Culturally Responsive Teaching: Building Connected Classroom Communities

Dr. Meg Eubank



Who I am:

- Professor
- Former Executive Director of ESL Nonprofit
- Taught students from over 100 countries, all levels, all ages
- Online (asynchronous and synchronous) and face to face instruction

- Tell me about your role!

Icebreaker/Warm Up: Celebrations of Success

(this helps you to get to know your students)

- In the chat, share a success that has happened recently, big or small!

Examples:
Big: Got my citizenship
Small: Found the Zoom link for this presentation without technical difficulties

Other option: Share one thing you're looking forward to (gives you info that you can refer to again in the future to build class community)



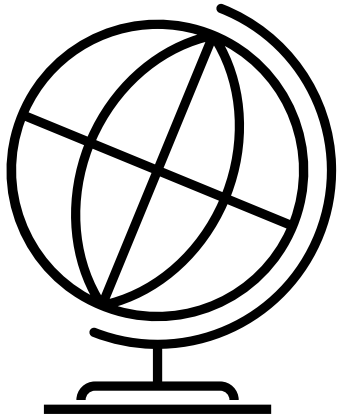
What countries are represented in your classrooms?

How do we teach a room full of people from different cultural backgrounds?

Use Culturally Responsive Teaching and Intercultural Communication Strategies

Culturally Responsive Teaching is "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Geneva Gay, 2010).

- 6 practices:
  1) have high expectations
  2) use students' cultural backgrounds
  3) bridge the gap between home and school
  4) look at the whole person
  5) use student strengths
  6) critically examine school practices, curricular content, and assessments



It involves moving away from deficit perspectives. It involves incorporating multiple perspectives into the curriculum and centering students and their cultures in the classroom.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (Paris, 2021, Gay, 2018, Hammond, 2021, Muhammad, 2022)

- The teacher-student dynamic can drastically improve with Culturally Responsive pedagogical practices where cultural traits, perspectives, and experiences are used in teaching, which results in a more relevant and engaging learning experience.

- Review of the literature: “in essence, they all share a common, central point: the need for… educators and educational contexts to understand, respond, incorporate, accommodate, and ultimately celebrate the people they serve - including their languages and literacies, spiritual universes, cultures, racial proclivities, behaviors, knowledges, critical thought, and appearances. (Khalifa et al, 2016)



Edward T. Hall (1976)

Image courtesy of PBS Learning Media

Connected Classrooms: that's the goal

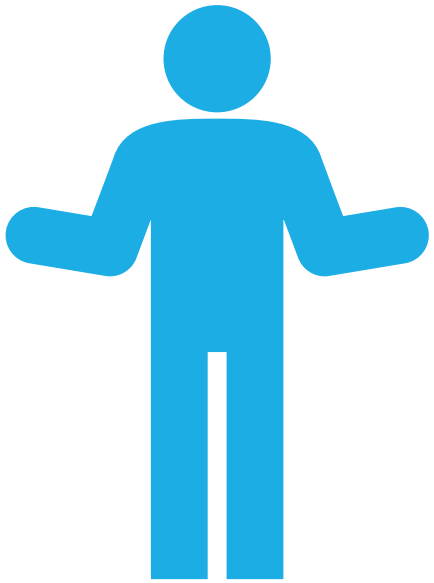
- Goals:
  - Have a classroom where everyone experiences the tenets of Culturally Relevant pedagogy
  - Everyone treats one another with respect and works together as a team
  - Students are able to learn in a welcoming environment
  - Students feel like they belong; the class feels like a community

How do we do this, especially when students might come from such different backgrounds and experiences?

First: Understanding Intercultural Communication

- Recognize and adapt to cultural differences
- Practice some strategies for teaching: teaching students and ourselves how to avoid cultural miscommunications

Example



- Yuliia was generally too shy to speak up in class. She finally had the courage to ask her teacher a question and the teacher responded, “That’s an unusual question.” Yuliia felt insulted because she felt like the teacher thought her question was foolish. She told the story to another teacher in tears, and the teacher told her to go back to the original teacher and ask him what he meant. The original teacher was upset that Yuliia felt that way, as he had meant it as a compliment. He meant that Yuliia’s question was insightful and intelligent.

