At my school about half the population is ELL students. I feel inadequate when it comes to working with ELL students due to language barriers. My school is also one of the smallest elementary schools in my county.

Audrey, Elementary School Counselor

Like Audrey, many school counselors may feel *inadequate* in their work with ELLs because they do not have the language proficiency necessary to make connections to these students in their home languages. However, there are many ways in which school counselors can work effectively with ELLs, independent of their language proficiency in students’ home languages. In the field of counseling, over the past two decades, multicultural counseling has developed as a major concept, as we explain in this chapter.

**Expectations of Multicultural Counseling**

Multicultural counseling has been called the “fourth force” in counseling (Pederson, 1999), a term that places it in context as one of the most influential concepts in the counseling field. School counselors serve students from every walk of life, so it is particularly important for them to understand how to work with students from diverse backgrounds. While it is challenging to be fully multiculturally competent about every cultural combination of every student in their school, school counselors need to be able to meet students where they are and work from there to help them access not only their education, but also other resources that will help them be successful in school and beyond.

Although the concept of multicultural school counseling itself is not well defined in the literature, the primary goal of multicultural school counseling is clear. It is “to prepare school counselors to integrate a critical understanding of
issues relating to culture, race, social class, ethnicity, sexual identity, religious beliefs and other aspects of identity and social location into mental health assessment and service delivery” (Ravitch, 2006, p. 18). We add to this goal the notion of *linguistic diversity*—that students who are in the process of developing English language proficiency are an important group that has often been underemphasized in the multicultural counseling literature. For the purposes of this book, we define multicultural school counseling as a call to understand the varying cultural identities and backgrounds in the schools. In order to work effectively with students, school counselors need to be able to conceptualize students, their parents/guardians, and other adults in the school within their larger contexts.

In recognition of the importance of this, school counselors graduating from a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited master's program are required to have content in social and cultural diversity (e.g., CACREP 2001, 2009, 2016). Yet, in the CACREP 2016 standards, there is no specific mention of linguistic diversity as a concept that needs to be addressed. While it is vital for school counselors to understand the unique challenges of meeting the needs of a culturally diverse school, they can draw upon multicultural coursework and lessons about linguistic diversity to understand some of the forces that might be impacting ELLs, both positively and negatively. For example, school counselors can apply the concept of positionality to understand the way that students (both ELLs and native English speakers), teachers, families, and members of the school community define themselves and others.

Positionalities, or social locations (Robinson, 1999), are ways to understand the social value that individuals may have according to any number of viewpoints. Because positionalities “possess rank, have value, and are constructed hierarchically, particularly those that are visible and discernible” (Robinson, 1999, p. 73), there will be some aspects of an individual’s cultural identity or position that may be valued or privileged. Other aspects of a cultural identity may be oppressed. So, for example, in traditional American culture, a White heterosexual woman from a lower socioeconomic background has both privileged (e.g., White, heterosexual) statuses and oppressed (female, more impoverished) statuses. Individuals have multiple positionalities that form a constellation of privilege and oppression that shape how individuals views themselves, those they come into contact with, and the world around them.

Using this concept of positionalities to understand an individual’s context can help school counselors understand how the different contexts of a student’s identity may be affecting him or her, both inside and outside of school. Although language status is just one of many different cultural identities that each student has, it is incredibly important—particularly if a student’s English fluency and receptive language are in initial stages of development and if the school does not have easily accessible resources developed for the student’s native language. With the importance of education as a vehicle for economic and social success, students who are unable to fully engage with their education due to a language difference are disadvantaged in accessing that education. We urge
readers to remember, however, that ELLs also may have specific strengths that could provide resilience and help connect the school to the community.

In order to provide culturally responsive services to every student, school counselors need to develop their understanding about culture. Culture has been defined as a way of life and the “context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others” (Brown, 2007, p. 188). It is important to mention that culture can be depicted in an oversimplified manner, which may lead to generalizations and stereotypical characterizations of individuals who have similar cultural backgrounds. Stereotypes develop when group characteristics are ascribed to individuals simply based on their cultural backgrounds (Brown, 2007).

