Asset-Based Pedagogies for English Learner Curriculum

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Abstract

Past research has shown that English language classes for English learners (ELs) often center around English-only policies and do not encourage the use of students' existing linguistic and cultural knowledge (Figueroa & Torff, 2018). Classes for English learners only focus on learning English, and the curriculum is not meant to help students succeed in other subjects, often causing them to fall behind non-English learners (Figueroa & Torff, 2018). Furthermore, teachers may not be adequately trained to teach ELs coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Nieto, 2000). Asset-based pedagogies encourage the use of curricula for ELs that incorporate the cultural and linguistic backgrounds that students already have. Using the literature on asset-based pedagogies, I identified six core characteristics of this approach: valuing student assets, evaluating current practices, analyzing personal views, incorporating family and community, teaching content that demonstrates high expectations, and teaching relevant content (e.g. Ladson-Billing's, 1994; González & Moll, 2005; Hollie, 2011; Hammond, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). This research contributes to a better understanding of how asset-based pedagogies can be used to create more appropriate curricula for English learners.

Introduction & Literature Review

Curricula for English learners (ELs) have been created with the deficit-based view that the existing language abilities and practices of these students prevent them from succeeding in more rigorous curricula. Consequently, EL students are taught using oversimplified curricula that focus on students' lack of English knowledge (Figueroa &

Torff, 2018). This leads to a disparity in their education relative to their non-EL counterparts. Additionally, English language classrooms are made up of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, and it can be difficult for such students to connect with a primarily Euro-American-centric curriculum that prioritizes Western values while devaluing their native languages and cultures (Thao, 2011). Furthermore, teachers are not provided with enough support and training to properly help their EL students (Figueroa & Torff, 2018).

Relative to non-EL students, ELs are disadvantaged. For the 2017-2018 school year, 68% of ELs graduated from high school, compared to the national average of 85% (BGN report, 2019). From 2007-2019, the National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) report shows a clear gap in reading, math, and science scores between ELs and non-ELs. In 2019, non-EL twelfth-graders in public schools averaged a math score of 151, whereas ELs scored an average of 109. Similarly, the average science score was 151 for non-ELs and 99 for ELs. Although gaps in reading are expected and ELs are still acquiring the language, the presence of a significant gap in other subjects such as math and science reveals that the curriculum prioritizes the teaching of the English language over other academic content. Furthermore, 62% of 6-12th grade EL students are U.S. citizens who have grown up in the U.S. and they can communicate well in English (Zong & Batalova, 2015). However, students of color who speak minoritized languages will often be placed in EL classrooms since their use of another language is viewed as negatively influencing their English learning, and their linguistic practices are labeled as unfit for an academic setting (Flores & Rosa, 2015). The curricula for ELs are meant to strengthen EL students' academic English by focusing on studying the English language while deprioritizing other academic content. Educators do not expect ELs to perform well in other academic areas until they master the English language, but they are creating difficulties for ELs to keep up academically with non-ELs precisely by *not* using the same conceptual material with ELs as they do with their non-EL students (Figueroa & Torff, 2018).

Asset-based pedagogies provide an alternative to the deficit-based mindset that undergirds typical EL curricula, as these pedagogies value the use of students' existing

linguistic and cultural knowledge in academic spaces, instead of positioning them as problems that need to be fixed (CA DOE, 2021).

Deficit-based EL curriculum lacks academic rigor: it does not provide content across multiple subject areas, it does not value diverse cultures, and it unduly prioritizes language acquisition. I will investigate the use of asset-based pedagogies in the creation of curriculum for EL programs. The research question central to this project is, "What are the characteristics of asset-based pedagogy?" I conduct qualitative research through analysis of the literature on asset-based pedagogies in order to identify the core characteristics of these pedagogies, all of which share the same goal of combating deficit-based views in the classroom.

