Centering Students' Cultural Geographies as Content and Process in an Introductory Course

Erin DeMuynck
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Abstract

Studying Cultural Geography can provide opportunities for students to develop nuanced insight into how places are created, perceived, experienced, resisted, and re-made. It can sensitize students to diverse experiences and perspectives. However, teaching complex concepts that highlight the fluidity and messiness of culture in ways that introductory-level students relate to can be challenging. This article presents an approach that takes students' perspectives and experiences seriously as course content and evaluates its outcomes. An analysis of students' reflective writing reveals it can help make Cultural Geography accessible and relevant to introductory-level students and non-majors, while simultaneously offering benefits associated with culturally responsive pedagogy. Exploring students' own experiences through the lens of Cultural Geography and promoting humanizing and collaborative dialogue on these topics can have multiple benefits. It can help students feel validated, which encourages engagement and a sense of belonging in the classroom. It can also inspire curiosity and a sense of discovery as students learn to use Cultural Geography as an approach to understanding the world around them and the people with whom they share it in new ways.

Introduction

I teach at a 2-year access campus that is part of a State University System in the USA. The student body includes a greater percentage of first generation, lower income students, and students who face academic and non-academic challenges than is typical at most comprehensive 4-year universities. Consequently, students enter my courses with a wide range of abilities, challenges, and previous experiences. When I learned I would be teaching Introduction to Cultural Geography, I surveyed the literature, explored available textbooks, and had conversations with colleagues at my institution and instructors at other universities to learn how Cultural Geography is being taught to freshmen and sophomores, most of whom would not go on to take an upper level Geography course. In particular, I was interested in identifying what scholars consider to be the most germane aspects of the broad and complex field of Cultural Geography to be taught at the introductory level and what methods are being used to teach them. My main concern was making sure all of my students would get the most out of a course that has the potential to help them understand the world and the people with whom they share it in more complex ways.

A literature review revealed a disconnect between how Cultural Geography is practiced by academics and school geography (Brown & Smith, 2000; Jo & Milson, 2013; Rawding, 2010; Standard, 2003) and between academic geography and public knowledge (Bonnet, 2003). Rawding (2010) points out, "In a world where academic geographers teach undergraduate geographers who then are trained as geography teachers, it would be reasonable to assume that after a suitable time delay, developments taught in the universities would find their way into the classroom" and explains that "this is far from the case" (p. 12). Winders (2014) explains that introductory-level college students are not necessarily learning academic cultural geography either. This, she suggests, could be due to the complex nature of the discipline, pointing out "the challenge teachers of Cultural Geography face for translating a diverse, seemingly endless body of research into the structure and material used to walk undergraduates through the semester" (Winders, 2014, p. 234). Discussions with colleagues, while not an exhaustive or scientific survey by any means, also demonstrate the existence of the disconnect scholars have identified between academic geography and what is taught to introductory-level students.

What defines Cultural Geography has changed over time and continues to be contested, but a broad objective of the discipline at present is to deepen understanding of multiple complex, contradictory, and ongoing processes, flows, and relations through which cultural spaces come into existence, change over time, and are experienced. This kind of understanding is important in our increasingly global world and diverse communities. It is difficult to develop this kind of understanding via a course focusing on description and explanation of the

cultural world as if it were a set of ready-made things to be memorized for a test. Students miss out on opportunities to hone the kinds of critical thinking skills and to develop the ability to recognize diverse cultural possibilities and see controversial topics from multiple perspectives. I believe teaching introductory courses in a fundamentally different way than how the discipline is practiced by academics represents a missed opportunity for students. Moreover, top-down approaches to teaching geography have been proven to be inappropriate in any student diverse class (Boehm et al. 2018). This article presents an analysis of student work and reflective writing that demonstrates that students at any level can learn Cultural Geography as an academic approach to understanding the world rather than as essentialized content.

