



Bridging Worlds: Cross-Cultural Communication & Academic Belonging in the Adult ESOL Classroom - Part 2

May 1, 2026

Dr. Jennifer Lacroix, *Faculty at Northeastern
University; Owner and Founder of Authenticity:
Cross-Cultural Communication*
lacroixj471@gmail.com

Welcome Back & Take-Home Debrief

Welcome back! Before we do anything else, what did you try in your classroom over the past few weeks? What did you notice?

Purpose:

- ▶ Reconnect the group, surface what happened between sessions, and create continuity with Part 1.

Directions: Chat waterfall

- ▶ Everyone types "I tried ____" and sends simultaneously on a countdown.

Chat waterfall

Popcorn share

Would 2-3 participants be willing to share a culture bump story from between sessions?

- "What happened? Just describe the moment."
- "What did you expect instead?"
- "Did you find anything underneath it?"



Workshop Goals

1. **Participants will design and be ready to implement at least one classroom activity** that integrates SEL and supports cross-cultural communication for adult ESOL learners.
2. **Participants will be able to name and explain two strategies** for teaching academic culture to students with survival needs; including how to read and respond to culturally influenced signals like silence, tone, and timing.

Community Cultural Wealth: Yosso's (2005) Six Capitals

Purpose: Build a shared, asset-based lens for seeing students; directly connect each capital to classroom application and to the workshop's two strategies.

Why this framework matters for these two goals:

One of our goals today is to leave with strategies for teaching academic culture to students with survival needs. Yosso gives us the most important reframe for that work: your students are not arriving empty. They are arriving *loaded*, with knowledge, skills, and forms of intelligence that academic culture often doesn't recognize, reward, or even see.

If we start from deficit, 'what do my students lack?', we build one kind of classroom. If we start from wealth, 'what do my students already know?', we build a completely different one. Today we're building the second kind.

1. Linguistic Capital

The intellectual and social skills developed through communicating in more than one language or style.

Your students who speak Spanish and are learning English aren't halfway to one language. They are fully *operating in two cognitive systems simultaneously*. Students from China or Korea managing three scripts — that's a form of intelligence most monolingual academics don't have. The question isn't 'how do we get them to English?' It's 'how do we make the classroom a place where that bilingual intelligence is an asset, not a liability?'

Classroom connection: Ask students to explain a concept first in their home language, then in English. The process of translation is analysis. It surfaces what they actually understand.

2. **Familial Capital** The cultural knowledge nurtured among family that carries community memory, history, and cultural intuition.

A student from Nicaragua who has been the family's translator since age nine knows things about navigating systems, advocating under pressure, and holding two realities at once that most college graduates don't learn until their thirties. That's not background noise. That's intellectual material.

Classroom connection: Narrative writing assignments that begin with family or community story before moving to academic argument. The personal is the scaffold, not the distraction.

3. Social Capital The networks of people and community resources that provide support and information.

A student from Venezuela who arrived with nothing and built a network that helped her find housing, work, and your program – she did that through social intelligence. She knows how to read relationships, build trust quickly, and mobilize resources. That is a transferable skill we rarely name in academic settings.

Classroom connection: Cooperative learning structures that make social intelligence visible and valued – not just individual performance.

4. Navigational Capital The ability to move through institutions that were not designed for you.

Every student in your classroom has navigated something that was not built for them – a hospital system in a second language, an immigration office, a school that assumed things about them. That navigational skill is exactly what academic institutions demand – and rarely teach. Your students already have it. The question is: do they know it counts?

Classroom connection: Explicitly name when an academic task requires navigational skill. "What you just did – figured out the library database with no instructions – that's navigational capital. That's what researchers do."

5. Resistant Capital The knowledge and skills developed through challenging inequality and keeping dignity intact.

A student from Turkey who pushes back on your characterization of something – not rudely, but firmly – may be exercising a form of resistant capital. They've had to maintain their sense of self in the face of systems that tried to diminish it. That's not a discipline problem. That might be the most academically rigorous thing they do all semester.

Classroom connection: Assign counter-narratives. Ask students to find the version of a story that's missing from the textbook. Resistant capital becomes critical thinking.

6. Aspirational Capital

The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite real barriers — and to pass that orientation to the next generation.

Classroom connection: First-week activity — "Why are you here?" Not as an icebreaker. As a real question, answered in writing, referenced throughout the semester when things get hard.

A student who is working two jobs, sending money to family in Colombia, navigating an immigration process, and still showing up to your class every Tuesday night — that's not just motivation. That's aspirational capital operating at a level most of us will never be asked to sustain. When that student misses a deadline, the story isn't 'lack of commitment.' The story is: *what is this person carrying, and how do I build a classroom that doesn't punish the weight of it?*

Breakout application (10-12 min)

Your task: For each of your two capitals: Name one way this shows up in your students: What does it actually look like in your classroom? Then name one thing you could do to make this capital *visible and valued* in an assignment or activity.