- Important to teach students the tools to clarify, and as teachers realizing that different cultural backgrounds could interpret things in different ways.

Some examples of Cultural Differences

- Concepts of time:
  - In many Asian countries: past-oriented (ancestors)
  - Western Europe/US: future-oriented (emphasis on goals)
- Gestures/Body Language:
  - Latin America, US: thumbs up means “okay”
  - Islamic cultures: thumbs up is a rude gesture
- Silence:
  - India, Europe, North America: insecurity and embarrassment
  - Japan: comfortable
- Social engagements:
  - Some Asian and South American countries: leaving right after dinner is polite (if you don’t leave it means you didn’t have enough food)
  - India, Europe, North America: if you leave right after dinner, it is rude because it means you just wanted to eat but don’t want to visit with your host



Case Study:
This one time, in ESL class…

- Group of young men from Saudia Arabia – formal with teachers, knocked on door before entering, outspoken in class and could dominate a discussion, needed to leave to pray during Ramadan
- Chinese women – quiet, did not speak much in class, little eye contact, formal with teachers, perfectionists, always asked for homework, did not ask many questions
- South American women - outspoken, always late to class, informal with teachers, more emotional, very social, ask lots of questions, share opinions easily
- Russian couple – very punctual, direct, blunt, logical and less emotional, ask clarifying questions, share opinions easily

How did I handle this class?

*1st recognize the problems

*solutions: adapting teaching

Breakout: Case Study Jigsaw

- Case studies of student issues
- What are at least three possible explanations for this behavior, including ones rooted in culture, past schooling, or life circumstances?
- What assumptions might a teacher make that could be incorrect or unhelpful?
- What is one culturally responsive response, and how would you check whether it worked?

Intercultural Differences

- Geert Hofstede's cultural framework (1980s) https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-orgbehavior/chapter/2-3-cultural-diversity/
- Concepts of Time https://centerforhci.org/avoid-bad-meetings-understand-cultural-differences-of-time-hierarchy-and-decision-making/

Created and distributed by: www.anneloehr.com	TIME
UK	• Punctual • Meetings are time-consuming & set well in advance • Agenda is preferred
US	• Linear time • Time is precious, scarce and a commodity • Prefer to do one thing at a time within fixed schedule • Equate working time with success– the harder you work (more hours), the more successful you will be
CHINA	• Punctuality is important, may arrive 15 or 30 minutes early • Penchant for humility demands other person's time seen as precious • Allow time after transaction is decided to attain degree of closeness
INDIA	• Time is not about countable, segmented hours and minutes; it is measured in events, priorities, emergency requests, etc. • Expressions of time are expressions of intent, not mathematical
SWEDEN	• Being punctual is sign of respect and efficiency • It is not rude to set deadlines for projects or decisions

Individualism Cultures in which people define themselves as individuals and form looser ties with their groups.	**Collectivism** Cultures where people have stronger bonds to their groups and group membership forms a person's self identity.
• USA • Australia • UK • Canada • Hungary	• Guatemala • Ecuador • Indonesia • Pakistan • China
Low Power Distance A society that views an unequal distribution of power as relatively unacceptable.	**High Power Distance** A society that views an unequal distribution of power as relatively acceptable.
• Austria • Denmark • Israel • Ireland • New Zealand	• Malaysia • Slovakia • Philippines • Russia • Mexico
Low Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures in which people are comfortable in unpredictable situations and have high tolerance for ambiguity.	**High Uncertainty Avoidance** Cultures in which people prefer predictable situations and have low tolerance for ambiguity.
• Denmark • Jamaica • Singapore • China • Sweden	• Belgium • El Salvador • Greece • Guatemala • Portugal
Masculinity Cultures in which people value achievement and competitiveness, as well as acquisition of money and other material objects.	**Femininity** Cultures in which people value maintaining good relationships, caring for the weak, and quality of life.
• Slovakia • Japan • Hungary • Austria • Venezuela	• Norway • Netherlands • Sweden • Costa Rica • Chile

VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

Aspect	Verbal Communication	Nonverbal Communication
USA	Direct, explicit	Eye contact important, value personal space
Japan	Indirect, context-driven	Subtle cues, bowing common
Middle East	Storytelling style, respect-focused	Close proximity, varied eye contact
India	Polite, harmony-oriented	Head tilts for agreement, less personal space
Germany	Precise, content-focused	Firm handshake, less non-verbal emphasis
Brazil	Warm, expressive	Touch common, expressive gestures
China	Indirect, hierarchical	Significance in silence, less direct eye contact

Examples.com



https://culturalawareness1001.weebly.com/cross-cultural-communication.html

Next: create lessons that employ the tenets of Culturally Responsive Teaching

- Celebrate cultural differences and allow for different backgrounds
- Multimodal activities and many ways to access content

Case Study (That taught me lessons I carry into my teaching today!)

Private Boarding School	My Students:
✓ Middle School and High School International Students at private boarding school ✓ Synchronous Online Zoom Classes starting March 2020 ✓ Fall 2020: in person (for those who could get back to campus) and zoom (for those who couldn't) hybrid	➢7 different countries ➢3 different continents ➢6 different time zones



Case Study

Problems	Class Goals (from Syllabus)
✓ Synchronous zoom classes didn't work with six different time zones ✓ Engagement was suffering ✓ Watching the class recording wouldn't help students meet class goals (and was boring) ✓ Speaking and Listening class where students couldn't practice just by watching a video ✓ A video is not Culturally Responsive – there's no connection	➢ Students gain confidence in using English in both **social and academic settings**. This course emphasizes building **listening comprehension and speaking skills**. Level-appropriate grammar topics and vocabulary are explicitly taught. Students also learn about the expectations of the **American classroom**, strategies for learning a second language, and cultural topics representative of the United States.

Case Study

Questions to think about

- How can I build speaking and listening skills and classroom skills if people aren't speaking and listening to one another, and aren't present in the classroom?
- How could I engage students across different time zones and meet the goals of the class?
- My classes have always been known for their community. I've had students often explain that class feels "like a family." How could I make these very disjointed classes feel like a family or a community? In other words, how could I make these classes Culturally Responsive when we were all strewn across the world, as separate as separate could be?



Sense of Belonging (Strayhorn, 2019, Baumeister & Leary, 1995, Borock, 2020)



When students feel they are welcomed members of the school community, they grow stronger social bonds, show more motivation, perform better academically, and are more likely to persist and be retained.