Deficit Theories

To understand the use of asset-based pedagogies, it is first important to understand the impact of deficit-based thinking in American education, particularly on students who are low-income or of color. U.S. education often centers on American and European values, therefore, students coming from other cultures and backgrounds are assessed with respect to standards for white middle-class Americans. Crucially, acknowledging and respecting different cultures and backgrounds is not seen as necessary for education. These dynamics often produce an inequitable education system that does not meet the needs of CLD students. More perniciously, the underachievement of students of color and of low-income students is often positioned as the product of the deficits in the lives of these students (Gay, 2000).

Caroline Hodges Persell (1981) describes deficit theories as an attempt to use social inequalities experienced by people of color and low-income people to explain differentials in academic performance. That is, the fact that students of color and low-income students are academically unsuccessful is a direct result of what they lack. Cultural deficit theories position the cultures and languages of low-income students and students of color as deficient, in light of perceived "lacks" in their home life: a lack of a sense of history, a lack of order in the family life, a lack of language skills, adaptive values, or self-esteem. Moreover, the dominant culture associates the parents of

students of color with poverty and views them as having values that are misaligned with those of the dominant culture. For example, parents of color and low-income parents are labeled as uninvolved in their children's education, which is seen as a deficit that negatively affects these students' academic performance (Gay, 2000). In a deficit-based theory, education becomes a way for students to be socialized into the values of the dominant culture, without questioning the social, economic, and political factors and systems that produce social stratification (Persell, 1981).

Further, it is also seen as a deficit for students to speak any language or variety that is not mainstream U.S. English (Gay, 2000). It is commonly viewed as detrimental to students' learning for them to be dominant in another language or in a variety of English that is not considered "proper" (Paris & Alim, 2017). Deficit-based theories pay special attention to the English language abilities of ELs. In one report on long-term ELs, students were described as having "high functioning social language, very weak academic language, and significant deficits in reading and writing skills" and as developing "habits of non-engagement, learned passivity, and invisibility in school" (Olsen, 2010, p. 2). This report focuses on helping CLD ELs by means of curricula that encourage them to master mainstream US English only while disregarding the value of their existing language practices (Olsen, 2010, p. 2). While it is important and practical for these students to learn mainstream academic English, presenting students' existing language practices in a negative light further stigmatizes the language use of CLD students by conflating academic success with the use of only mainstream US English (Flores & Rosa, 2015).   Hence, it is important for educators using asset-based teaching, to not diminish the validity of students' existing language practices when also helping them acquire academic English. Incorporating the use of students' everyday linguistic practices into the curriculum as a skill for their education and not just as a stepping stone to learning "appropriate" language is necessary to fight the stigmatization around the linguistic practices of minoritized students (Flores & Rosa, 2017).

Christine Malsbary explains that as a result of implicit biases, educators may unintentionally use deficit theories to justify the low performance of their EL students. In her study, she interviewed teachers who described students in EL classes as

unmotivated, challenging, and overwhelming to teachers (Malsbary, 2014). One teacher, in particular, had this to say about her EL students in an email to an administrator: "Only 10% couldn't communicate in English and the others were too lazy to care," and that no student needed any extra attention because they simply did not care. This teacher highlights not only the fact that many students in EL programs already speak English but also the deficit-based views toward EL students. Many studies have shown the effect that implicit biases can have on students. One study found that teachers' attitudes toward students changed depending on the sound of students' voices, and another found students who spoke non-mainstream English were evaluated more negatively (Choy et al., 1976; Seligman et al., 1972). Non-mainstream American voices tend to be associated more with African Americans, and simply hearing a voice that sounds African American causes listeners to expect the speaker to use non-mainstream variants of speech (King & Sumner, 2014). The fact that individuals make judgments about the linguistic competence of people based on the sound of their voice indicates that other assumptions about the characteristics of a person are being made as well. Another study found that white preschool teachers expect their black students, especially black boys, to exhibit misbehavior, and the use of eye tracking demonstrated that teachers would watch black students more than white students (Gilliam et al., 2016).

