



LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BULLETIN

Information and Tips from The Multilingual and Multicultural Center

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Sociocultural Issues in Language Minority Education

UNWRAPPING CULTURE & LANGUAGE FOR ELLS IN THE MAINSTREAM

Assisting struggling English Language Learners (ELLs) requires providing support to help them gain equitable access to education when multiple variables impede their ability to achieve academic success. It means, in part, taking on the role of "broker" and "unwrapping" the culture and the language to help foster their learning when the conditions of ELLs prevents them from making much progress. ELLs are inherently at-risk; educators must expand their professional repertoire to include "best practices" to address these challenges. This *Bulletin* examines a variety of culturally- and linguistically-related practices for helping ELLs overcome the many variables negatively affecting their learning.

CULTURAL "BROKERING" PRACTICES

1. *Advocate for the proper instruction, information, and support services they may need in order to achieve academic and social success in school.* ELLs are often caught between two worlds - their home culture and their adopted U.S. culture - without the family support necessary to successfully negotiate the complexities of American schooling and society. Explanations about schooling practices,

explicit discussions about culturally misunderstood or complex issues, and advocacy for equitable and appropriate services in any combination of major and minor ways help ELLs affirm their identity as academically successful students.

2. *Connect with parents to support the schooling of their children.* Ideally, *visit the parents at home!* With an interpreter ask questions about their expectations for their son's or daughter's schooling; observe interactive behaviors to get a feel for communication styles; and explain to them what your goals and plans are for their child's success.

3. *Allow for strategic use of the learner's home language when necessary for classroom participation.* Without doubt, the purpose of schooling is academic achievement *in English*. However, periodic and purposeful usage of the home language can be a valuable shortcut to appropriate academic English usage.

4. *Use stories to inform about, illustrate, and support your content whenever possible in your teaching.* Stories have a culturally universal appeal and will provide factual information within appropriate contexts to be better understood.

5. *Actively study the cultures represented by the students in your class to establish and reinforce your relationships with students and parents.* Library and internet resources will provide a great amount of historical, social and cultural information. At the very least, consult the Culturegrams Series (Axiom Press, Inc., Lindon, Utah) for succinct and useful information on all countries.

ONE DOZEN "PRINCIPLED" INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

1. *Explicitness* - introduce rules, patterns, and structures explicitly so that students know what they are dealing with.

2. *Modeling* - Demonstrate (repeatedly, if necessary) what you teach: "I do, you watch; I do, you help; you do, I help; you do, I watch"

3. *Multisensory teaching* - Deliver instruction in combinations of auditory, visual, and tactile-kinesthetic applications to accommodate ELLs with either oral or print literacies.

4. *Repetition* - Provide multiple practice opportunities for the development of fluency and automaticity of information.

5. *Structure* - Provide clear and sequenced instructions; follow them as outlined; and move to the next step only when the previous step has been mastered.

6. *Metacognition* - Teach students why they are learning. Explicitly model learning strategies to promote independent learning.

7. *Metalinguistic awareness* - Focus on language features when appropriate; deliver vocabulary as a regular feature of your instruction; and teach collocations.

8. *Diagnostic/prescriptive teaching* - Analyze how and why a student's learning progress is what it is.

9. *Task-oriented teaching* - Declarative knowledge quickly becomes procedural through tasks. Performing tasks in a cooperative group format actively engages all learners.

10. *Criteria-oriented task involvement* - Before engaging students in tasks, discuss with them the criteria necessary for qualitative as opposed to mediocre performance through rubric development.

11. *Oral & written prompting* - Post useful and frequently used oral prompts (e.g., "I would like to ask a question", "Could you say more about that", "Could you please spell/repeat/write that word/term?") and written prompts, e.g., "This paper describes. . ." (See Bulletin Vol.9, No. 7)

12. *Homework strategies* - Orally give and write clear and appropriate assignments; make accommodations when necessary; teach study skills along with it; use a calendar for organization support; determine how/whether parents can be supportive.

Struggling English Language Learners, many of them refugees who have experienced war, trauma, and interrupted schooling, need vigorous ongoing *cultural and linguistic supports* in the form of advocacy. Knowing when to *unwrap* the culture and *unwrap* the language is an important set of skills to develop. According to Mary Pipher:

"Schools are therapeutic environments. . . teachers are part of the healing process. They give their students order and predictability. . . teachers connect the dots between the world of family and of school, the old culture and America, the past and the future." (p.115)

SOURCES:

Olsen, Laurie, and Jaramilla, Ann (1999). Turning the Tides of Exclusion. Oakland, CA: The California Tomorrow Equity-Centered School Reform Series.

Pipher, Mary (2002). The Middle of Everywhere. New York: Harcourt, Inc.

Schneider, F. (2001). "Principles of Advanced Level Instruction" Washington, DC: Conference on Disabilities.

Warger, Cynthia (2001). "Five Homework Strategies." www.schoolbehavior.com.

Special thanks to the previous workshop participants for their teaching suggestions in this Bulletin.