Breakout Rooms:
Groups of 3-4:

Group 1: Capitals 1&2
Group 2: Capitals 3&4
Group 3: Capitals 5&6

What are our strategies?

- 1) Strategy 1: Start from Wealth – Use Yosso's Framework to See What Students Already Know
- 2) What else?

Share out: Whole group

Academic Norms Audit: What Have We Actually Taught?

The Iceberg: What Academic Culture Actually Is

Above the waterline (what we teach explicitly):

- Academic vocabulary
- Essay structure
- Grammar rules
- Citation formats

Below the waterline (what we assume everyone already knows):

- How to disagree with a teacher (or that you *can*)
- When silence means "I don't know" vs. "I'm thinking" vs. "I disagree and won't say so"
- Eye contact norms in authority relationships
- What "participation" means and why it's graded
- The expectation that you advocate for yourself
- The idea that asking questions signals intelligence, not ignorance
- That deadlines are firm, not relational



The distinction: (e.g., deadlines for assignments and plagiarism)

There's a difference between *mentioning* a norm and *teaching* it.

- ▶ **Mentioning it:** 'Deadlines are firm in this class.'
- ▶ **Teaching it:** 'In U.S. academic culture, a deadline means the work is due at that time regardless of circumstances. I know that may be different from what you've experienced. Here's why it works this way — and here's exactly what to do if you can't meet one.'

Teaching also means explaining the *why*; the cultural logic.

- ▶ Plagiarism isn't just a rule. It's rooted in a Western academic value of individual intellectual ownership.
- ▶ That's a *culturally specific* value. Your students from collectivist learning traditions aren't being dishonest; they're operating from a different framework.
- ▶ Teaching the norm means naming that difference directly.

Strategy 2: Make the Invisible Visible – Explicitly Teach Academic Norms, Including the Cultural Logic Behind Them

Each person:

1. Names one academic norm they have *never* explicitly taught
2. Drafts what teaching it, not just mentioning it, would actually look like:
 - a. What would you say?
 - b. What would students practice?
 - c. How would you explain the why?



Breakout Rooms:
Groups of 2 (pair activity)
(6-8 minutes)

Name the connection to cultural signals

Making the invisible visible also means teaching students how to read *you*, and teaching yourself how to read *them*.

- ▶ Silence in your classroom from a student from Korea or China may mean deep respect, or processing time, or face-saving.
- ▶ Silence from a student from Venezuela or Colombia may mean fear of being wrong publicly because in some educational systems, being wrong in front of others carries real social cost.
- ▶ Tone matters too: a Russian student's directness is not rudeness.
- ▶ A Turkish student's formality is not distance.
- ▶ When you teach academic norms, you also name: 'In this classroom, here's what silence means from me, and here's what I'm curious to learn it means from you.'

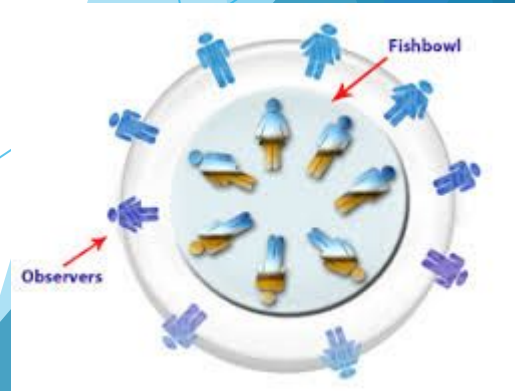
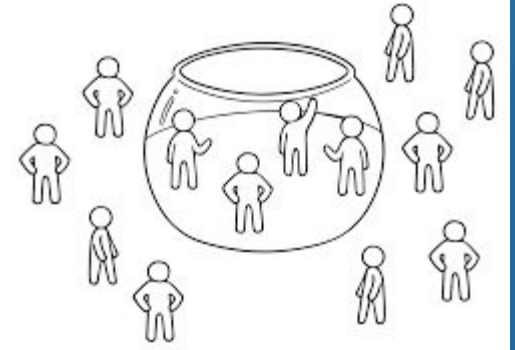
The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the slide, creating a modern, layered effect.

The Dialogic Fishbowl: Setup Guide + Abbreviated Demo

The Dialogic Fishbowl

A *dialogic fishbowl* is a structured discussion where a small inner circle talks while the outer circle observes with a specific task. It's 'dialogic' because the goal is genuine exchange; building on ideas, not performing for the teacher.

For our students, it works because: it reduces whole-class speaking pressure; it gives quieter students, including many from high-context cultures, a bounded, structured entry point; it makes listening a visible, valued job; and it creates a natural container for cross-cultural exchange without anyone being put on the spot."



