Core Function → **School Culture and Climate**

Effective Practice → **The school environment reflects and honors the diversity of the community it serves.**

Success Indicator CC08: The lobby, hallways, classrooms, and schoolyards display multilingual signs and artifacts representative of the diversity of the school community. (5867)

Overview: Schools which publicly display non-English signs and artifacts validate EL identity and show these students and families that their language is valued in the school. Multilingual signs and artifacts have the direct benefit of helping English learners (ELs) orient themselves and locate important places in the school. It also facilitates their understanding of school events. In addition, even for ELs who can understand signs written in English, use of the native language has an important symbolic function. Signs which include a viewer's native language feel "closer" to the viewer, providing a sense of emotional comfort (Cenoz & Gorter, 2004).

Questions: Do posted signs include the main languages spoken by students and families in my school? Are there flags, books, maps, or other artifacts on display that represent the diversity of my students? How can the physical environment empower ELs within the school? How would EL students and families react to multilingual signs and artifacts? How would other students and families react? How would teachers react?

What are the benefits to posting multilingual signs throughout a school building?

On the simplest level, multilingual signs and artifacts are helpful because they provide information to EL students and families. Signs in multiple languages help EL families orient themselves and navigate through the school (Breiseth, Robertson, & LaFond, 2011). These signs can also help beginning EL students acquire pragmatic competence, or the ability to "make one's way" in a foreign language (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008), as students match their native language to the English for common school words and phrases they see on signs. One only needs to reflect upon experiences in a foreign country without any language knowledge to understand that even a little bit of one's native language can make a huge difference in trying to navigate everyday situations.

In addition to their informative benefits, multilingual signs and artifacts have extremely strong symbolic power in schools. All public places have a "linguistic landscape" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) made up of visible language in the form of signs, billboards, street names, etc. In some places, the linguistic landscape is centered around one language, while in others it is multilingual. In either case, language can be a powerful marker of who belongs in a space, especially for those who consider their language an important identity marker. Landry & Bourhis (1997) describe the linguistic landscape as "the most observable and immediate index of the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting a given territory" (p. 29). This is no less true in schools than in any other public location.

Therefore, the written language that schools present to students and visitors is a strong marker of who belongs and has power in a school. While being a space filled with an unfamiliar language can be overwhelming and disempowering, being able to read a space creates a feeling of familiarity and emotional comfort. As pointed out by Javier (2007), individuals have different emotional relationships with different languages. The use of native language pro-

vokes a sense of closeness or belonging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008). For ELs who can already read English signs, reading signs in a native language has no additional informational value. However, these signs still have symbolic value, empowering ELs and families by giving them linguistic ownership of the school space.

What should school leaders consider when adding multilingual signs to their school?

Because of the symbolic importance of public signs, school leaders should be aware that including multilingual signs and artifacts in a school can feel threatening to some English-speaking families. In the United States, there has been significant struggle over what Hornberger (2002) calls "a one-nation-one-language ideology," which is the idea that all members of American society should learn English and assimilate to a mainstream American culture (Hornberger, 2002). Those who subscribe to this idea may believe that the inclusion of other languages in public spaces mean that the school is moving away from their culture and values (Gorter, 2013).

Therefore, it is important for multilingual signs and artifacts to be framed not as a way of keeping ELs and other English speakers separated, but rather as a way of welcoming ELs and their families into the school community on equal footing with all other children. Research shows that there is very little chance that any amount of multilingualism in schools (much less a few signs) will stop immigrants from assimilating to American culture. Almost all first-generation immigrant children learn to speak English well, and most prefer it over their native language (Portes, 2002). The question is not whether students will learn English, but whether they and their families will be welcomed as full and equal participants in our public schools to support student learning. Multilingual signs and artifacts are a small but important step towards including ELs and their families in the life of the school.

What signs and/or artifacts might schools display and where?

(Adapted from Brieseth, Robertson, & LaFond, 2011)

- A multilingual welcome sign at the main entrance of the school

- Multilingual signs on doors NOT to be used and which indicate where the entrance to the building can be found

- Multilingual signs outside the main entrance explaining how to enter the building (i.e. ring a bell and wait for someone to open the door or speak into the intercom; have your picture ID ready to show the security guard)

- Multilingual signs inside the main doors with directions to important offices and school locations (such as the gymnasium, auditorium, or parent resource room).

- Multilingual signs and/or with graphics to label the bathrooms, library, computer lab, gymnasium, cafeteria, music room, etc.

- Multilingual signs with the school mission and/or motto throughout the school

- Student works created by students of different language and cultural backgrounds

- Books by authors from around the world and in different languages

- Artwork by artists from around the world

- Images of scientists, engineers, educators, and other individuals in other areas from different parts of the world

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