Teachers are not unique in their tendency to make assumptions about their students based on stereotypes, which can have serious adverse effects on the student's education (Gilliam et al., 2016). Making judgments about who people are based on peculiarities one has about them, such as their voice or their appearance, is normal because the mind naturally places people into categories in an attempt to manage and reduce complexity (Kinzler, 2020). The problem arises when these implicit biases based on stereotypes lead to educators making decisions about students that then create more obstacles for these students in their academic achievement (DeCuir-Gunby, 2022).

Deficit-based views are constructed on the basis of stereotypes about specific groups of people, and many teachers struggle to recognize when they are judging the

abilities of individual students based on these stereotypes (Kinzler, 2020). It is important to combat deficit-based conceptions of EL students so that teachers do not unintentionally make assumptions about the abilities of their students based on the stereotypes that they associate with their students. If deficit-based views are not challenged, they become a way to blame EL students for their underachievement relative to non-EL students (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Accepting deficit-based beliefs about EL students and their cultural and linguistic practices allows educators to avoid questioning the unequal distribution of educational opportunities (Malsbary, 2014).

Teacher Education

It has been proposed that to combat negative views toward CLD students, teacher education programs must prepare teachers to work in diverse classrooms to ensure they are able to make all students of diverse backgrounds feel welcome in academic spaces (Nieto, 2000). While 79% of public school teachers are white, 53% of *students* are non-white, with the majority of these being Hispanic, Black, or Asian students (NCES, 2018). However, teacher education programs frequently focus on preparing teachers for classrooms made up of white, monolingual, middle-class students, and therefore teachers are not properly prepared to help the CLD students they encounter in their actual classrooms (Gay 2000; Nieto, 2000). As a result, teachers are not properly prepared to work in CLD classrooms. There is a disconnect between teacher and student, leaving teachers susceptible to deficit-based thinking (Nieto, 2000). The student population in the U.S. is increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, and therefore it is important for all teachers to be able to recognize and talk about the biases, deficit-based beliefs, and stereotypes they hold about their students, to consciously limit the harm they enact (Carter et al., 2017).

Current English Language Education

ELs are often placed into language immersion programs that are designed for monolingual instruction to improve ELs' English abilities (U.S. DOE, 2020). Some examples of English learner programs include native language, dual language, and

English as a second language (ESL). Native language instruction and dual language programs for ELs are less common, with the most common being immersion programs such as ESL programs, which encourage monolingual, English-only classrooms (Cook et al., 2012). While these classes encourage a monolingual curriculum, these classrooms are made up of CLD students who often engage in bilingual and multilingual interactions with each other during class time (Malsbary, 2014).

Additionally, teachers express concern that English-only policies make it difficult for them to fully help students. In particular, bilingual teachers feel that their abilities are not being used to their full potential in the classroom (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). CLD students find it difficult to connect with the current dominant curriculum, which prioritizes Euro-American values and devalues native languages and cultures (Thao, 2011). In contrast, bilingual education programs that include the use of students' home languages have proven to be more beneficial for EL students than monolingual English-learning programs (Collier, 1992; De Jong, 2004). Bilingual education is beneficial for EL students since they are using the linguistic knowledge that they already have to learn English while also learning the same non-linguistic content as their non-EL classmates (Cummins, 2001). Therefore, they do not fall behind in other academic areas as a result of not being provided with the same academic content (Cummins, 2001). However, bilingual programs, also known as dual enrollment programs in the U.S., are the least common form of the program used for ELs (OELA, 2021).

Teachers of EL students lack proper support for creating lesson plans and need more preparation in EL instructional methods, language acquisition, and multiculturalism (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). Teachers express that the lesson plans for EL students that focus on both language and content required more time than was available. The lesson plans provided for EL teachers prioritize the teaching of English over other academic content because they feel their students need to master English first to be able to properly understand other academic material (US DOE, 2020). Therefore, the academic content taught to students is watered down and the English level used is lower, which is meant to make the content more digestible for

these students. However, this makes the lessons slower, and as a result, teachers are not able to teach these students all the content that they need to cover while also focusing on teaching them English. The curriculum for EL classes focuses on the standard English language rather than other academic content and teachers are provided with lesson plans that are less rigorous for ELs. Therefore, teachers do not expect their ELs to be able to learn the same academic content that their other students are learning. This makes it difficult for them to keep up academically with non-ELs (Figueroa & Torff, 2018).

