

Overview of Bilingual Students in Hawai'i

Across the United States, 10 percent of K–12 students in public schools are past or current English learners (ELs).¹ In Hawai'i, however, as of 2019, approximately 17 percent of students in public schools are or have been ELs. Of that number, nine percent are classified as "Active ELs."²

EL students in Hawai'i speak about 70 different languages. The most common Pacific Island languages spoken by Hawai'i EL students are:³

- Chuukese (15 percent)
- Marshallese (12 percent)
- Samoan (5 percent)



Other languages commonly spoken by EL students in Hawai'i include Ilokano, Tagalog, Spanish, Japanese, and Mandarin.⁴

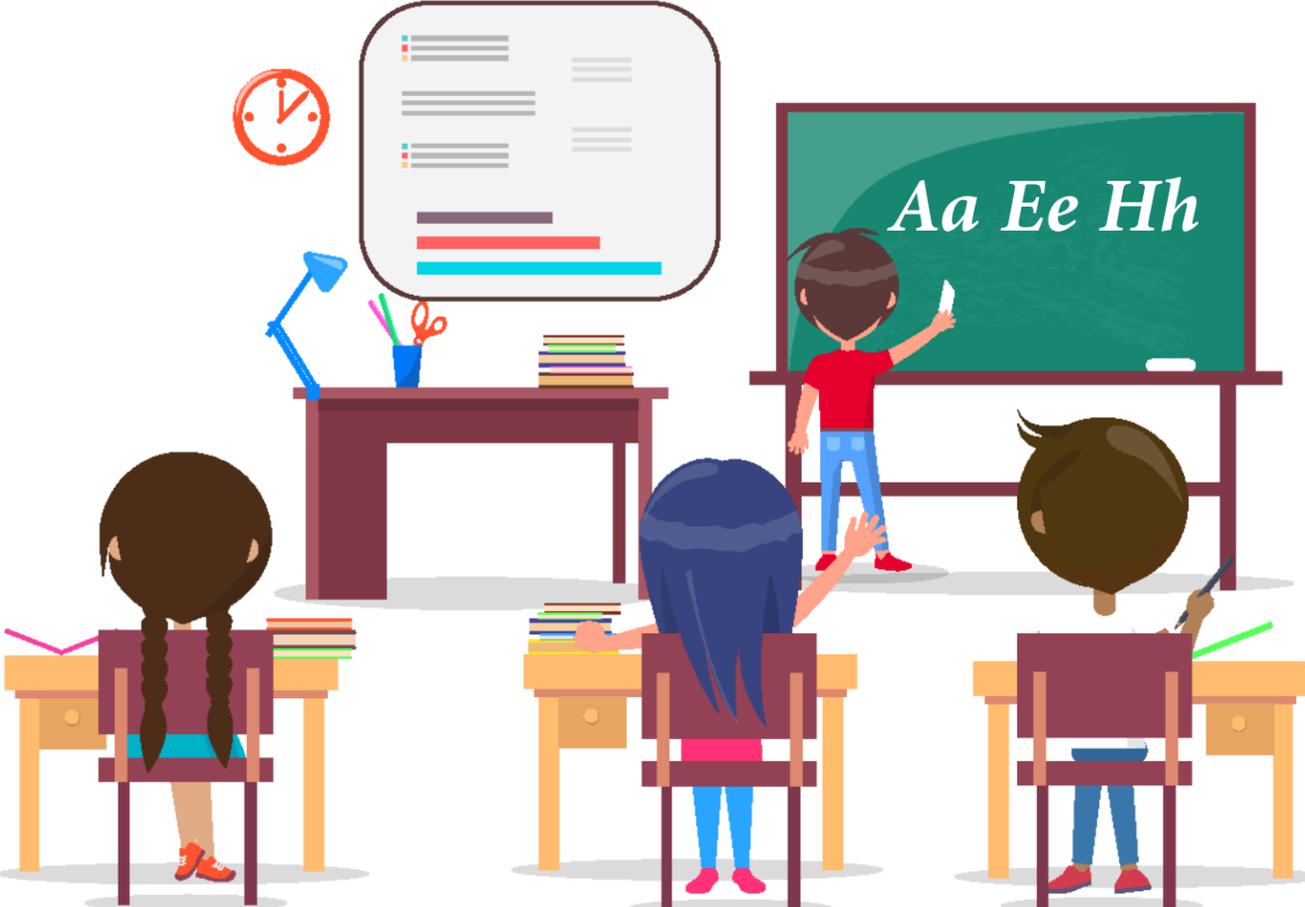


Definition of Culturally Sustaining Teaching

Culturally sustaining teaching refers to a teaching approach that values and meaningfully centers students' cultures and communities in classroom learning across units and projects.⁵ Teachers using this approach with their multilingual students not only see their students' language skills as strengths, but acknowledge that students' languages and culture(s) are dynamic and contextual.^{6,7}

In adopting this approach, teachers can create education opportunities that validate students' linguistic and sociocultural practices, but also allow students to grow more critically engaged with them. Both teachers and students then view those practices as worthy of study, rather than only seeing them as a bridge to more mainstream practices.⁸

