

Sound Bites for Better Teaching
Language and Culture Are Inseparable
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Perspectives Practices Products

Language is the written and oral expression of a people's culture. Consequently, culture should not be considered as a separate entity with its own curriculum and activities because it exists in every aspect of the language. When studying vocabulary, students need to be taught both the linguistic and the cultural meanings of the words, i.e., the linguistic equivalent to the word "bread" is *pain* or *pan* but if our students visualize *pain* or *pan* as Wonder Bread, they do not fully understand the cultural meaning of the French *pain* or the Spanish *pan*. To achieve that, they should have the same mental picture of the word that the French or the Spanish have. Many of the rules of French grammar can be explained by the "logical reasoning" so characteristic of the French mind: the noun + adjective sequence, the hour + the minutes, the future after *quand*, *lorsque* etc. to express a future action, the present tense after *depuis* to express that the action is still happening, etc. If culture is defined as the perspectives, practices, and products of the people, i.e. the 3Ps, then every reading can be broken down into its cultural components.

Self-Evaluation (no right or wrong answers)

Do you plan separate culture lessons or do you integrate them into your lessons?

Do you test for cultural knowledge? How?

Is the culture represented in your classroom by pictures and realia representative of the true culture or is it stereotypical?

Which of the 3Ps do you find the easiest to incorporate into your teaching? Why?

How competent do you feel in including the perspectives of culture into your lessons?

Do you play the music of the country on a regular basis?

Do you know the difference between high culture and low culture?

How do you keep your cultural knowledge up-to-date?

TIP

When showing a video, shut off the sound and ask the students to describe the cultural elements they see: products, such as cars, buildings, signs, houses, clothing; practices, such as use of space, greetings, meals, school schedules, leisure activities, etc. That could be followed by a brainstorming session to determine why what they see is different from what we do here in America.