Asset-based Pedagogies

It is important for ELs to have a good comprehension of the English language because it is the language associated with institutions of power; therefore, it is important for them to have the opportunity to develop their use of academic English to access these avenues (Bucholtz et. al, 2014). At the same time, the home language and culture of these students should not be devalued by educators simply because it is not the dominant language or culture (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2017). The linguistic and cultural practices that ELs already have can be included in the classroom precisely in order to help them access the dominant language, which not only grants them further access to institutions, but also to resources to challenge inequalities within these institutions (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, 2017). In order to value students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds in EL classes, educators need to see the languages and cultures of their students as resources rather than deficits (Au, 2008; Cummins, 2001).

However, simply building on the linguistic and cultural knowledge that ELs bring to the classroom in order to teach them standard English is not enough (Flores & Rosa, 2017). It is also necessary to challenge and criticize the existing beliefs about race and language that are frequently used to devalue the languages and cultures of those who do not belong to the dominant white culture (Gay, 2000; Sharroky, 2009). Asset-based pedagogies challenge deficit theories, as they value students' languages and cultures rather than seeing them as deficits needing to be fixed for students to be successful (CA DOE, 2021) while aiming to "critique injustices, oppression, and other

social-political issues" (Flint & Jaggers, 2021, p. 1). An example of an asset-based pedagogy is the Funds of Knowledge approach, which sees the existing knowledge that students have from their experiences in their communities as valuable. The knowledge that students bring from their language, culture, communities, and experiences can be used in the classroom to scaffold new academic learning by incorporating it in lessons (Flint & Jaggers, 2021). This is done by using the student's linguistic and cultural background to create lessons that incorporate these in some way. For instance, if a teacher notices that the parents of many students work in agriculture, the teacher could design a science lesson on plant growth or establish a small classroom garden. Alternatively, if a teacher is working in a large Korean community, the teacher could design a lesson on the science of making kimchi. (OSPI, 2021)

Another asset-based pedagogy is culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). CRP focuses on academic achievement and develops cultural competence to encourage positive ethnic social identities while supporting students' ability to criticize social inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Paris and Alim have expanded on CRP by offering culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), which positions schools as a place where students of color are valued and included based on their multifaceted, diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Paris & Alim, 2017). The key characteristics of CSP include: (1) centering students' cultural communities, (2) accountability for community needs, (3) historicized content and instruction, (4) the capacity to contend with internalized oppression, and (5) the ability to circularize these characteristics in learning settings (Ferlazzo, 2017). With asset-based pedagogies, educators incorporate not only the cultural and linguistic knowledge students bring with them, but also the experiences they have faced as minorities (Flint & Jaggers, 2021).

The foregoing literature review indicates that EL students face many disadvantages, as a result of a lack of teacher training and the use of inappropriate curricula rooted in deficit-based conceptions of ELs. The literature also shows that using the linguistic knowledge that EL students already bring with them in their education promotes greater academic growth than an English-only education (Murphy, 2014; Cummins, 2001; Ramirez, et al., 1991). Therefore, to create a socially just and equitable education

with appropriate content, it is important to challenge deficit-based views, by using the existing cultural and linguistic knowledge that students bring to the classroom to scaffold their academic learning (Hammond, 2014). The use of an asset-based curriculum is one way to achieve this. However, it can be difficult to know how to properly implement the characteristics of asset-based pedagogies in order to create effective curricula (Hammond, 2014).

Methods

I identified the core characteristics of all asset-based pedagogies. This is meant to synthesize the literature and give a clearer picture of the essential features of an ideal asset-based curriculum.

