

Socio-Cultural Awareness

Cultural norms are deeply ingrained and acquired in a subtle manner at a young age. The misinterpretation of cultural norms and signals is common. Patience, open-mindedness and acceptance are essential. Some things to keep in mind are:

- **Immigration status:** Avoid assumptions about immigrant students; some may be refugees, others are not. For some, a change in country has been precipitated by very difficult circumstances; others move for economic reasons, employment, travel and education.
- **Public and private behaviour:** Cultural understanding may vary with respect to punctuality, school attendance, values, privacy and public behaviour (eye contact, touching, personal space). Teachers should obtain information on cultural practices and carefully explain local expectations to students and parents.
- **Relationships and roles:** Relationships and interaction between children and adults and males and females may be different.
- **Teaching practices:** Schooling and teaching practices are often unique to a country. It will take time for students to adjust to a new school system. Provide oral and print information to explain the school day and calendar, classes, instruction and student reports.
- **Play:** Play varies among cultures. The use of play in instruction and informal activities as well as the school's guidelines for playground behaviour should be explained to parents and students.
- **Holidays and observances:** Teachers should know the most significant observances of immigrant students. Students may need to be absent from school for certain religious holidays. Ensure that the student and family are also knowledgeable about holidays and observances in Canada and in this province.
- **Naming customs:** Parents and children may not have the same family name and the position of names may be different from English. Try to use correct names and pronunciation. Check with the family.
- **Body language:** Body language, including gestures, touch, personal space and eye contact, varies. Take time to learn and discuss key areas of difference, particularly those that may lead to significant misunderstanding.
- **Dress:** Clothing and accessories can have cultural and religious meaning. Respect these differences and provide opportunities for students to explain their dress. Help students and families learn appropriate clothing for school, school functions and climate.

- **Food:** Food, meal schedules and eating experiences vary greatly. Certain foods are prohibited in some cultures. Provide support for students as they introduce and are introduced to new foods and practices. Recess time, eating in a cafeteria, bringing lunch from home and class social events may be new for some students.
- **Symbols:** A positive symbol in one culture may represent something quite different in another. This may influence student response to common symbols, as well as the ability of students to identify and use symbols and symbolism in academic tasks.
- **Activities and outings:** Certain activities, outings or events may cause concern for students and families. Participation in sports such as swimming, field trips, especially to places of religious significance, and overnight travel should be carefully explained to students and parents. Parents should be informed of school practices and school personnel should acknowledge the need for occasional exemptions.

Some Principles of Second Language Learning

- **Developing a high level of second language proficiency takes time.** A learner may be competent in conversation after a year or two but it takes several years to achieve the language needed for school success.
- **Second language learning is a developmental process.** ESL students need a period of listening, building receptive language, before they are ready to speak. Errors reflect the learner's position along the developmental continuum and are a natural part of the learning process.
- **Individual differences affect learner success.** Many factors influence learner progress, including age, motivation, cognitive ability, learning strategies, aptitude, personality and prior education.
- **Language is learned when input is comprehensible.** Students learn language when they understand language directed to them. They progress as they successfully engage in real communication and meaningful language activities.
- **First language literacy has implications for programming.** Students with limited literacy skills, and those unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet, may need to begin with reading readiness activities. A student with limited or no prior schooling will need a well planned literacy program.

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Teaching Students from Diverse Cultures



Information and Strategies for Classroom Teachers of English Second Language Students

Newfoundland
Labrador

Create a Welcoming and Inclusive Environment

English Second Language (ESL) students learn best in a supportive environment where their attempts to communicate are valued. Risk-taking in the second language is encouraged. As long as errors do not impede comprehension, communication should not be interrupted to correct them.