The setup in six steps (see handout)

1. **Choose a prompt** that has no right answer, connects to students' lives, and is low-stakes enough to enter. Example: *"What does it mean to be a good student where you come from and here?"*
2. **Select the inner circle (half of your total students)**; try to mix language backgrounds if possible; in your first fishbowl, seed with students who have some comfort speaking. The other half of your class sits outside the circle and each student sits directly behind one of their peers, but not facing them.
3. **Give the outer circle a specific written task**; without a task, observers disengage. Options: "Write one question you want to ask when the empty chair opens." / "Notice when someone builds on what another person said; mark that moment." / "Write one word that captures something you heard." The outer circle participants become the "language coaches" and offer constructive feedback at the end of each discussion cycle.
4. **Run the discussion (8–10 min)** do not interject. If silence falls, count to 8 before prompting. If a student shares something emotionally heavy, let it land. Do not rush past it. The teacher needs to sit far outside the circle and say something like, "Just pretend I'm not here."
5. **Trade roles**: After 8-10 minutes of discussion (or longer if needed), pause the discussion. As the students in the inner circle to turn around and receive feedback from their language coaches, students who were sitting behind them in the outer circle listening. Then, the students swap places; the inner circle becomes the outer circle and vice versa. Resume discussion for 8-10 minutes; encourage students to 'piggy-back' off something the first group had discussed and continue to make personal connections.
6. **Always debrief** (even for 3 minutes). Ask: "What did you notice? What question are you still sitting with?" The debrief is where learning consolidates and where you address any emotional moments from the discussion.

Abbreviated live demo

Think about a moment when a student did something in your class that confused you, frustrated you, or just felt off and you couldn't quite put your finger on why.

- Inner circle: "What was it like to be in the middle?"
- Outer circle: "What did you notice from the outside?"

3 Volunteers for inner circle

Pro Tip: Handling the silence after a personal disclosure during a fishbowl

- ▶ If a student shares something real and heavy during a fishbowl and the room goes quiet, don't pivot.
- ▶ Say: *'What [Name] shared is real. I want to give it a moment.'*
- ▶ Then offer a written bridge: *'Take 90 seconds — write one word in response to what you heard, just for yourself.'*
- ▶ After class, follow up privately.
- ▶ What you don't do: move immediately to the next task. That silence says to the student: your experience is an interruption.



The background features a white space on the left and a complex geometric pattern of overlapping translucent blue shapes on the right. The shapes include triangles and polygons in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. The overall effect is modern and professional.

Design It: Your SEL-Integrated Classroom Activity

My Activity Design (see handout)

Individual: Design one classroom activity; Post to chat when ready.

1. **The academic norm or cultural communication pattern I'm addressing:** *(e.g., silence as respect vs. silence as confusion; self-advocacy; what participation means)*
2. **The form of cultural wealth I'm drawing on:** *(Which of Yosso's six capitals does this activity make visible or valued?)*
3. **The SEL connection:** *(How does this activity build belonging, reduce shame, or acknowledge students' whole lives?)*
4. **What students will actually do:** *(Be specific — what's the task, the structure, the timing?)*
5. **The cross-cultural communication move:** *(How does this activity help students — or you — interpret or respond to silence, tone, timing, or other culturally influenced signals?)*
6. **How I'll know it worked:**

Commitments, Closing & Next Steps

Commitments, Closing & Next Steps

Whip-round

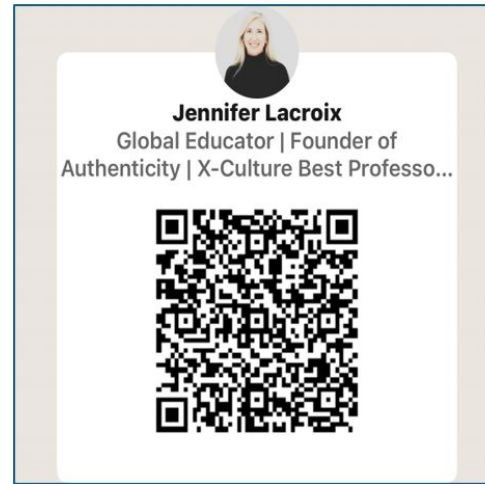
Whip-round:

Each person completes one sentence in an unmuted go-around:

"In the next two weeks, I will ___ and I'll know it worked if ___."

Yosso writes a quiet thesis of everything we've done in both sessions. She argues that the dominant narrative in education positions students from marginalized communities as deficient, as people who need to be fixed, filled, corrected. Her framework says: no. They arrive with wealth. Our job is to build classrooms that can see it.

The academic culture work: the iceberg, the norms audit, the fishbowl, the SEL bridges, all of it is in service of that. You're not just teaching English. You're building a room where students from Venezuela, Brazil, Korea, Russia, Turkey, and Nicaragua can bring what they actually know and use it to go somewhere.



Thank you!

Dr. Jennifer Lacroix
lacroixj471@gmail.com
www.jenlacroix.com



We want your feedback. Please be sure to complete the evaluation →

Learn more about upcoming First Literacy Professional Development Workshops at www.firstliteracy.org/professional-development-workshops/

Follow First Literacy on [Facebook](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [X](#) | [Instagram](#)