I focus on the asset-based pedagogies listed on the California Department of Education website: Funds of Knowledge, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP), Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Linguistically Responsive Teaching. I chose to analyze the key works of each pedagogy. These include Gloria Ladson-Billings's "Dreamkeepers" (1994), Norma González and Luis Moll's "Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms" (2005), Sharroky Hollie's "Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching: Classroom Practices for Student Success" (2011), Zaretta Hammond's "Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students" (2014), Django Paris and Samy Alim's "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies" (2016) and Geneva Gay's Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice (2000). Based on an analysis of these works, I identified the core characteristics of many asset-based pedagogies to understand the consensus on best practices.

Core Characteristics of Asset-based Pedagogies

After an analysis of seminal works within the field of asset-based pedagogies, I identified the following six core characteristics common to all such pedagogies: (1) Valuing student assets, (2) encouraging questioning of systems in place, (3) analyzing

personal views, (4) incorporating family and community, (5) teaching content that demonstrates high expectations, and (6) teaching relevant content.

Characteristic 1

<u>Valuing student assets:</u> Valuing personal, academic, cultural, and linguistic knowledge and experiences that students already bring. Seeing the knowledge that students have gained from their families, cultures, and personal and academic experiences as valuable and useful to their education.

Many students who are academically underachieving are CLD students whose language and cultures have historically been devalued. To help these students, it is important to focus on academic teaching that is catered toward supporting them and not further delegitimizing their existing cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Hollie, 2011). Students' cultural background influences the way they learn and understand the educational content taught to them, so teachers must take the time to understand the background of students (Hammond, 2014). This way, teachers can make effective connections between their lives and the academic content, without further imposing cultural stereotypes (González et. al, 2005).

Teachers do not need to know everything about the culture of every student but rather, they need to recognize shared characteristics among the different backgrounds of each class student, especially appreciating aspects of students' cultural backgrounds that are negated by the dominant culture (Hammond, 2014). The goal of asset-based pedagogies is to utilize students' backgrounds to help them reach their full academic potential. With classrooms being increasingly more culturally and linguistically diverse, it is important to recognize differences and adapt teaching styles to best help different groups of students learn (Gay, 2000). Differences should not be limited to race, but also should include culture and language as these are characteristics that influence students' learning (Billings, 1994; Hollie, 2011). One simple example is that many Latin American and African American communities come from collectivist cultures, so for these students, it would be appropriate to include more collaborative work and teaching (Hammond, 2014).

By finding better approaches to teaching their CLD students, teachers contribute to creating more equitable and diverse education. This helps teachers step away from the traditional Eurocentric teaching, which centers the white, middle-class knowledge, culture, and language (Paris & Alim, 2017). Recognizing the differences among diverse students, teachers fight deficit beliefs by not minimizing the value of the cultures or languages of their students for differing from the dominant ones (Billings, 1994).

Characteristic 2

Encouraging questioning of systems in place: Educators should question social and political systems and how they contribute to inequities faced by students in the classroom. Encouraging students to question the systems in place and the way they impact their lives and the lives of others.

It is important to validate the experiences of minoritized students and acknowledge the inequities that they have faced (Hammond, 2014). To understand why minoritized students are underperforming, it is essential to recognize how these students have been excluded from education. The U.S. education system has encouraged students to assimilate, and the languages and cultures of minoritized communities have been viewed as obstacles to students' academic learning (Hollie, 2011). The issues of power and racism in the U.S. are reflected and continued in education (Gonzalez, 2005). While teachers alone cannot eliminate inequality, they can decide to challenge Eurocentric and deficit-based education through their teaching (Gonzalez, et al, 2005). By recognizing the inequities faced by minoritized students, educators can not only create curricula that challenge deficit-based beliefs but also find ways to equip their students to face these issues in society (Gonzalez, et al, 2005).

Education is meant to help students learn the skills and knowledge that will help them survive in the society they live in and the inequities students face in the education system are a reflection of the racism that they will encounter in other institutions throughout their lives. By acknowledging this, teachers can help prepare their students to face, question, and challenge racism in their own lives (Billings, 2000; Gay, 2000). Creating curricula that center on students' backgrounds and everyday experiences will

lead to discussions regarding issues of race, class, culture, language, and gender (Gay, 2000; Gonzalez, 2005; Paris & Alim, 2017). Instead of shying away from discussions on these topics, educators should scaffold students' critical thinking and provide them with resources to better understand different issues (Hammon, 2014). Education provides students access to tools and resources that they will be able to use to do this.

