers: (1) of, (2) were, (3) aunts, (4) different, (5) different, (6) were.]

Key elements in succeeding with the cloze procedure include choosing texts that challenge but do not overwhelm, giving students time and assistance in predicting the missing words, and encouraging students to share strategies and clues in identifying the unknown words (Rasinski, Padak, & Fawcett, 2010).

Assessment of High-Frequency Words

You can assess a student’s automatic word recognition using a standard sight word list such as the Dolch (1955) or Fry (1980) list. Provide the student with a copy of the list; use another copy to record his or her score. Only count as correct those words the student can read effortlessly. The results can be interpreted as follows:

- 90% = Independent Reading Level
- 70–80% = Instructional Reading Level
- <50% = Frustration Level
Assessment of Basic Reading Vocabulary

Another resource for vocabulary assessment is Rasinski and Padak’s (2007) Informal Vocabulary Inventory, which focuses on words from primer to grade 8. The words in the inventory come from Harris and Jacobson’s (1982) Basic Reading Vocabularies. Using the interpretation of results listed above for the assessment of high-frequency words (i.e., 90% is the independent reading level, 70–80% is the instructional reading level, and below 50% is the frustration level), follow these steps:

1. Begin with the student’s grade placement.
2. Read 10 of the 11 words to the student.
3. Ask the student to define or use each word in a sentence in a way that describes the word.
4. Give the student 10 points for each description if it is correct, 0 points if it is incorrect, or 5 points if you feel it is partially correct.

Informal Vocabulary Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primer</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>father</td>
<td>zoo</td>
<td>wink</td>
<td>wobble</td>
<td>tingle</td>
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<td>hen</td>
<td>train</td>
<td>sharp</td>
<td>worst</td>
<td>vacuum</td>
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<td>overhead</td>
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<td>breeze</td>
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<td>guess</td>
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<td>lantern</td>
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<td>bone</td>
<td>apartment</td>
<td>ghastly</td>
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<td>beautiful</td>
<td>captain</td>
<td>eager</td>
<td>crimson</td>
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<td>grow</td>
<td>always</td>
<td>coyote</td>
<td>cactus</td>
<td>confidence</td>
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(continued)
A knowledge rating chart (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2009) can assist in monitoring vocabulary progress in a number of ways. It can be used as a self-assessment tool for word recognition in order to help motivate vocabulary learning (e.g., Faltis, 2005), while also monitoring word learning progress. The student identifies words from a text in three ways: (1) I know the word well, (2) I have seen or heard the word, or (3) I don’t know the word at all. Once the student has experience with the word, then he or she can move the rating to the column that shows knowledge of the word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Know the word well</th>
<th>Have seen/heard the word</th>
<th>Don’t know the word at all</th>
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A knowledge rating can also be used for screening purposes. For example, as a screening tool, you can identify words from the Dolch (1955) or Fry (1980) lists and record them in the Word column. Then you can use the other three columns to record the students’ responses to your presentation and follow-up questions about the word. Another idea for the Word column is to use it for bold-faced vocabulary words that are found in specific chapters of texts in the content areas.

Knowledge ratings can be especially useful for comparing the words used by students of diverse backgrounds and words in books or their home languages. Recall that understanding students’ cultures is the first step in being culturally responsive. Their cultures include the language they use. For example, for ELLs, listen to the words they use in their everyday language and add selected words to the Word column. Add a column to make the connection between the words they are using in English and the like words in their native language. This additional column can also be used for making connections between words in books and home languages.

Knowledge rating can be extended to instructional activities that are used for assessment. Word sorts, often used in instruction of new vocabulary concepts, can be created by using scissors to cut the words out from the Word column in the knowledge rating chart. Students can sort the words by concept (an open sort), or, if categories are added to the word sort, students can sort the words into the predetermined categories (closed sort). Words can also be grouped into the categories of the knowledge rating (i.e., know the word well, have seen or heard the word, don’t know the word at all).

