

THE DIVERSITY KIT

**An Introductory Resource for
Social Change in Education**



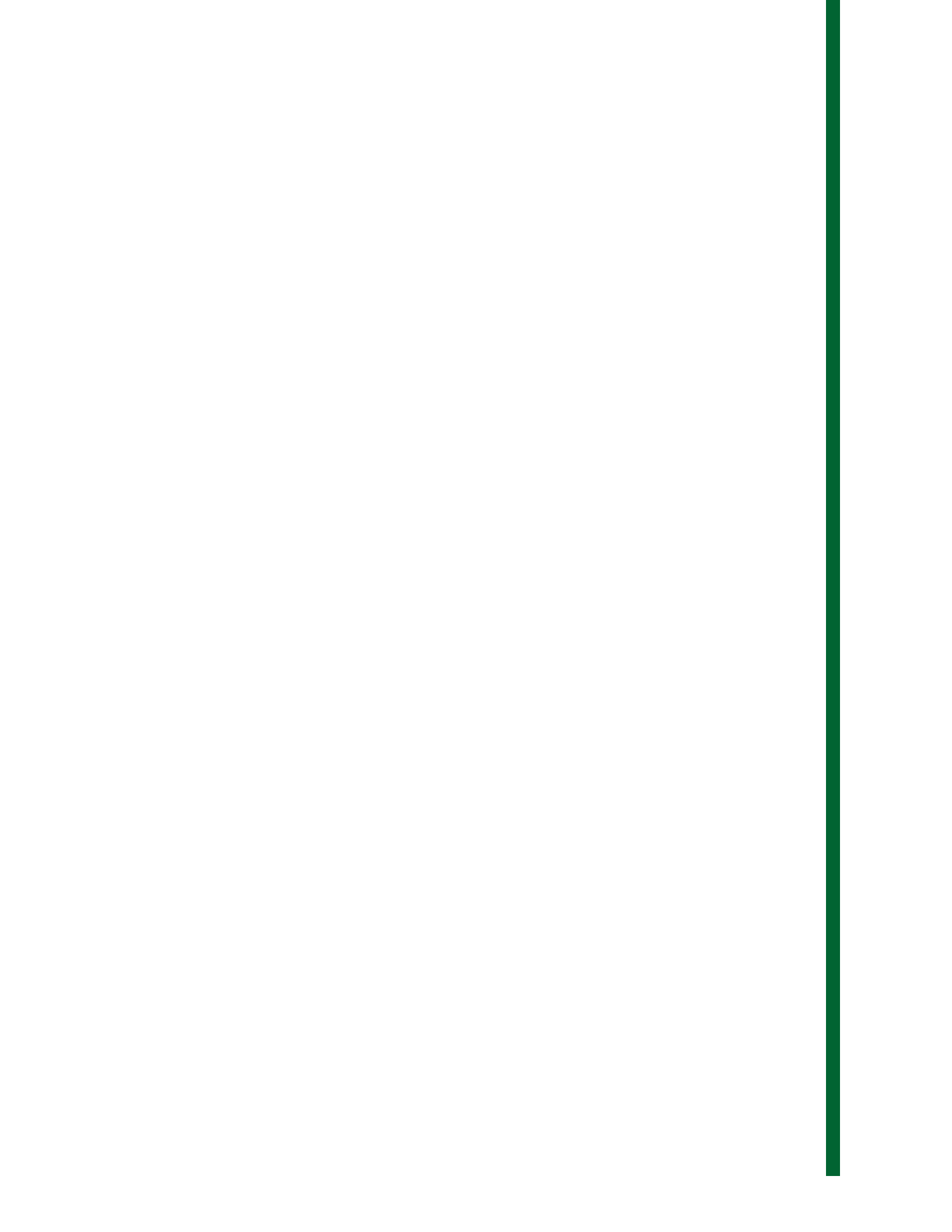
PART II: *CULTURE*



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PART II:
CULTURE



The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory

a program of The Education Alliance at Brown University

The LAB, a program of The Education Alliance at Brown University, is one of ten educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Our goals are to improve teaching and learning, advance school improvement, build capacity for reform, and develop strategic alliances with key members of the region's education and policymaking community.