Research



Need to Belong

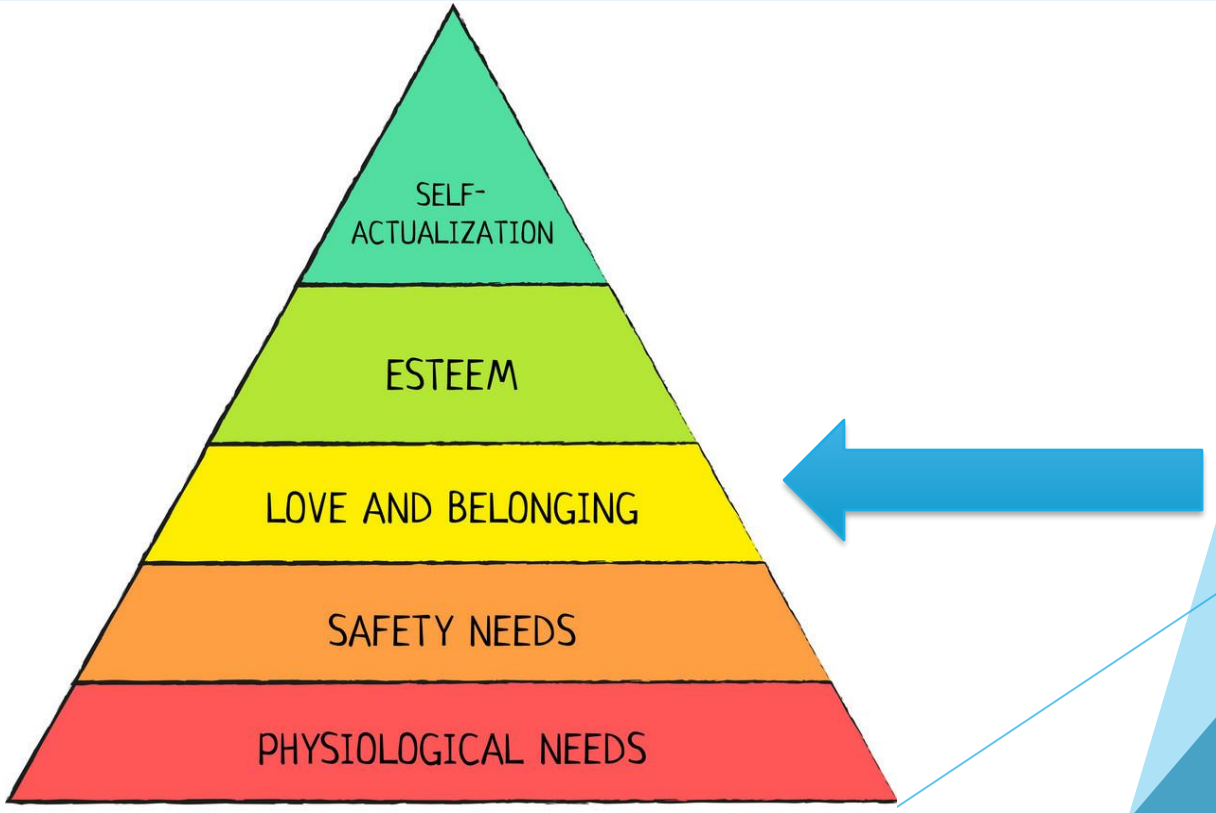
Belonging Hypothesis

"…a need to belong, that is, a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among human beings" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 499).

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *117*(3), 497–529. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Research

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)



