



Who we are

As part of our class, “Exploring Interpretation as a Career,” we learned about cross-cultural communication and professional interpreting. We met with the Parent Community Specialists of Portland Public Schools’ Multilingual Center and learned about the important work done by interpreters, translators, and cultural brokers.

In 2017, we were invited to present at the “Creating Welcoming and Safe Schools” conference at the University of Southern Maine. Social workers and teachers we met there encouraged us to make a brochure about the information in our presentation. They wanted something that could be given to teachers during trainings about how to support students from immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

You are welcome to copy this brochure and use it. We thank the Portland Educational Foundation for a grant to make copies for staff in our district. For a color pdf, contact Jen Lunt at luntje@portlandschools.org.

We hope this information is helpful and inspires you to keep learning with your students!
Sincerely,

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Keep in mind...

None of us are experts and we are all learning all the time. Teachers and school staff don’t need to be perfect and know everything about every culture or every country in order to support their students well.

However, schools are great places for us to learn about each other and we are lucky to live in a place where we have so much diversity. When we make assumptions about each other, we get in to trouble. The more we can learn about our differences and our “deeper” cultural values and backgrounds, the better we will be able to understand each other.

Finally, students want teachers who are always open, who want to get to know what makes us each unique and special, and who are excited to learn more.



Resources we used (and recommend) for learning more:

Teaching Tolerance

www.tolerance.org

Facing History and Ourselves

www.facinghistory.org

EdChange

<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/teachers.html>

Know Your Rights: American Civil Liberties Union

www.aclu.org/know-your-rights

Supporting Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students in Schools

A brochure for teachers and school staff created by multilingual students in Portland, Maine.



All original artwork created by Vianca Espinosa, Deering High School, Class of 2018

8 Questions to Ask about Your School



Fig. 1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

#1: How do you address student needs?

In our class, we learned about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Fig. 1) as a way to think about how people who need interpretation might need support to say what they need. Schools can help students by using this too. The idea is that if someone is missing what they need at one level, they aren't as motivated or focused to do the next level. So if you have a student who has spent a lot of time getting their basic needs (red) met, talking to them about their career goals (green) may not work out well.

#2: How do you explore culture?

We learned about the Iceberg Concept of Culture (Fig. 2) to talk about how people can avoid misunderstandings when interpreting cross-culturally. We talked about the "culture of school" and how it is different from many of the cultures where we grew up. The Iceberg Concept helps people think about deeper culture and not just language, dress, and food. Deep Culture includes things like the "body language" and the "concept of insanity." How does your school explore and talk about this part of everyone's cultural backgrounds?

#3: How clearly are you communicating?

As we learned about the professional standards and legal rights for interpreting, we learned that it is not only the right of families and students to get information accurately communicated — it is also the right of the teachers and schools too. Because of this schools have to do a good job requesting services of professional language interpreters to help them communicate.

#4: How are multilingual students "used"?

As multilingual students, we have all been put in positions where we tried interpreting medical or legal information for our families when we should not have been. We aren't professionally trained interpreters. However, there ARE situations in schools where we can be really helpful and good at bridging gaps. We can be "language buddies" for newcomer students. We can give our opinions about ways to talk to our families. We can provide video explanations in other languages about school events. Schools can use our multilingual and cultural- broker talents in appropriate ways.

#5. How inclusive is your curriculum?

Everyone needs to see themselves represented in what they are learning in school. Schools are always changing how and what they teach. As you look at what you are teaching, are you making sure that it reflects the backgrounds and identities of all students? What narrative and language are you using to talk about students from minority or marginalized groups?

#6. How inclusive are your extracurriculars?

Some families who are new to the U.S. school system do not understand about the value placed on sports, clubs, and other activities in American culture. Students need help explaining this to their families so they understand the different opportunities beyond the permission forms and "robocall" phone announcements. Think about what assumptions you might make about why some students are not as involved in extracurriculars. What are the obstacles they are facing?

#7. How do you help targeted groups?

At times when certain groups are targeted — like immigrants, religious minorities, and groups from certain countries — how do you make sure you are helping them feel safe? Clear reminders like translated "You are welcome here" signs make a difference. Holding community meetings and creating spaces to share can really help too. How and when are all teachers reaching out to these groups of students to support them?

#8. What are you doing to keep learning?

What ways is your school helping teachers learn about their students? Are there times when teachers must learn about the places and cultures where students come from and how they can support them best? Is your school learning from your students?

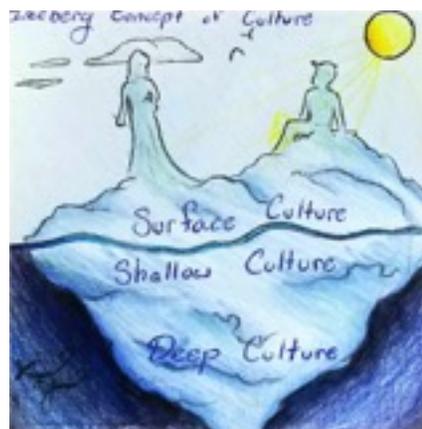


Fig. 2 The Iceberg Concept of Culture

5 Core Ideas for Providing Support for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners

• Meet students where they are.

Use the concept of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Fig 1) when you work with students who are coming from challenging situations or are experiencing culture shock. As a teacher, you can help by understanding that some students may need more help and time.

• Build relationships first, then ask questions.

In order to feel comfortable sharing about who we are and where we come from, we need to have trust. By building relationships, we will learn from each other better. Once a student trusts you, they will usually be excited to answer your questions about what experiences have shaped them in their lives.

• Go deeper than surface level culture.

Sharing our languages, dress, dance, and food is a great way to connect but we have to go the next level. Deeper culture - our beliefs and values - can be where many misunderstandings can happen. This is where conflicts come up too because it is at a deeper emotional level. Schools can help by making it possible for everyone to share about themselves at deeper levels.

• Focus on the language used in schools.

This means everywhere! Keep thinking about how you are teaching new vocabulary to your students in all of their classes. Keep being aware of how students from minority groups have their backgrounds represented in the curriculum and in their teachers. Keep thinking about what is and isn't being translated into other languages for everyone to understand. Keep thinking about whether the words "immigrant," "refugee," and "ELL" are seen positively and what can be done to stop stigmas. Ask students for their input!

• Always be open to learning more.

As multilingual students, we have all spent time feeling confused and not sure how to speak. This is part of how we learned. We know this is not easy and we hope teachers keep learning about students like us.