**Assessing Comprehension**

You may find that some of your diverse learners have adequate word recognition and vocabulary knowledge but struggle with comprehension. Teachers often say of these students, “They don’t understand what they read.” However, such a general statement doesn’t capture the complexity of comprehension and, thus, doesn’t provide specific information to help such students. The comprehension book in this series (Rasinski & Padak, 2008a) identifies the following critical aspects of comprehension assessment:

- Provides information on students’ retelling and summarizing of information from the text,
• Provides information on students’ ability to go beyond the literal information in the text,
• Provides information on students’ critical understanding of and judgments about the text, and
• Provides information about students’ monitoring of their comprehension. (p. 61)

Retellings

One of the most common methods of assessing comprehension is through a retelling. As the name implies, in retelling the student is asked to retell what he or she read. Following are some guidelines for retelling (Rasinski & Padak, 2008a):

• Tell students before they read that you will be asking them to tell you what they recall from the text when they are finished.
• When students finish reading the passage, give them a few moments to collect their thoughts. Then remove the text from their view and ask them to tell you everything they can remember.
• Prompt students to tell you more when they stop. You might say, “Is there anything else you remember?” and then give them wait time. You can also ask them to give an opinion of the text or ask if the text made them think of anything in their own experience.
• Use the rubric shown in Figure 2.2 (Rasinski & Padak, 2008a) to evaluate students’ retellings.

Two-Column Notes

Two-column notes are another way to gather information on the critical aspects of comprehension. Have students fold a paper in half lengthwise and label one column What the text is about and the other column What the text makes me think about. The first column will provide information on literal comprehension and summarizing. The second column can yield information about the student’s background knowledge, whether he goes beyond literal information in the text, and whether he has critical understanding of and makes judgments about the text.
CHAPTER 2
Assessing Reading Instruction for Cultural Responsiveness

1 Give minimal recall, if any, of a fact or two from the passage. Facts recalled may or may not be ones of great importance.

2 Recalls a number of unrelated facts of varied importance.

3 Recalls the main idea of the passage along with a few supporting details.

4 Recalls the main idea along with a fairly robust set of supporting details.

5 Provides a comprehensive summary of the passage, logically developed and with great detail that includes a statement of the main idea.

6 Provides a comprehensive summary and makes inferences that go beyond the text itself. The inference may be in the form of connections to the student’s own life, reasonable judgments about the text or characters or items within the text, or logical predictions about events that go beyond the boundaries of the text itself.

Figure 2.2 Retelling Rubric

10 Quick Assessments

Here are 10 quick student activities you can use to assess comprehension. Some are suitable for narrative text, some for expository text, and some for both:

- Make a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the main character with yourself.
- Draw a picture of an important event in the story.
- Write three sentences that describe the beginning, middle, and end of the passage.
- Make a list of things you want to remember from the passage.
- Write two sentences: problem and solution.
- Do a story web.
- Write a letter to a character.
- Draw a picture of the setting.
- Write five questions you would like to ask the author.
- Write a different ending for the story.

These activities can be evaluated with a simple three-point scale: 3 (outstanding), 2 (satisfactory), and 1 (unsatisfactory). Chart the results and look for patterns across several of these samples.
Anecdotal Notes

You can assess comprehension very effectively and informally as you talk with students about what they are reading. Students can also respond to texts by drawing, acting, and making physical models or in other nonlinguistic ways. Use a variety of texts, including fiction and informational texts, poetry, and textbooks.

Most teachers ask students to make predictions during read-alouds or as students read silently to a designated point in the text. Such predictions are a good indicator of comprehension. Is the prediction logical? If so, the child likely has the background knowledge to understand and extend the story. Incidentally, when children make a prediction, avoid saying “Let’s turn the page to see if Joey is right.” Joey may have made a very logical prediction, but the author took the story in a different direction. Comments such as “Could that happen?” “Does that make sense?” and “Let’s turn the page and see what the author decided to do” validate the child’s comprehension.

Take anecdotal notes on the conversations you have with students about read-alouds, texts they read orally to you, and texts they read silently as well as notes on their nonlinguistic responses to text. If you write your notes on sticky notes, you can easily group them into the four critical aspects of comprehension and look for patterns of response for particular students.