Case Study



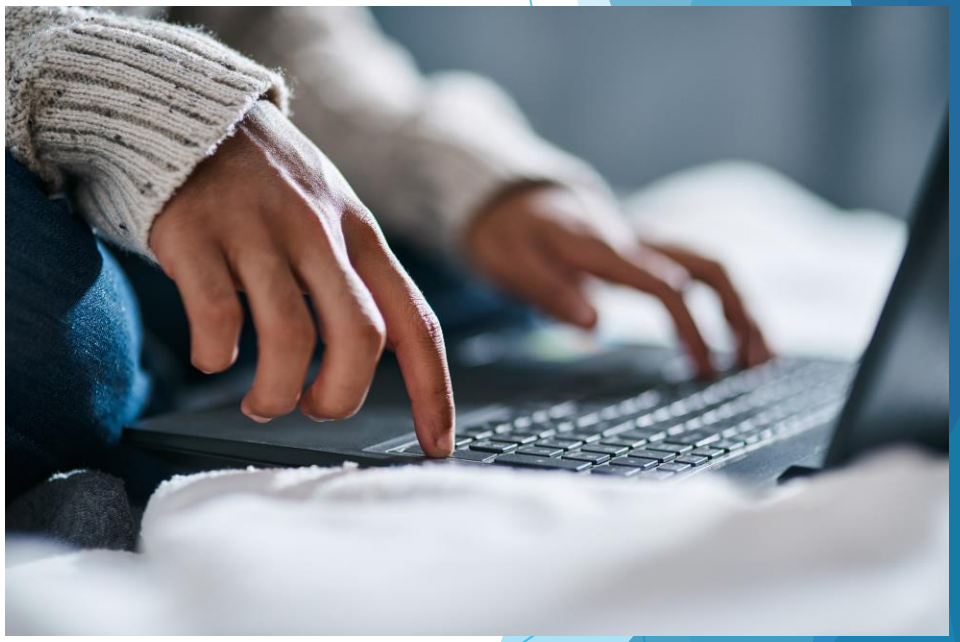
Problems

- ✓ Synchronous zoom classes didn't work with six different time zones
- ✓ Engagement was suffering
- ✓ Watching the class recording wouldn't help students meet class goals (and was boring, no buy in and no personalization)
- ✓ Speaking and Listening class where students couldn't practice just by watching a video
- ✓ All those intercultural differences played out differently during a pandemic

Case Study

Solutions

- ✓ Synchronous zoom check ins and conferences at varying times on varying days as well as email check ins and voice memo or video check ins (building the personal connection)
- ✓ Everything else asynchronous with Digital Portfolios as the main foundation:
  - Audio recordings
  - Video recordings
  - Photos
  - Online Collaboration



Case Study

Sites with Digital Portfolio Capabilities

- ✓ **SeeSaw (https://web.seesaw.me/)**
- ✓ **Flipgrid (https://info.flipgrid.com/)**
- ✓ **Google Classroom**
- ✓ **Book Creator (https://bookcreator.com/)**
- ✓ **Class Dojo (https://www.classdojo.com)**
- ✓ **Portfolio Gen (https://www.portfoliogen.com/)**
- ✓ **And many more!**

Audio Discussion Board Sample:

Culturally Responsive prompt related to a source text we read and listened to.



Student audio comments threaded underneath (names censored for privacy).



Rubrics and Feedback

Screenshots of Student Videos



“Dream Job Interview” video still



Recipe and information about “Small Pot Rice Noodle” dish from China video still



“Famous Black Americans Biography” video still

Student-Made Videos

- Dream Job Video link
- https://youtu.be/pSfaUxJGp7A?si=lBy5bII68zVhSMKf



Techniques for any context:



- Portfolios (digital or paper)
- Multi-modal activities (audio, visual, acting things out)
- Assignments focused on building community and connection
- Relevant to students' lives (ex. call for pizza)
- Explicit instruction (both cultural and assignment expectations)
- Frequent Feedback and check ins

Gradual Release of Responsibility Teaching Process



- Direct Instruction (minilessons presenting themes and concepts)
- Guided Instruction/Practice (guided practice and modeling)
- Application (students applying learning to authentic situations with my support)
- Independent Work/Assessment (students producing work that illustrates their learning)
- Reflection (metacognitive process to reflect on their learning process)

Pearson, P.D. and Gallagher, B. 1983. “The instruction of reading comprehension.” Contemporary Educational Psychology 8: 317-344.

Culturally Responsive Strategies:

Set up the classroom culture explicitly

Classroom rules and expectations

- Lessons on cultural norms and classroom norms (Can you just get up and go to the bathroom, or do you need to ask first? Are cell phones allowed or not?)
- Students can help create classroom rules with you but you act as their guide

Provide rubrics and feedback to students

- Rubrics are your checklist of what you need to do – different cultures have different expectations
- Explicit instruction of expectations on assignments or activities (ex. formatting an essay)
- Feedback tells them how to improve

Culturally Responsive Strategies:

Use students' experiences to connect to learning and get to know their backgrounds

- Practice making connections – what does this remind you of? How does it connect to real life?
- Share stories

