

**GLCA: Teaching Writing to Multilingual International Students in a Small Liberal Arts Setting**, College of Wooster, November 1-3, 2019  
Inclusive Classrooms and Student Agency Module, Dr. Tamara Stasik

## **5. The Cultural Backpack- Sharing Your Background and Experiences with students**

### **Faculty/Student Activity**

#### Exercise 1: Cultural Backpack

This is drawn from: Cáceda, Carmen, Myriam Jimena Guerram and Hsiaoping Wu (2017). My cultural backpack activity: A reflective teaching note. *ORTESOL Journal*, Volume 34 ,pp. 81-83. <https://ortesol.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/Publications/Journals/2017/My%20cultural%20backpack%20activity-%20A%20reflective%20teaching%20note%20-%20ORTESOL%20Journal%202017.pdf>

“The backpack is a metaphor of culture being visible and invisible to others, and there is a tendency to see only what is visible”. This activity encourages teachers and students alike to consider their deep culture by identifying objects or artifacts (tangible or images or even drawn) that connect to your values, sense of self, culture, and beliefs.

This activity implicitly demands that the participant define what culture means to them. Not only do they share their “surface” culture—defined as what is visible to any person (e.g., food, or dance)—but they also share their “deep” culture, which is defined as what is typically invisible to others (e.g., beliefs or concept of time). Both kinds of culture have been passed on to every person during their socialization processes (Park, & King, 2003).

#### **Faculty Activity:**

Model the activity by bringing to class or workshop artifacts that you consider to be part of your culture. The artifacts can be real objects, or you can draw them. They can also be actions.

- Eg: the Mikan fruit and the traditional way of peeling it like a flower.
- Eg: a Pisanki Easter Egg showing the custom of drawing on eggs with melted wax and then dipping them into dyes. Traditionally, the designs have symbolic meanings connected with beauty, fertility, rebirth, and life; modern family symbols..
- Eg: a method of showing respect to an elder, etc.

**Student Activity:** Bring in their backpack three objects that they identify as significant to their sense of who they are. During the activity, each student takes turns revealing their item (3-5 minutes), describing its significant details and why they feel connected to that object and what Participants reveal the objects, describing them and telling the story of the associations they have with the object, and how it stands for an important aspect of their life that relates to their identity.

This works well for first days of courses, when ice-breakers are used to get to know each other.