3-Minute Reading Assessment

Another assessment option is the 3-Minute Reading Assessment (Rasinski & Padak, 2004, 2005). This assessment samples a student’s reading and determines his or her level of performance in four critical areas: word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Basically, it provides the same information as most informal reading inventories do but literally takes only 3 minutes per student.

Assessing Your Instruction

Before adding new strategies and activities to your instructional repertoire, it is important to evaluate your current practices for CRI. What current instructional practices do you find to be effective? What instructional areas need to be fine-tuned? Are there instructional components that are not being covered to the degree that they need to be? Is there an area for which you need more information before you can self-assess?
To help you in evaluating your current instructional practices, we have provided a semantic feature analysis chart in Figure 2.3. Along the side of the chart is space for you to list instructional strategies you currently use to enhance children’s literacy learning. Across the top of the chart are components that may be present in the activities you listed. Of course, not every component can, or should, be part of every activity. Some activities will encourage students to interact with classmates, for example; others may invite a more independent response. The key is to seek a balance in terms of the variety of strategies used so that a range of developmental levels and diverse learner needs can be effectively addressed.

Take time to complete the semantic feature analysis. Place a + sign in the corresponding box for each attribute that is present in a literacy instructional activity you currently use. More than one attribute may be present for each activity that you list. (It’s OK to leave areas blank! We’ll be revisiting this chart later.) You may wish to collaborate with colleagues; others may help you recall additional strategies that you use during the course of the school year.

When the semantic feature analysis is complete, it should help you see which aspects of culturally responsive reading instruction currently receive a great deal of attention in your classroom and which aspects may not currently receive enough emphasis. Knowing this will help you to better plan adjustments in your instructional routine. Discuss your findings and insights with colleagues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Strategies</th>
<th>Connection to Background Knowledge and Experiences</th>
<th>Students Participate Individually, in Pairs, and/or in Small Groups</th>
<th>Multimodal Response and Interaction with Text</th>
<th>Incorporates Multicultural Materials</th>
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Figure 2.3  Semantic Feature Analysis for Current Culturally Responsive Instructional Practices
Assessing Reading Instruction for Cultural Responsiveness

Assessing Your Materials

A language-rich environment is especially important for culturally diverse learners. All children need to be read to daily, surrounded by print, and provided time to read independently; however, the need is so great for diverse learners that most will not be successful in school without these factors. Read-alouds, the classroom library, and wall displays should include multicultural materials because children learn better when provided materials where they “see” themselves (Bishop, 1992; Menchaca, 2000). When possible, materials should include texts in the native languages of ELLs in the class. Not surprisingly, the information conveyed in textbooks and lessons is culturally embedded. Some texts or topics can actually be culturally offensive (Meyer, 2000), so it is critical that teachers understand students’ cultures in order to assess materials for such cultural disconnects.

The checklist in Figure 2.4 will help you assess the content of your materials for CRI. Place a check in the appropriate box, and make notations on specific materials.

Not only should you have materials that are multicultural in content, but also you should use multitextual materials—that is, materials that are different types of text and that represent different genres. There are four primary types of text: print text, audio text, video text, and interactive text (e.g., Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knoble, 2003; Walsh, 2008). Print texts include books, magazines, and newspapers. Audio texts are those that children listen to, such as speeches and music, and visual texts can include videos, art, and other images. Interactive texts are those the child can touch or manipulate; they can be concrete or online. Digital texts can resemble print texts, as many e-books do, or interactive texts, if hyperlinks are embedded in the text. Here are some questions for your assessment of multitextual materials:

4. What interactive texts do I have? Online sites? Other texts that can be touched or manipulated?

Now that you have assessed the multicultural content of your materials and the multitextuality of your materials, what do you need to add to your classroom? Review the questions above, and make a list...
of what you might need to supplement your current holdings. As you assemble your classroom library, consider students’ outside-of-school interests. Recall that one of the goals of CRI is to bring the outside in. In Chapter 5, we offer resources where you can find and evaluate print texts with multicultural content for adding to your classroom. You can also find resources for audio, visual, and interactive texts that will be primarily online. There are sites to find audiobooks,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Literary Quality</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>SATISFACTORY</th>
<th>UNACCEPTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Authentic and robust language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Memorable characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Compelling plot</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Illustrations that support and enhance the text</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Characters</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>SATISFACTORY</th>
<th>UNACCEPTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Presents common characteristics of a group</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Recognizes individuality and/or subcultures within a group</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Avoids racial or cultural stereotyping</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Has characters that solve problems without patronage from a dominant culture</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Setting</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>SATISFACTORY</th>
<th>UNACCEPTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Accurate depiction of time, place, or situation</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Authenticity</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>SATISFACTORY</th>
<th>UNACCEPTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Portrays cultural norms and customs (i.e., dialects, food, clothing, religion, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Presents facts accurately</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Has a main idea that enhances understanding of the culture</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Illustrations</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>SATISFACTORY</th>
<th>UNACCEPTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Conveys cultural details</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is free of stereotyping or generalizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Accurately portrays cultural settings</td>
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</table>

Figure 2.4  Checklist for Content of Culturally Responsive Materials
speeches, and podcasts, for example, and sites where students can create and share content with peers for both comprehension and vocabulary building.

Assessing Your Instruction for Learning Modalities

Getting to know students’ cultures, or background knowledge and experiences, allows for teaching to build on these interests so that students can be successful in school. But getting to know their modalities takes responding to student cultures one step further: It helps to build on their strengths and needs as learners.

Think of modality as the manner, or style, in which one learns. You may think of learning styles such as tactile, or learning through touch; auditory, or learning through hearing; and visual, or learning through seeing. These three modes (tactile, auditory, and visual) (Dunn, 1986) have been the basis for learning style research and are found in many theories of learning styles. One such theory is Gardner’s (1983) original seven multiple intelligences: bodily kinesthetic, visual/spatial, musical, logical/mathematical, linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, as well as Gardner’s (1999) addition of a naturalist intelligence, where the learning mode draws upon students’ environment, or natural surroundings. Still other learning style theories consider whether learners prefer working in small groups or solitarily or prefer active engagement in or reflection on the activities.

While there are a number of assessments that ascertain learning styles and modalities (e.g., Armstrong’s Multiple Intelligence Inventory, 2009; Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory, 1976), it is less important to ascertain a student’s particular learning style than it is to understand the multiple modalities of your students in order to create a flexible learning environment where they have opportunities to experience learning in ways that they learn outside of school.

Behavioral observation is one method that will help you understand your students’ multiple modalities. Observe students during academic and nonacademic tasks and while they are alone or with others. Ask questions about what the child is doing while observing:

1. Is the child more often engaged in solo activities or peer activities?
2. What is the child doing while in solo or peer activities (e.g., drawing, reading, gazing, writing, talking, listening)?
3. What does the child do while reading (e.g., look at pictures or words more, use hands or fingers to point at words)?
Answering these questions will allow you to create a learning environment that leverages students’ learning modalities in assessment; ultimately, the answers to the questions inform instruction. For example, if you find that one student tends to talk more when with peers, then a retelling assessment for comprehension might be a better assessment than a retelling using a graphic organizer that contains specific points in the story. For instruction, then, adding the visual modality of the graphic organizer during a retelling would address both the child’s strengths and needs as a learner.

The semantic feature analysis in Figure 2.3 contains two columns that are specific to ascertaining multiple modes of learning. Now that you have thought more about multiple modalities, take a moment to review the strategies that you listed. Do students participate individually, in pairs, and/or in small groups? And with the strategies you listed, do students have opportunities for multimodal response and interaction with text? For example, when the learning outcome is to comprehend a fiction story in terms of the plot, characters, setting, or theme, do your students have opportunities to tell, act, sketch, use a graphic organizer, or respond with objects or manipulatives?

**Assessing Your School’s Readiness for Culturally Responsive Instruction**

Tatum and Fisher (2008) remind us that nurturing successful readers “requires a wholesale transformation that involves a shift in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes, and in schools’ policies and practices, instead of simply tinkering with a few cultural additions to the curriculum or adopting a new teaching strategy” (p. 66). The following questions are adapted from DuFour, Dufour, Eaker, and Karhanek’s (2004) work with professional learning communities. The answers to these questions have great implications for culturally responsive literacy instruction.

