

Intervention: Bilingual/ESL Instructional Strategies for ELL Students

Culture Studies (All Grades)

The importance of including a student's home culture in the classroom is a well-documented, fundamental concept in the instruction of English language learners (Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal, & Tharp, 2003). Culture study, in this context, is a project in which students do research and share information about their own cultural history. This often involves interviewing parents and/or grandparents as well as others who share the student's cultural background. Culture studies can be appropriate at any grade level and can incorporate many skills, including reading, writing, speaking, giving presentations, and creating visuals. Culture studies can be combined with other strategies such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, and accessing a student's prior knowledge. They can also be effective as part of an alternative assessment process (Freeman & Freeman, 1994).

Other strategies for including culture.

As many researchers and practitioners have noted, incorporating culture into the classroom should be about more than holidays and food. There are many strategies that teachers can use to encourage an awareness of student diversity. Story-telling is one important strategy that can be used across grade levels. Asking students to tell a story that is either popular in their home country or draws on their own experience, and allowing them to tell it both in their native language and in English, can help build their confidence and can send a powerful message of cross-cultural appreciation. A similar strategy, and one that is not limited to elementary school, is Show & Tell. Inviting students to bring an object that represents their home culture and to tell the class about its uses, where it is from, how it is made, and so on. sends a similar message of

inclusiveness and awareness. A third strategy for working culture into the classroom is known as Misunderstandings. Teachers can ask students to share an incident they have experienced that involved a cultural misunderstanding. Questions can be asked about the nature of the misunderstanding—whether it involved words, body language, social customs, stereotypes, or any number of other factors. Students can examine the misunderstandings and gain insight into the complexities and importance of cross-cultural awareness. The humor that is often involved can also help engage students in further culture-based inquiry (Derrick-Mescua, et al., 1998).

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