I employed the course interventions described in this article based on a belief that Cultural Geography can help students at any level develop skills and knowledge that are critical in our increasingly global world and in our increasingly unequal and divided communities. My goal was to engage a class of 37 freshmen and sophomores at an access institution in learning Cultural Geography as an approach to understanding the world around them. In order to bring complex concepts to life for my students, I focused on bringing their own cultures and cultural places into the classroom as course content in a non-essentialized way and on students' own terms. A benefit of this that hadn't been my initial motivation, but the importance of which quickly became apparent, is related to promoting a sense of belonging in the classroom among students. By centering students' own identities and cultural contexts, not only was I making the course less abstract and more relatable, I was sending a message that what each student brought to the course was valid and valuable. This has benefits for learning within the context of this course and beyond, as will be described in further detail below.

Student Subjectivities

A diverse body of research suggests that instruction should begin with the subjectivities of the students and what they know about their own lives. From the perspective of culturally relevant or culturally responsive pedagogy, this encourages students to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom (Gay, 2010). This is important not only for engagement and learning within a specific course, but also because the greater the sense of belonging, the more likely it is that the student will remain in college (Hausmann et al., 2007; Lehmann, 2007; O'Keefe, 2013). This is especially relevant for the access campus context in which I work, which serves a large number of lower income and first generation college students, which are groups that are more likely to feel alienated in the classroom and who are more likely to leave college before graduating (Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Stephens et al., 2014). Culturally responsive pedagogy begins with

students recognizing that their own backgrounds and cultures can be assets in the classroom, an outcome of which is the development of confidence and positive feelings about one's identity (Gay, 2010). Beyond the benefits of learning how Cultural Geography relates to their lives, students may benefit in terms of their well-being and their persistence in college due to developing a sense of confidence, courage, and belonging (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

In a discussion about designing educational experiences that incorporate student subjectivities, we should also recognize the role of educational experiences in shaping student subjectivities (Dewey, 2008; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2014; Peters, 1966). Both the content and pedagogical process involved in the courses student take can have lasting impacts that go far beyond learning the information covered in the course. For example, Dewey (2008) discusses the impact of top-down, memorization-based pedagogies, suggesting that a memorization approach to learning encourages "docility, receptivity and obedience" (p. 6) in students. Not only does this teaching method circumvent opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, it is considered to have an adverse, miseducative impact (Dewey, 2008; Freire 1998).

Furthermore, Peters (1966) suggests that what makes a person educated rather than simply being well informed is that they understand "the 'reason why' of things" and through this understanding, comes "to care" (pp. 30-31). Peters (1966) also proposes that what students learn should have direct relevance to what students care about. Care may be pre-existing for students, or it may come after classroom learning helps then understand a topic in a more complex way. For example, care may arise from learning to recognize and understand relationships between students' own experiences and broader systems in which they're embedded (McInerney et al., 2011).

Freire (1970) refers to students' self-realization and development of understanding of political, economic, and social structures that shape their lives as conscientization. The development of student's agency is an important aspect of this concept. In this perspective, understanding one's place in the world and relationships between students' own lives and broader structures is seen as a crucial step toward changing the world (Freire, 1988). Cultural Geography is a discipline that lends itself toward conscientization, for example by revealing the ways in which "culture doesn't take place in a vacuum" (Anderson, 2015). Through studying Cultural Geography, students can develop an understanding that existing patterns have causes and are not natural and as such, are not inevitable.

Centering Students' Cultures Through Reflective Writing and Dialogue

While all cultural geographers seek in some way to understand how identity, place, and culture influence and are influenced by each other, the

definition of culture is contested within the field. In this course, we based our discussion of culture on Anderson's (2015) definition, which is, "what people do," and includes, "the material things, the social ideas, the performative practices, and the emotional responses that we participate in, produce, resist, celebrate, deny or ignore" (p. 6). This very broad definition helped students think beyond preconceptions of what culture is and grasp the ways in which culture – what people do – relates to their own lives.

Outside of the academic context, culture tends to be understood as something exotic, or something traditional, something that involves formality or a specific intention. A class discussion during the first week of the semester revealed that for some students, culture was understood as special traditions, foods, and clothing and not everyday life. For some culture was primarily what other people in or from other places had or participated in and something they can closely relate to. Anderson's definition clearly lays out all the ways that culture is part of all of our everyday lives. It helped reinforce for the students that their cultures were going to be important course content and that they were going to be knowledge produces – and not just knowledge consumers – within the classroom.

