

Running Head: A CULTURAL WRITING PROJECT IN AN ESOL 1 CLASS SETTING

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## Introduction

The class of 2007 started out in August. So far students have learned about the mainstream holidays such as Halloween and Thanksgiving. They will soon be exposed to what some consider the quintessential American spirit: Christmas.

My ESOL 1 students have barely set foot in the United States and they are already being pressured to take part in a host of celebrations they may not be completely acquainted with and, therefore, have little or no meaning to them. As a matter of fact, when asked what they thought about Halloween, some said they considered it foolish.

Most students for whom I have designed the project are foreign-born Hispanic teenagers. According to Gil, Vegas and Dimas (1994, in Kim 2002), this population experiences a more stressful adaptation process than their American-born counterparts. Students' criticism towards the host culture may be a sign of a stage of hostility (Kim, 2002). Thus, the lesson plan I will lay out has as a primary goal to help transition my students from the defense to the minimization stage (Bennett, 1993). In other words, students will be challenged to move from a generally negative opinion of the adopted culture to a positive worldview that recognizes the human cultural commonalities created by tradition. The project will not only make students broaden their knowledge of their traditions but also realize that they, like the host culture, have a heritage to feel proud of.

Students' task is to create a brochure that promotes a festival or a major holiday in their country. The target readers are Americans of any ethnic background who take interest in foreign cultures.

Students will be graded based on the understanding of the potential audience, grammar and spelling, general appearance and picture.

## Subjects

The population for whom this class is designed comes from various Central and South American countries such as El Salvador (60%), the Dominican Republic (15%), Guatemala (10%), Peru (5%) and Honduras (10%). They are newcomers to an ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) program in a high school in Prince George's County Public Schools. The reasons for immigration were to seek better educational and economic opportunities. Sixty percent are undocumented and five percent are children whose parents currently hold refugee status.

Students are 9<sup>th</sup> graders whose age ranges from 14 to 16. The majority has been in the country for less than six months. They all speak Spanish at home with exception of a student who lives with her English-speaking guardian.

## Lesson Plan

The written warm up starts with a multiple-choice activity. Students are shown a sample brochure advertising a travel package and they are asked to identify the name of such publication. In addition, students get in small groups and write a list of words related to "brochure". The purpose is to assess students' prior knowledge. The more words a group writes, the more prior knowledge they have on the topic.

The teacher introduces the project by referring to the American traditions that they have learned. She goes on asking if they think Americans would also be interested in

their culture. The objective of the project is discussed, followed by a brief explanation of how they will be graded. They will also assign tasks to each group member. There will be three students in each group. One will be responsible for handwriting, the other student for typing and the third student for proposing ideas, researching, proofreading and checking grammar.

After that, in small groups, students will analyze how a professional brochure is organized and illustrated. They will also find out what kind of information a brochure contains. Such discovery process will give them ideas on the design of their own material. Students share their findings with the whole group.

Teacher uses a sample professional brochure to show students what elements she will be looking for when grading the final product.

Students will be shown a Power Point presentation demonstrating the writing process, which includes the pre-writing phase, drafting, editing, revising and publishing. The teacher models the pre-writing phase jotting down words related to information they would like to include. Then they decide where the information should be located on the tri-fold page. The next step, which is also modeled by the teacher, is drafting. Students will organize their thoughts into paragraphs. Next, students will do peer review as well as confer with the teacher. In this phase they will reorganize their writing. They will finally check for grammatical and spelling errors by proofreading the brochure. Finally, students will use a Microsoft application (Publisher) in order to publish their work, which will be displayed in the bulletin board.

Before students receive a grade, they will create an entry in their journal that answers the question “What did you learn about the traditions from your country?”

Furthermore, they give themselves a grade for their work and write notes on what they thought was successful and unsuccessful.

### Conclusion

The stress caused by the process of adapting to an unfamiliar environment is often comparable to death or divorce. As educators, we have the responsibility to help sojourners identify with the host society and to cope with stress. This can be achieved by making a connection with their own culture so that they can acquire an understanding of the unfamiliar environment quickly enough not to feel the discomfort. Such task takes time and can be confusing.

In order to make the project feasible, it is important to form mixed-ability groups of students that share the same ethnicity. However, adjustments are recommended if the lesson is aimed at a mixed ethnic group. It may not be possible to match ability with ethnicity. Thus, students should be allowed to include more than one tradition in the project.

This lesson plan was not covered by the time this paper was submitted. The class was at least four days short of completing it. Therefore, I will not be able to provide a final product, a journal responses or a self -evaluation.

## References

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