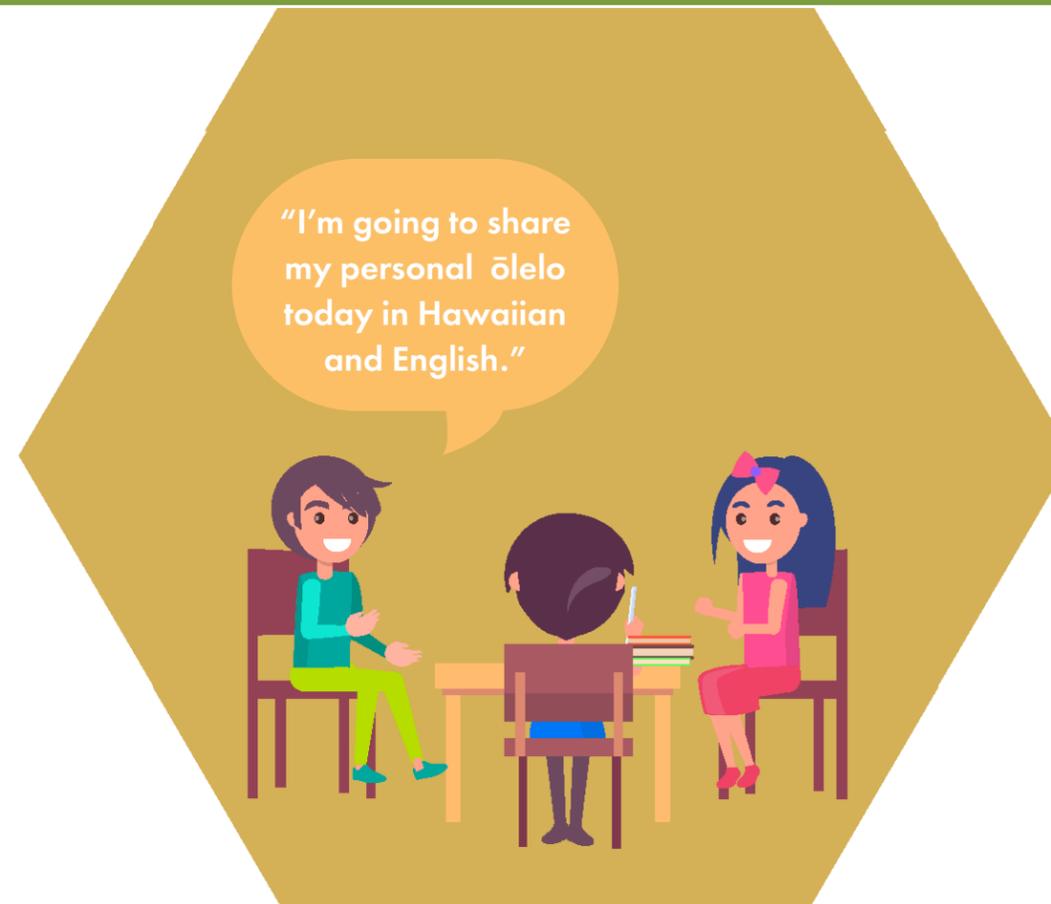
Some culturally sustaining teaching strategies include thoughtful integration of materials from a variety of cultures and traditions into the curriculum, building meaning relationships of trust between students and teachers, and engaging in cooperative learning.^{9,10}



Practices for Implementing a Culturally Sustaining Approach to Teaching Multilingual Students

COLLABORATIVE TEACHING

Collaborative teaching refers to instructional approaches, such as project-based learning and peer teaching, that allow students to have control over at least parts of the learning process. This can help create a more comfortable environment for students who may not be confident in their language skills.^{11, 12}



TRY THIS!

Create projects for students where they can research topics of interest and share results in a medium of their choosing in English and their home language(s).

RESPONSIVE FEEDBACK

Responsive feedback provides students information on their performance that takes into account and values their experiences and contributions to the academic task. Teachers who use responsive feedback build stronger relationships with their students.¹³ They also create a more positive environment in which students can take academic risks, which can enable increased learning.¹⁴



TRY THIS!

Privilege all students' knowledge with responsive feedback. In this example, one student references family relationships when describing shapes. The teacher positively acknowledges the student's contribution and, by exploring her response further with a guiding question, can tie her knowledge of family relationships to math concepts while correcting language use.

Practices for Implementing a Culturally Sustaining Approach to Teaching Multilingual Students

INSTRUCTIONAL SCAFFOLDING

Instructional scaffolding is a practice in which teachers design lessons that challenge students to learn new material but are still accessible. The scaffolding builds on what students already know and helps them learn new content in a structured way. Effective instructional scaffolding should take into account students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.¹⁵

"A legend is a well-known story from the past that people tell each other. What are some legends you know?"



TRY THIS!

If the lesson goal is to build understanding about narrative structure, ask EL students to share local legends with which they are familiar. Students can then map their legends to different narrative structures. They can also critically examine their purpose in other activities, like a discussion on how moral lessons are passed through generations.

USE OF NONTRADITIONAL MEDIA

Standard school media like textbooks communicate information in ways that may not always match students' real world cultural and linguistic experiences. Culturally sustaining teaching views these experiences (often expressed through nontraditional media like oral storytelling or street art) as equally meaningful practices to be studied. Utilizing different media has been shown to develop linguistic awareness for EL students.¹⁶

"Today, we're going to analyze symbols using Pacific Island tattoos and how they transmit cultural knowledge. Then you can create a drawing of a tattoo to represent who you are."



TRY THIS!

Encourage broader ideas about what counts as reading and writing alongside the standard curriculum by including nontraditional media that students use to communicate meaning into assignments. Students can transfer their cultural knowledge and develop additional language skills through these new or familiar media.

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