This broad definition also helped me identify opportunities to make connections between culture as the subject of our course and culturally responsive pedagogy. The following elements of culturally responsive pedagogy, identified by Gay (2010) and in Mezirow et al. (2011), were useful in the course development:

- appreciation of diverse ways of seeing and being in the world;
- learners allowed to be experts on their own cultures;
- feelings of validation and belonging as students' cultures and contributions are acknowledged as valuable;
- classroom relationships that demonstrate caring, connectedness, and collaboration; and
- sensitivity to social justice and equity.

We began considering the diverse ways of seeing and being in the world on the first day of class. I asked students to reflect on our classroom silently for a few minutes – what it meant to them, their experience of being in our classroom, how it made them feel. Then, after asking them to write down a few notes on their reflection, I explained my perspective on and experience of being in the classroom. It was clearly very different from what the students had written, among which there was a diversity of notes written. Some of them had written about being excited to learn or to meet new friends, but many students had written about feeling nervous and anxious. This was an opportunity to validate all students' experiences and feelings and begin building classroom relationships.

After the first day, I continued to use reflection and reflective writing prompts to integrate cultural responsivity into the course. These prompts based

on the day's lecture and often an accompanying reading assignment from Jon Anderson's Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces (2015). Haigh (2001) suggests journals are useful for making students "self-conscious of the development of their learning" (p. 168) and explained that through journaling his students were able to "contextualise themselves and to construct their own understanding (p. 171). The journal prompts that I designed invited students to relate Cultural Geography concepts learned in class to their own experiences and occasionally to reflect on their learning experiences. They were meant to be short responses completed in about five minutes at the end of the class period although I often gave the prompt at the end of one class and asked students to think about it until the following class period when they would be provided time to write.

The practice of reflective journaling offered students an opportunity to begin to take their everyday places and experiences and identify how they relate to Cultural Geography. The open-endedness of the prompts and the short time period provided for writing meant that students were just supposed to get their ideas on the paper – they didn't need to worry about writing style or structure and didn't need to be concerned with identifying "the correct answer." An example of a journal prompt assigned around the middle of the semester following a lecture on Mobilities and examples of student responses are below. By this time in the semester students knew what was expected and needed very little explanation in terms what kind of example I was asking for. Students understood if they correctly applied the concept, any example was fine. Some students relate examples from lecture or assigned readings to their own personal examples, such as in Response 2, below.

Prompt: Apply the practice component of the Mobilities framework to an example from your own life.

Response 1: I decided to attend college close to where I live because I couldn't afford to live in a dorm. Lack of money caused this immobility that some of my high school friends didn't experience. I was disappointed at the time when I made the decision, but I know my restricted mobility now means more mobility later when I have a degree and look for jobs in other places and that makes me hopeful.

Response 2: My daily movement between home and school is easy unless the weather is bad. I slid off the road last winter so now I'm scared driving in the snow. But I'm a U.S. citizen with a driver's license and I'm white so other than hazardous weather and other drivers I don't have much to worry about.

Response 3: When I took the L in Chicago I found it confusing and chaotic and felt out of place and anxious and a little unsafe. I'd never been to Chicago before or taken public transportation so I didn't know what to do. Everyone else looked

as relaxed as they would be sitting in their own house. Some were listening to headphones with their eyes closed. I didn't think about it at the time, but the mobilities approach tells us to ask why. Why are they comfortable and why am I not? Why are they tired?

Through their journaling practice students were able to begin to recognize how experiences they may understand as mundane or "normal" and may not have previously thought a lot about relate to sophisticated Cultural Geography concepts. It also helped them recognize the multiplicity of ways of experiencing place (or movement between places in the case of Mobilities) and understand that their own cultures were valued as an important part of the course. I believe this made it easier to foster sensitivity to social justice and equity. Rather than feeling defensive when confronted with perspectives and experiences they may not have considered previously, students put effort into understanding them because their own perspectives and experiences had already been validated. Dialogue among students enriched this learning.