**Dimensions of Culture and the Process of Acculturation**

When talking about culture, some English language teaching scholars have referred to “big C” and “little c” culture. Big C—Culture—is often used to refer to contributions such as architecture, literature, and music, while little c—culture—refers to our everyday lives (Murray & Christison, 2011). Culture has also been referred to as a process and not content (Kramsh, 1998). Murray and Christison (2011), drawing on Levy (2007), describe a framework that can help professionals understand the contexts in which they work. Figure 2 represents the five key dimensions of the framework.

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**Figure 2. Five Key Dimensions of Culture**

- **Elemental**: We all have our own culture.
- **Group Membership**: We all are members of several groups, which need to be understood as having their own ways of using language.
- **Relative**: Understanding a culture in relation to other cultures, not as an absolute construct.
- **Contested**: Challenges to cultures occur at the national and individual levels.
- **Individual (Variable and Multiple)**: How culture is represented is individual and personal.
These five key dimensions can help school counselors consider the influence of culture in their consultations with any student. Each of these dimensions of culture is explained in the figure. Culture as elemental refers to how each person has their own culture but may be unaware of our cultural beliefs and understandings. Culture as relative refers to the aspect of culture that is only understood in relation to other cultures. Culture as group membership is the side of culture involving multiple memberships in a variety of groups in society. Culture as contested refers to the challenges to culture at national and individual levels. Finally, culture as individual (variable and multiple) refers to the representation of culture as individual and personal. In Chapter 3, we apply these dimensions specifically to working with ELLs and their families.

Another aspect of cultural learning that is broadly applicable is the process of acculturation. Acculturation has been referred to as the development of a new cultural identity. Acculturation is a complex process that can disrupt a person’s self-identity and ways of being. If it does, this may lead to culture shock, which may involve a wide range of feelings and psychological crisis. Culture shock has been described as the second out of four stages of culture acquisition (Brown, 2007). The four stages of additional culture acquisition are described in Figure 3.

Stage 1 is excitement and euphoria, where everything in the new culture is fresh and exciting. Stage 2 is culture shock, where there is frustration with differences and feelings of anger, unhappiness, and homesickness. Stage 3 is gradual recovery, where individuals begin to accept the differences between their culture.

Stage 4
Near or Full Recovery

Stage 1
Excitement and Euphoria

Stage 2
Culture Shock

Stage 3
Gradual Recovery

Figure 3. Stages of Culture Acquisition
and the new culture and start to understand the second culture. Stage 4 represents near or full recovery, either assimilation or adaptation, where individuals understand many aspects of the new culture and accept it more fully. Broad application of the process of acculturation and adaptation to ELLs is discussed further in Chapter 3.

**Multicultural Competencies**

The Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) constructed a set of multicultural competencies that provides a nice baseline for multicultural competence. In discussing multicultural competence, Ratts et al. (2015) provide a discussion of the specific competencies that “culturally skilled” counselors need to have. These multicultural competencies include the ability to: 1) maintain awareness of personal assumptions, values, and biases; 2) empathetically understand the worldview of people from diverse backgrounds and maintain a general understanding of multicultural issues; and 3) develop and use appropriate interventions, strategies, and techniques for a multicultural and diverse population. While this document provides valuable information and guidance for working with the range of students that a school counselor will serve in the schools, it does not always account for the resources and requirements of a school setting. Holcomb-McCoy (2004) tailored the multicultural competencies to be more applicable to school counselors in her School Counselor Multicultural Competencies Checklist, which is duplicated below. When reading through this checklist, take note of your reactions to your own personal areas of competence and challenge.

**School Counselor Multicultural Competence Checklist**

*(Holcomb-McCoy, 2004, pp. 184–186)*

**Multicultural Counseling**

1. I can recognize when my attitudes, beliefs, and values are interfering with providing the best services to my students.