Through education, minoritized students can gain access to institutions of power that have excluded them and be able to contribute to changes that create equity in education and also in society. Rather than simply expecting students to assimilate to the dominant culture and language, teachers should guide students to question existing ideas that invalidate their languages, cultures, and experiences. Teachers can then help Students see how maintaining their existing cultural and linguistic practices, while also utilizing the dominant ones, is a form of resistance to the existing racism. At the same time, students are also being taught to acknowledge how they contribute to or oppose these systems (Hammond, 2014; Billings, 1994; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Characteristic 3

Analyzing personal views: Understanding and questioning personal points of view and opinions. Encouraging students to analyze their thoughts and opinions to understand why they have those beliefs and how their experiences have shaped their views.

Before being able to challenge inequities in the classroom, teachers should recognize their own culture and how it influences their personal views and implicit bias. In doing so, teachers can become cognizant of how their culture influences their classroom management style, their attitude toward students, and their connections with their students (Hammond, 2014). To implement asset-based teaching strategies properly, teachers need to recognize how they see themselves in relation to their students and the communities they are a part of. Teachers' classroom practices reflect their views of themselves, their profession, and the students they work with (Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000). If teachers see value in their job and the students they are working

with, they will be able to find effective teaching strategies and engage with and connect with their students (Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000)

The use of asset-based teaching does not mean that teachers are expected to only recognize the positive aspects of the communities they are working in (Billings, 1994; Gonzalez, 2005). Teachers should not only recognize issues such as sexism, colorism, violence, or unemployment but also attempt to understand the root causes of these issues as well as how they impact their students. Additionally, this helps teachers analyze how these issues may influence their views of the community and their students. (Gonzalez, 2005). By first recognizing their own bias and analyzing their opinions and ways of thinking, they can help their students learn to do the same. Students should engage in challenging discussions regarding real-world issues. It is important for students to learn strong critical thinking skills and to not simply state their opinions, but to have the ability to explain and support their arguments (Hammond, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Making the class content relevant to students by connecting academic content to their lives, will help them improve their critical thinking skills and literacy skills (Hollie, 2011). Through lessons that cover issues that they encounter in society, students will find what they learn in class to be important background knowledge to properly understand these issues (Gay, 2000; Hollie, 2011; Paris & Alim, 2017). For example, students might believe that race does not matter because we are all equal. However, educators can encourage students to analyze if this is true in our society by presenting the history of different minority groups and the way that those groups of people face inequities today due to past and current institutional racism (Paris & Alim, 2017). The goal is not to make students feel like helpless victims but rather to help them identify the root causes of issues so that they can form their opinions, learn to properly support them, and express their views (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Characteristic 4

Including family and community: Interacting with the communities and families of students to understand and connect with them. Using knowledge from the community and family in course content.

Asset-based teaching requires teachers to look to the communities and families of their students, to learn about the knowledge, experiences, values, languages, and cultures of their students. Doing this, helps teachers create stronger curricula that are better suited for their students, based on their strengths and the knowledge they have (Hollie, 2011; Hammond, 2014). Connecting with the communities and families of their students helps teachers center the communities of their students in their teaching (Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000). This helps teachers not simply present the knowledge, culture, or language of their students as a tool to reach "real" academic knowledge or "appropriate" English, but as valuable knowledge with academic value (Billings, 1994; Hollie, 2011). When teachers understand students' knowledge from communities as valuable on its own, they reject the deficit view that this knowledge needs to be replaced with the dominant one (Hollie, 2011; Paris & Alim, 2017)

Asset-based teaching encourages students to see academic success as a tool for them to positively impact their communities (Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000). Additionally, by engaging with the communities and families of their students, teachers are also able to understand the different challenges that their students face, which helps them know what resources they need to advocate for and how they can help meet their students' needs (Gonzales, 2005; Paris & Alim, 2017). Through asset-based teaching, teachers can make connections with the local community that they work in and they can create stronger relationships with their students (Billings 1994; Gonzales, 2005).