The key to fruitful dialogue lies in the recognition of and interaction between multiple perspectives and appreciation of a common humanity amid these differences (Rule, 2015). In dialogic interactions, students are required to engage with alternative points of view in ways that challenge and deepen their own understandings of course concepts and their application. This practice not only serves the purpose of engaging students in the learning process as active knowledge creators rather than simply consumers, but it also highlights the critical notion in Cultural Geography that there are multiple legitimate ways of seeing, understanding, and experiencing the world.

Dialogic inquiry not only enriches individuals' knowledge and understanding but also transforms it (Freire, 1970; Wells, 1999). Thus, dialogic learning can only be successful when the participants succeed in creating and maintaining shared understandings, contradictions notwithstanding, of course content and its meaningful applicability to students and their respective cultural worlds. Moreover, students simply learn more when they are actively engaged and guided group dialogues encouraged all students to engage (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Regular small group dialogues were an essential part of the course and focused on applying course concepts to local, national, and global current events and issues. The dialogues were structured and required students to prepare in advance. Students were assigned readings from a variety of sources and asked to summarize the authors' main points, relate readings to a Cultural Geography concept covered in class, and explain their reactions to the articles through their own cultural lenses. Some examples of reading topics included refugee experiences, segregation, and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests. Students worked with the same small group on a near weekly basis. Respectfully listening

to, thinking about, and understanding their classmates' understanding of the assigned readings and how they relate to concepts we have studied in Cultural Geography were stressed as essential to successful participation in this activity.

Analysis of Students' Observations and Experiences of Place

Place is central to the study of Cultural Geography, viewed as a basic element in the constitution of culture and as a basic outcome of cultural processes. Cultural geographers seek to understand culture's influence on place and the ways culture influences experiences of places and everyday life. Cultural Geography students should learn to understand places not as "points or areas on a map, but as integrations of space and time; as spatiotemporal events" (Massey, 2005, p. 130). Places are "constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (Massey, 1994, p. 154).

A culturally responsive approach to Cultural Geography allows and encourages students to put themselves and their own experiences into this picture. It encourages students to consider how their own everyday lives and practices constitute and are constituted by places. In this way, Cultural Geography becomes a lens through which students make sense of themselves and the world around them and a way to validate students' experiences and encourage their engagement in class.

This article began from an assumption that when Cultural Geography is taught as facts to memorize, important learning opportunities are circumvented. For example, it may be less likely to disrupt cultural centric thinking. On the other hand, when it is taught as an approach to understanding the world, students may be more apt to develop an understanding of the multiple ways places are understood and experienced, power relations involved in producing these differences, and possibilities for a more just production of space are important for all students. I argue that cultural geographers at all levels, including students enrolled in 100-level courses and non-majors, should and can engage in this kind of learning. It has the possibilities of interrupting insular and prejudicial views students (and instructors) bring to the classroom and offers new pathways for students.

To foster connections between place and students' lives, I drew on the following elements of place-based learning, discussed in Gruenwald & Smith (2014):

- using local phenomena as a basis for curriculum development;
- an emphasis on learning experiences that encourage students to become knowledge producers;
- a study focus that is driven by students' own experiences, interests, and concerns;
- the role of teachers as co-learners; and

- increasing the permeability of boundaries between inside and outside of the classroom.

With these elements in mind, I designed assignments that guided students in conducting observations and analyses of familiar places and experiences of interest to them. Students were invited to choose a place to observe and assignment instructions explained the steps through which to analyze their observations using a specific Cultural Geography concept we covered in class. For example, for an assignment exploring relationships between nature and culture, students' analyses focused on places ranging from a coffee shop to the campus parking lot and from a corn field to a golf course. Students made insightful connections. For example, the student who observed a coffee shop he visits regularly before school made connections between the grooves on a wooden coffee shop floor where customers stand in line each day, the tired faces and bodies of those in line, including his own, the caffeine that occurs naturally in coffee, and cultural expectations of high levels of human production as well as economic needs. The student who wrote about the golf course made her observations from her back porch and noted that, "although grass and trees indicate nature, they are meticulously designed and maintained, which affects property values of the surrounding homes and how much people are willing to pay to golf there."