The LAB develops educational products and services for school administrators, policymakers, teachers, and parents in New England, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Central to our efforts is a commitment to equity and excellence. Information about LAB programs and services is available by contacting:



LAB at Brown University
The Education Alliance
222 Richmond Street, Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903-4226

Phone: 800-521-9550
E-mail: info@lab.brown.edu
Web: www.lab.brown.edu
Fax: 401-421-7650

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THE DIVERSITY KIT: CONTRIBUTORS

Authors:

Charles Ahearn, SERVE
Deborah Childs-Bowen, SERVE
Maria Coady
Ken Dickson, MCREL
Charlene Heintz, LAB
Kendra Hughes, NWREL
Maggie Rivas, SEDL
Brenda Rodrigues, NCREL
Elise Trumbull, WESTED
Kim Uddin-Leimer
L. David Van Broekhuizen, PREL
Maria Wilson-Portuondo
Belinda Williams

Editors:

Tom Crochunis, LAB
Susan Erdey
Jessica Swedlow, LAB

Graphic Design:

Sherri King-Rodrigues, LAB

Production:

Patricia Hetu, LAB

Publications Assistant:

Kristin Latina, LAB

Completion of *The Diversity Kit* was made possible by the leadership and coordination of Maria Pacheco, director of Equity and Diversity Programs for The Education Alliance at Brown University, who oversees the LAB's national leadership area of teaching diverse learners.

Members of the LAB's National Leadership Advisory Panel contributed to the review of this document. Their recommendations help assure that the LAB's work concerning equity and diversity is appropriate, effective, and useful in the field, particularly in improving educational outcomes for students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

National Leadership Area Advisory Panel:

Thelma Baxter
María Estela Brisk
Joyce L. Epstein
Sandra Fradd
Joel Gomez
Gloria Ladson-Billings

Annette Lopez de Mendez
Delia Pompa
Warren Simmons
Dean Stecker
Adam Urbanski
Charles V. Willie
Lily Wong Fillmore

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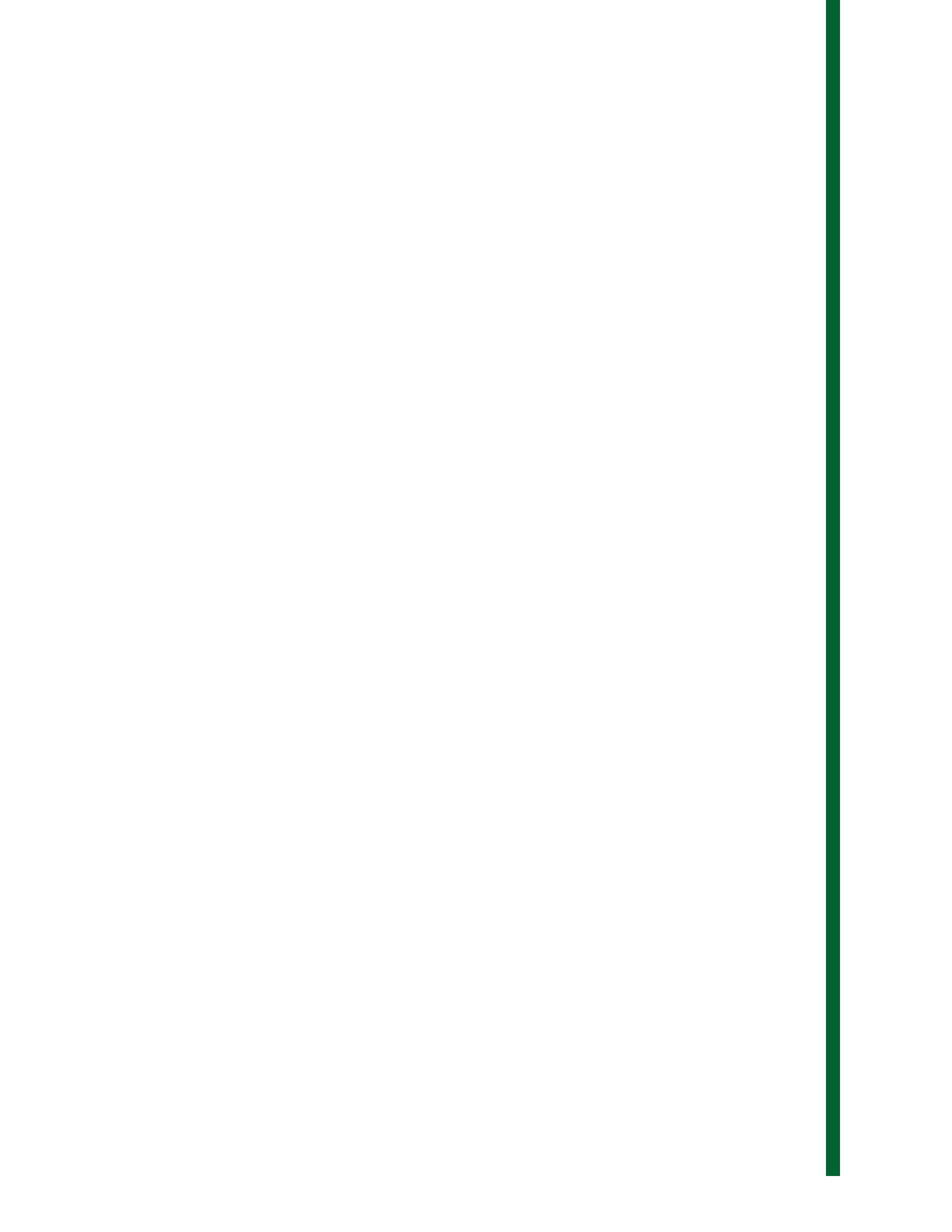
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is culture? How does culture shape identity? What is culturally responsive teaching? How can teachers effectively build upon students' cultural identities to facilitate learning? These are just some of the questions that we address in three separate chapters on culture.