1. What happens in our school (or district) to facilitate the learning of culturally diverse students? Does it depend on the individual teacher, or do we have a coordinated plan?
2. What structures do we have in place that discourage culturally diverse students’ learning (e.g., grading practices, teachers working in isolation, discipline, teaching strategies)?
3. Is our plan directive? Do we do “whatever it takes” to ensure that culturally diverse students learn regardless of home circumstances, parent involvement, lack of English proficiency, and so on?

4. If our diverse learners struggle with reading, is our response intervention or remediation? Do we address this struggle as soon as it begins, or do we allow it to build and then try to “fix” it?

**Plans for Change**

In this chapter, you have evaluated your own assessment strategies for CRI and, as a result, perhaps generated some ideas for change. Use the following goal planning chart to make notes about the changes you wish to make. As you do so, make sure that these changes reflect the “big ideas” we outlined at the beginning of the chapter:

- Focus on critical information.
- Look for patterns of behavior.
- Recognize developmental progressions and children’s cultural or linguistic differences.
- Be parsimonious.
- Use instructional situations for assessment purposes.
- Include plans for (1) using assessment information to guide instruction and (2) sharing assessment information with students and their parents.

Also while goal planning, choose from the areas of culturally responsive assessment in this chapter:

- Assessing student cultures;
- Assessing reading skills: vocabulary and comprehension;
- Assessing your instruction: cultural connection, multicultural materials, multimodalities; and
- Assessing your school’s readiness for culturally responsive instruction.

Now that you have identified the changes you wish to make, consider what you might focus on for improvement and how you will
show the improvement with the following self-evaluation questions adapted from Hansen (1998):

1. What have I done well in my CRI this year?
2. What was the most recent thing I learned to do well in my CRI?
3. What would I like to do better in my CRI?
4. How might I go about this in my CRI?
5. What evidence might show the change/difference in my CRI?

You may want to share your self-evaluation with others to get their feedback.
Goal Planning:   
Culturally Responsive Reading Assessment

#### Goal

______________________________

Plans by ___________________________ Date ________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Steps: What do I need to do?</th>
<th>Materials/Resources</th>
<th>Evaluation: How will I assess the usefulness of this change?</th>
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Conclusion

Delpit (2002) reminds us, “If we are to invite children into the language of school, we must make school inviting to them” (p. 42). We can make school more inviting when we plan backward, assessing our students’ cultures and learning needs so that we can then provide appropriate instruction. In the next chapter, we will offer some guiding principles for CRI and share specific strategies designed to help you teach “to and through their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (Gay, 2000, p. 24).
I. REFLECTION (10–15 minutes)

ANALYSIS

• What, for you, were the most interesting and/or important ideas in this chapter?
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________

• What do you think will be your biggest challenges for assessing your culturally diverse learners?
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________

CLARIFICATION

• Were any assessment strategies confusing to you?
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________

• Which assessment strategies do you need to know more about?
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________
EXTENSION

• Share with your group other effective assessments you have used with ELLs.

• Which assessment strategies in this chapter will you try soon? Why?

• Are there any assessment strategies you would be reluctant to use? Why?

II. DISCUSSION (30 minutes)

• Form groups of 4–6 members.
• Appoint a facilitator (timer) and recorder.
• Share responses. Make sure that each person has shared his or her responses to each category (Analysis/Clarification/Extension).
• Help each other with any areas of confusion.
• Answer and/or discuss questions raised by group members.
• On chart paper, the recorder should summarize the main discussion points and identify issues or questions the group would like to raise for general discussion.
III. APPLICATION (10 minutes)

- Based on your reflection and discussion, use the following chart to develop a tentative plan for assessing your culturally diverse students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Information I Have</th>
<th>Information I Need</th>
<th>Assessments I Could Use</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Name</td>
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<td>2. Name</td>
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<td>3. Name</td>
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