

# VS 3.4: Stages of Identity Formation



## Think About

- How can the process of cultural identity formation differ for immigrant vs. indigenous minority groups? By age?
- Who are our language minority students?

### Conceptual Outline

The ESL students who come into your classroom already have cultural and social identities in place. In their home countries, those identities were the norm, the majority, and the mainstream. These students' diversity has only recently come into focus. It is new to them, too.

Students from all backgrounds—Mexican, Japanese, Iranian, and Polynesian— express pride in their native language, history, and culture. These native cultural factors will always be part of their cultural identity.

The formation of cultural identity takes place in numerous social contexts: the home, the school, the larger community. At every turn, cultural identity becomes a choice for the child about what to preserve of self, what to change of self, and what to give up in self. In this process immigrants move through various stages of adaptation, beginning with survival.

### Examples of immigrants who adapt to a new culture

### Meaning Making

Diversity as new?

Price in my culture?

My choices?

## Conceptual Outline

## Meaning Making

### Mother and Teacher

**Maria Requena** tells of challenges in immigrating from a small town in Mexico to a large city in the U.S. Everything was different. As a parent, she felt the need to support her children in the process of acculturation. Other people told her to stop speaking Spanish with her children, but she said, "I felt so sad. I cannot tell my children to forget who they are." Maria told her children, "You're always going to be Mexican...take the best things from here and grow." Maria chose to have her children read, write and speak in Spanish daily at home. They now also speak English. She tells parents, "Don't feel bad about keeping their own language. Keep who you are. Don't forget.

My message?

### Young Adult

**Glory Rodriguez Harris** says when she came to the mainland from Puerto Rico she didn't want to act like everyone else. Her sister did that, but Glory didn't like it. She thought, "If I do that, then . . . it's just not going to be me." She chose to retain her accent. She rolled her Rs, wore her island clothes, and resisted assimilating into mainland culture. She now uses English and Spanish so interchangeably that she cannot always distinguish which language she is using: "Is this Spanish or English?"

The core of my identity?

### Adult

**Fode Dombia** suggests that adults are more prepared to navigate the process of change than children. As an adult he came to the U.S. with objectives, but he sees students who are forced to come to the U.S. Although Fode came to the U.S. to get a PhD and teach in a middle school, he still has been surprised at the differences between what books say the U.S. is like and what his experience is teaching him. He has been shocked. He has felt like a Martian in this particular community; however, he knows that these experiences are a normal part of the stress of adjusting to a new cultural environment.

The adult experience?

### Young Child

A child in **Larue Taylor's** class struggled in the U.S. His parents had divorced, and his mother had brought the boy to the U.S. He only spoke once in class during the entire school year. He isolated himself. He created no friendships. Once Larue made a home visit. She was surprised how different this boy was: He danced and sang for her while his brother played the drums. He never learned to speak English during that school year.

The child experience?

## Conceptual Outline

## Meaning Making

### Examples of immigrant children becoming cultural brokers

Children become emissaries for their families, conducting business, translating for parents, and serving as go-betweens with the home and outside community.

#### Examples:

- Claudia Ramirez Wiedeman was the mediator between her parents and the outside world, translating, filling out papers, making out bills, and calling for appointments.
- Norma Garcia Bowman was the child of migrant workers. She was checked out of school often to translate for her parents and protect them from fraud.

Students I know?

**Indigenous minorities** (e.g. Native Americans or Native Hawaiians), unlike immigrant families, are born in the U.S. and have lived in the U.S. for several generations.

In my school?

**Thomas Ricento** (University of Texas, San Antonio)

"Because of federal policies, Native Americans lost their language and culture. Because of prejudice and policy, they were also stopped from assimilating into the mainstream of U.S. culture. Only recently have some attempts been made to preserve the language of Native Americans."

**Both teachers and parents play critical roles in supporting a child's development as a cultural being.**

My role?

**Brenda Beyal** (Elementary School Teacher)

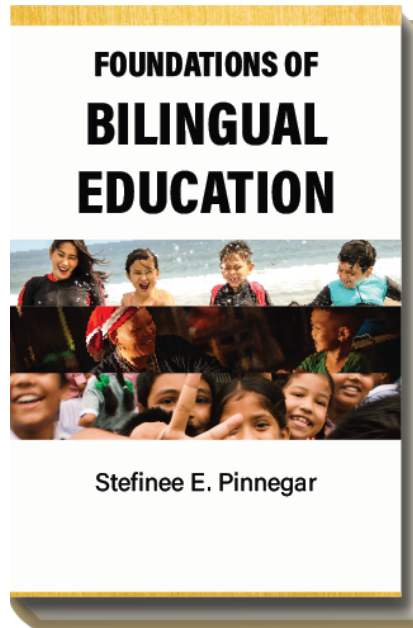
"By treating them equally, they're treating them unequally because they're not recognizing all that this child brings into their classroom. I look at my students and think, 'This Navajo child needs me to recognize that yes, you're a person, but on the other hand, there are things I want you to learn. There are things that I expect from you that I hope will help you to succeed here in this world.' I want to teach them how this culture works, or how the dominant culture works. I want them to be able to learn to work in that culture, but keep what they bring into the classroom inside them."

My desire for ESL students?


**Muriel Tuairau** (Parent)

While Muriel's grandfather helped develop her sense of cultural identity, it was learning Hawaiian history as an adult that made her commit to its importance for her and her children. She promoted Hawaiian culture with her children and hopes they will do the same for their children. She says, "I want them to be proud of who they are."

Instilling pride in students?



Pinnegar, S. E. (2019). *Foundations of Bilingual Education*. EdTech Books.  
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