

Lesson Objectives

Taking the individual experiences of adult learners into consideration can be critical when tutoring English language learners. In this lesson you will look at the meaning of culture and some key areas of cultural differences.



Variety in Learners

Regardless of country of birth, all learners have a variety of learning styles, levels of prior knowledge, expectations of the educational setting and learning objectives.

The ELL classroom may have adult learners with a history of disruption, political trauma, and mental upheaval. Although the identified role of the tutor is to teach English language skills, the tutor's role as a cultural broker is very important as well.

English language learners come to the learning settings eager to share information about their cultures. During tutoring sessions it is important to provide opportunities for exploring and discussing student's cultures and the culture of the United States.

What is culture?

"The simplest definition of culture includes those values, beliefs, and practices shared by a group of people. Social scientists and anthropologists vary on their definitions of what comprises a culture, subculture, or microculture, but for practical purposes, the notion of sharing a common worldview is often enough for individuals who find themselves moving between multiple cultures." ([Zieghan, 2001](#))

Key Areas of Cultural Differences

Culture and Family

In some cultures, family is the first priority. Children are celebrated and sheltered, the wife fulfills a domestic role and family mobility is limited. At the same time, other learners come from cultures in which work is the priority, children are minimally parented and independent, and family mobility is quite common.



Culture and Education

Tutors may find that students come from countries in which the education culture is based on memorization with a lot of emphasis on theory with a rigid, teacher-centered curriculum. These students may have a hard time with an analytical approach that emphasizes a practical, narrow and in-depth specialization.

Personal Sensitivity

Tutors may find that some learners come from cultures in which there is a high sensitivity to differences of opinion. Students may fear embarrassment, especially publicly. They might shun confrontation and are often hurt by teasing. Other learners may view sensitivity as a weakness and they may show difficulty understanding subtlety.

Control

Some learners may come from a culture with a high sensitivity to being "checked on." They may be sensitive to giving and receiving critical feedback. On the other hand, there may be students from cultures in which critical feedback is universally accepted, practiced, expected and discussed.



Personal Appearance

Tutors may find that some learners come from cultures in which dress and grooming are status symbols, while other students may believe that appearance is secondary to performance.



Work/Leisure

Some learners may feel that they work to live and that leisure is considered essential for a full life. Money is for enjoying life. Other students may feel that they live to work and leisure is the reward for hard work. Money is often an end in itself.

Competition

Tutors may find learners from a culture in which personal competition is avoided while others come from cultures where it is important to prove yourself in competitive situations.

Time

Some learners may come from cultures in which time is a relative concept and deadlines are flexible. These individuals may believe that what is happening now is not more important than the future. Others may believe that deadlines and commitments are firm and that what is happening now is only important if it contributes towards the future.



Your Turn

Have you experienced another culture? How did it compare to your own? Take a minute to reflect on one of the key areas of cultural differences and how it relates to your own experience. Please write a brief written response.

This lesson has been abbreviated for Whatcom Literacy Council tutors. If you are interested accessing the full course entitled [Culture and English Language Learners](http://www.proliteracyednet.org/) you may find it on the ProLiteracy Education Network website: <http://www.proliteracyednet.org/>