We base these chapters on several principles of culture and learning:

- Students come to school with specific cultural knowledge or “cultural capital,” including their particular experiences and prior knowledge.
- Valuing students' cultural knowledge and building upon it is a key component of culturally responsive teaching.
- Culture is largely mediated by language, as manifested in metaphor, storytelling, songs, and greetings.
- A group's culture reflects its shared traditions, which can include a common history, language, religion, customs, and literary traditions.
- Culture is dynamic and ever changing; a group's culture includes the goals, ideals, and beliefs that will ensure the group's survival. However, there are variations among individual members of a cultural group in terms of their beliefs and values.

In the first chapter of this section of *The Diversity Kit*, we focus principally on defining culture and cultural identity. We argue that culture is dynamic and that exploring, valuing, and promoting students' cultures in the classroom will support their personal and academic development. In this first chapter, we explore the notions of collectivism and individualism as cultural orientations, and we examine the power relations that have historically existed between certain societal groups.

In the second chapter we focus our lens more specifically on the area of culture as it impacts teaching and learning among diverse student populations. We ask the readers to participate in activities and the accompanying vignette discussions that encourage them to explore the concept of a learning community. We also challenge educators to explore the funds of knowledge found in students' home communities. Through these exercises we underscore the importance of knowing the students' home cultures and using that knowledge as a resource to enhance student learning.

In the third chapter, we explore the relationship among school, family, and the broader community. The chapter addresses educators' concerns regarding the challenges of involving parents and extended family members in the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In this chapter, we offer suggestions and provide activities that show how to bridge the gaps among school, family, and the community. We encourage the reader to become a language detective and to explore the culture of the communities in which students live, work, and play. We also encourage developing a curriculum that is culturally responsive and that promotes interaction between students and their families. Ultimately, when teachers and students create a space in which students' languages, cultures, and identities are negotiated and valued, teaching is facilitated and students excel.

Culture is intimately connected to language. For that reason, we suggest that *The Diversity Kit* be used in its entirety to explore the areas of human development and language as additional dimensions of learning. We encourage the reader to explore diversity and all of its richness through *The Diversity Kit* and to challenge social conventions and uneven power relationships that have historically marginalized culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

OVERVIEW: CULTURE, IDENTITY, and DEVELOPMENT

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ? *What is cultural identity?*
 - ? *How does culture impact development and learning?*
 - ? *How does valuing students' cultures support their development in schools?*
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