- Prepare classmates for the arrival of a new student - pronounce the student's name properly; locate the country of origin; ensure a place close to the front; arrange a peer mentor; label classroom objects.
- Encourage participation, acceptance and respect.
- Help students with essential survival expressions such as, "Washroom, please."
- Include ESL learners in classroom and extracurricular activities.
- Ensure access to a bilingual dictionary, children's and/or picture dictionary and encourage its use.
- Initiate conversation with the student outside the classroom; every conversation is a valuable one.
- Allow the ESL student to enhance learning for classmates; the student may, for example, share cultural or country information, teach classmates a few words of the language, take part in a multicultural event and create bilingual posters.
- Seek information about the student's first language and writing system to better understand its influence on progress in English.
- Support first language use by the student; recognize that conversations with family and friends will likely be in that language. Encourage pride in heritage and in being bilingual, an asset to anyone.
- Allow the student to write in the first language (personal journal, study notes) or read a book in the first language during silent reading.
- Encourage parents to get involved in the school, volunteering, attending events and interviews.
- Assure parents that it is a good practice to keep up the home language and talk to their child about school studies, in the home language.
- Give lots of encouragement and praise!
- Provide guidance in the selection of high school courses. Students may experience more success in their first year with courses that are less language-dependent.



Classroom Strategies

Make language and content accessible. People learn language best when they comprehend the language addressed to them and are engaged in meaningful content and language activities.

- Get to know the literacy level of your ESL students. Don't assume a high literacy level because of a good command of oral English.
- Monitor teacher talk – simplify language, avoid colloquialisms and complex structures; speak slowly and clearly, using a normal tone. Introduce colloquialisms and idioms gradually.
- Ask classmates to monitor their spoken language.
- Incorporate gestures, drawings and props with explanations.
- Provide alternate on-topic resources at a lower language level.
- Provide visuals and graphic organizers to aid comprehension.
- Recycle new words in several contexts.
- Differentiate assignments by modifying the reading level of texts and the volume of writing expected.
- Provide alternate activities to engage the student and develop language and content skills.
- Build language and literacy outcomes into your lesson plans; focus on skills needed for the content area.
- Use pre-reading activities to focus on main ideas and key vocabulary; have students explore new vocabulary and predict meaning.
- Inform students of upcoming content; encourage reading ahead.
- Pre-teach the necessary background information.
- Allow time for brainstorming and group discussion before writing.
- Use graphic organizers, including word webs, for pre-writing.
- Partner the ESL student with classmates who have good communication skills for group and pair work.
- Print clearly rather than use cursive writing.

- Keep up routines such as printing the day, date and homework assignments on the board.
- Print keywords, page numbers and instructions on the board.
- Print and explain assignments clearly, step by step.
- Consider that it may take ESL learners longer and/or language may need to be simplified for tasks.
- Provide models of projects, writing and other assignments.
- Check for comprehension – observe the student at work and use questions that require one word answers, props and gestures.
- Display posters, perhaps created by students, to show the meaning of key content words and illustrate main ideas visually.
- Help the student create a word wall or personal word bank with new vocabulary in simple sentences or illustrated graphically.
- Provide notes or allow the student to copy from a classmate.
- Correct or indicate grammar errors in written work sparingly, focusing on errors that are easiest to correct.
- Assess language proficiency regularly.

Peer Help

- Assign, train and provide ongoing support to peer mentors.
- Have a classmate ensure that the ESL student is on the right page and understands what to do.
- Have peers help through modeling and demonstrations.
- Assign a buddy reader to read with the student for a few minutes each day. Provide high-interest, low-vocab texts or children's picture books of interest.

Self-Help

- Encourage self-assessment, e.g., the student should self-edit written work and reflect on progress.
- Encourage strategies for language learning, such as a) underlining new words, re-reading and guessing meaning in context and b) summarizing to recycle language and ideas.
- Encourage the student to ask for assistance and clarification.

Working Independently

- Set up a computer centre with appropriate websites bookmarked.
- Set up a listening centre with audio books.
- Set up a reading centre of high-interest, low-vocab books.

For more ideas and information, speak to an ESL teacher or contact a Program Specialist at your school district. Review provincial documents. Seek opportunities for professional development.