Characteristic 5

Teaching content that demonstrates high expectations: Using teaching content that challenges students and demonstrates a belief in the capability of all students to achieve academic success, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. Using content that allows students to discuss and learn about challenging topics.

Deficit-based thinking makes it easy to blame students for their low academic achievements as a result of their culture not valuing formal education (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014). Students internalize negative messages about their abilities in the form of low expectations and unchallenging content (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014). Rather than blaming the cultural background of students for their academic performance, it is necessary to show students genuine care about them making academic efforts and support through challenging content (Hollie, 2011; Hammond, 2014;). Doing this includes assignments that allow teachers to evaluate students' strengths and acknowledge where they are struggling. It is important to genuinely compliment them on their strengths, but also to provide critical feedback that helps them see their weaknesses (Hammond, 2014).

Having high expectations for students does not mean that educators need to reward students for everything or tell them that they are doing well when they are not (Billings, 1994; Hammond, 2014). Rather, teachers can acknowledge where students are successful, inside and outside of the classroom to reinforce the connections between their home life and school. Additionally, it helps students understand teachers' high expectations if they see that their excellence in other aspects is recognized and if they see that acknowledging academic weaknesses does not mean they are not excellent in other ways (Billings, 1994).

By recognizing where students need to grow, teachers can provide students with work that challenges them to do so, while also providing them with the proper support to succeed in challenging tasks (Billings, 1994; Hammond, 2014). While certain students might not perform at the grade level, their improvements toward reaching that goal should be acknowledged (Billings, 1994). Through asset-based teaching students are expected to overcome the feelings of discomfort that come with challenging academic tasks (Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014). Students learn to make an effort to learn even when they are having a difficult time with class material if they are shown that they are expected to be able to overcome those challenges (Gay, 2000). While deficit beliefs propose that students without certain skills or backgrounds have difficulties with being taught academic content, asset-based

teaching challenges this by encouraging teachers to recognize at which level students can participate in learning (Hammond, 2017). This allows teachers to provide students with the appropriate rigorous material to help them learn (Billings, 1994).

Characteristic 6

Teaching relevant content: Teaching content that is relevant to the lives of students helps them value and embrace aspects of their own cultural and linguistic identities. Furthermore, this helps students' whole identities feel seen and teaches respect for the identities of others.

Textbooks will not be able to provide students with asset-based content that helps them connect the class material to their lives. Therefore, teachers must find supplemental texts that support their students based on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Hollie, 2011). Additionally, an asset-based curriculum looks to support students' learning of academic knowledge and language, without rejecting that of their home (Hollie, 2011; Paris & Alim, 2017). This helps relieve the pressure that teachers may have to erase students' nonstandard practices, helping them view their students more positively (Billings, 1994; Hollie, 2011).

Furthermore, teachers need to be able to create trusting relationships with students. It is important to demonstrate care for the cultures of the different students so that students feel seen. One way to help students feel acknowledged and cared for is to use relevant content that makes academic content feel less distant from their lives (Hammond, 2017; Hollie, 2011). Simply celebrating cultural or linguistic diversity does not help students create trust with the teachers and it does not improve students' learning. Through asset-based teaching, teachers must learn from observing and speaking with their students about what is relevant to their lives (Hammond, 2017). Then, teachers can make the standard curriculum more accessible to students by connecting them to their existing knowledge (Gay, 2000; Hollie, 2011).

Culturally and linguistically relevant content gives students a sense of confidence and encourages them to perform well academically. Connecting academic content to

students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds challenges the idea that there is no place for students' existing knowledge in academic settings (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Conclusion

Through this research, six key characteristics of asset-based pedagogies were identified. This research could serve as a resource for EL teachers who seek to use asset-based pedagogies to combat deficit-based theories toward their students. Asset-based pedagogies could be used by teachers to create appropriate grade-level curricula that support their EL students in learning academic English by making use of students' existing linguistic and cultural knowledge.

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