2. I can identify the cultural bases of my communication style.

3. I can discuss how culture affects the help-seeking behaviors of students.

4. I can describe the degree to which a counseling approach is culturally inappropriate for a specific student.

5. I use culturally appropriate interventions and counseling approaches (e.g., indigenous practices) with students.

6. I can list at least three barriers that prevent ethnic minority students from using counseling services.

7. I can anticipate when my helping style is inappropriate for a culturally different student.

8. I can give examples of how stereotypical beliefs about culturally different persons impact the counseling relationship.
Multicultural Consultation

9. I am aware of how culture affects traditional models of consultation.

10. I can discuss at least one model of multicultural consultation.

11. I recognize when racial and cultural issues are impacting the consultation process.

12. I can identify when the race and/or culture of the client is a problem for the consultee.

13. I discuss issues related to race/ethnicity/culture during the consultation process, when applicable.

Understanding Racism and Student Resistance

14. I can define and discuss White privilege.

15. I can discuss how I (if European American/White) am privileged based on my race.

16. I can identify racist aspects of educational institutions.

17. I can define and discuss prejudice.

18. I recognize and challenge colleagues about discrimination and discriminatory practices in schools.

19. I can define and discuss racism and its impact on the counseling process.

20. I can help students determine whether a problem stems from racism or biases in others.

21. I understand the relationship between student resistance and racism.

22. I include topics related to race and racism in my classroom guidance units.

Understanding Racial and/or Ethnic Identity Development

23. I am able to discuss at least two theories of racial and/or ethnic identity development.

24. I use racial/ethnic identity development theories to understand my students’ problems and concerns.

25. I have assessed my own racial/ethnic development in order to enhance my counseling.

Multicultural Assessment

26. I can discuss the potential bias of two assessment instruments frequently used in the schools.

27. I can evaluate instruments that may be biased against certain groups of students.
28. I am able to use test information appropriately with culturally diverse parents.

29. I view myself as an advocate for fair testing and the appropriate use of testing of children from diverse backgrounds.

30. I can identify whether or not the assessment process is culturally sensitive.

31. I can discuss how the identification of the assessment process might be biased against minority populations.

**Multicultural Family Counseling**

32. I can discuss family counseling from a cultural/ethnic perspective.

33. I can discuss at least two ethnic group's [sic] traditional gender role expectations and rituals.

34. I anticipate when my helping style is inappropriate for an ethnically different parent or guardian.

35. I can discuss culturally diverse methods of parenting and discipline.

**Social Advocacy**

36. I am knowledgeable of the psychological and societal issues that affect the development of ethnic minority students.

37. When counseling, I consider the psychological and societal issues that affect the development of ethnic minority students.

38. I work with families and community members in order to reintegrate them with the school.

39. I can define "social change agent."

40. I perceive myself as being a "social change agent."

41. I can discuss what it means to take an "activist counseling" approach.

42. I intervene with students at the individual and systemic levels.

43. I can discuss how factors such as poverty and powerlessness have influenced the current conditions of at least two ethnic groups.

**Developing School-Family-Community Partnerships**

44. I have developed a school-family-community partnership team or some similar type of group that consists of community members, parents, and school personnel.

45. I am aware of community resources that are available for students and their families.

46. I work with community leaders and other resources in the community to assist with student (and family) concerns.
Understanding Cross-Cultural Interpersonal Interactions

47. I am able to discuss interaction patterns that might influence ethnic minority students’ perceptions of inclusion in the school community.

48. I solicit feedback from students regarding my interactions with them.

49. I verbally communicate my acceptance of culturally different students.

50. I nonverbally communicate my acceptance of culturally different students.

51. I am mindful of the manner in which I speak and the emotional tone of my interactions with culturally diverse students.

Reflections on School Counselor Multicultural Competence Checklist

Upon reading through this checklist, what were your thoughts? Which areas did you feel were overall strengths of yours? How might you use those strengths to improve the climate of your school? Conversely, which are areas that you identified as areas for further growth for yourself? Of those, select the two biggest priorities for further development. What are ways that you could increase your level of competence in those two areas?

We encourage school counselors to think broadly about culture and how it is relevant to all students in their schools. In the next chapter, we apply these concepts more specifically to the ELL population.