Ask students to compare their culture with American culture

- Thank you notes
- Weddings
- Baby Showers

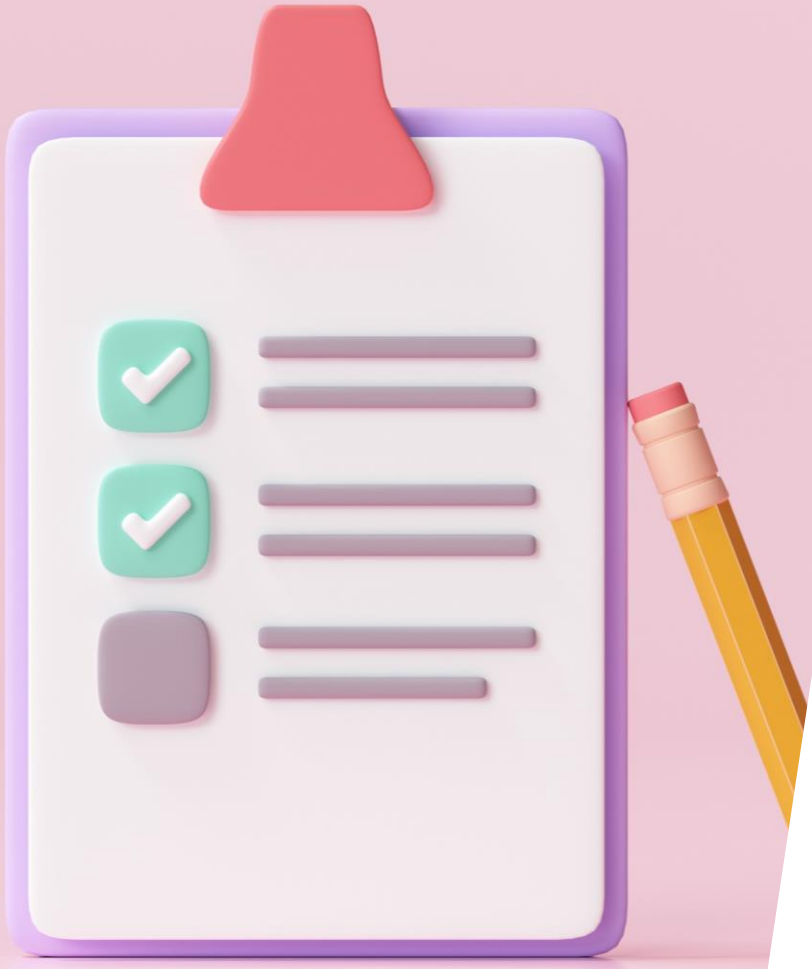
Culturally Responsive Strategies:

- Pair students or groups with other students who speak different languages
- Learn words in students' native languages and language share with each other (ex. Skate: Patinar- Spanish and Patin – Vietnamese)
- Allow students to guide discussions



Culturally Responsive Strategies:

- Allow students opportunities to communicate nonverbally (ex. hold up a red, yellow, green card to show understanding)
- Explicitly recognize differences in cultures – use them in conversations
- Include lessons about acclimating to the US
- Use student surveys and ideas (the information can be used to plan lessons, to learn preferences, and recognizes student interest)



Culturally Responsive Lesson Audit

- **Representation:** Whose experiences, names, and contexts appear in this lesson? Can every student see themselves in it?
- **Prior knowledge:** Does it assume knowledge of a specific culture (holidays, sports, fast-food menus, school systems, banking)? How could I build or check that background?
- **Student voice:** Where do students draw on their own lives, languages, or expertise?
- **Choice and flexibility:** Can students show learning in different ways (writing, speaking, visuals, working alone or with others)?
- **Participation norms:** Does the task assume a particular way of interacting (volunteering, debating, giving peer critique)? What supports exist for students who aren't used to it?

Persistence Project

Replication of the "Persistence Project" at Oakton Community College in Illinois:
(https://catalog.oakton.edu/academic-student-support-services/persistence-project/)

First Three Weeks of Class	Rest of the Semester
• Set clear, high academic standards but not policies that easily doom students. • Learn names and have students learn one another's names. • Give meaningful feedback on an assignment or quiz. • Hold 10-15-minute, one-to-one "get-to-know-you" conferences with each student.	• Acquaint students with resources and opportunities at • Attend at least one cocurricular event with students (or do something social with them!). • Contact students who are struggling in class and offer them help. • Talk with students about future goals

Continue Building Community



- Connect people in as many ways as possible
- Multiple ways to access
- Humanize teaching



Contact Me!

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Thank you!

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