For an assignment on transgression and resistance, some of the places students observed and analyzed were a corridor at the mall, the campus library, a fast food restaurant, and a church. The student who observed the mall did so with his male partner while the two of them held hands. He noted that this was outside of the norm in this place and thus could be considered an act of transgression. He explained that his sexual identity means that he is transgressing cultural norms in most places. The student who wrote about the fast food restaurant where she works observed the ways in which, "the counter in the restaurant serves as a border between two sets of cultural orders and expectations" and how it feels to be behind the counter and in front of it in terms of the idea that "the customer is always right." Before students turned in their final essay for each observation and analysis assignment, they took part in a peer review through which they received feedback from their classmates and had opportunities to see several examples of how their classmates had approached the assignment, thus broadening and enhancing their learning. Students whose analyses were somewhat superficial were able to recognize the depth of their classmates work as examples of what to strive for.

For the final observation and analysis assignment, students were not given detailed instructions and a specific concept to use for their analysis as they had been previously in the semester. Rather, students were asked to select any course concept we covered during the semester and design their own small study

that focuses on any aspect of their university or of higher education more broadly. The topic they chose was to be something they have experience with and care about. Students met with me individually for guidance and final approval of their topic and methods but were on their own to complete the work. They used a variety of methods including interviews, observations, and self-reflection. The final projects culminated in poster presentations on the last day of class. The following are a sample of students' poster titles and brief explanation of the author's approach to their topic. The specific course concept students chose to apply in each project is italicized. "The University" was substituted in place of the institution's name for the purpose of this paper.

- The University as a *Liminal Space*
  - o Explored experiences of college as a transition stage between childhood and adulthood
- Diverse *Identities* and Diverse Experiences of College
  - o Discussed the ways that race, class, gender, and sexuality influence students' experiences
- *Resistance* to High Textbook Prices
  - o Identified and evaluated the impacts of several ways students are reacting to high textbook prices and proposed three possibilities for resistance
- A *Mobilities* Perspective of International Students' Experiences
  - o Compared and contrasted several different experiences of being an international student, focusing on aspects relevant to moving and movement
- *Representations* of College Drinking and their Impacts on Students' Attitudes, Actions, and Self-Perceptions
  - o Identified the major messages embedded in the informational posters around campus that focus on educating students about college drinking and explained how these messages influenced students' attitudes about drinking, the actions they took, and their perceptions of themselves as drinkers or non-drinkers
- *Capitalism and Culture*: Impacts of Budget Cuts on our Campus
  - o Identified via interviews with faculty and staff how the material and emotional spaces of the university have been influenced by a series of budget cuts and how this affects student learning

The final presentations were in lieu of an exam and were an opportunity to demonstrate the depth of their understanding of a Cultural Geography and their ability to use it to explore and analyze their topic. In addition to presenting,

students each turned in a written critique of classmates' projects, evaluating their classmates' understanding and application of the Cultural Geography concept each group of chose to focus on for their project. Upon completion of this project, many students gave passionate presentations that reflected an understanding that the existing status quo has a variety of causes and consequences that a Cultural Geography perspective can help illuminate. The notion that existing Cultural Geographies are not natural or inevitable, and thus, can be changed was also represented in presentations.

Results

Following IRB approval, an analysis of student work, including journal reflections, and my observations of in-class discussions revealed that an approach to teaching Cultural Geography that begins with student subjectivities can be successful. It also brought out several overlapping benefits. First, when principles of culturally responsive pedagogy are engaged and dialogic practice is encouraged, Cultural Geography as an approach to understanding the world can be made accessible and relevant to introductory-level students. Students' ability to think of examples from their own lives and relate them to course concepts reveal that students were able to understand the concepts being covered and recognize how Cultural Geography "works" as an approach to seeing the world.

In a classroom with students with an especially wide range of academic backgrounds, skills, and challenges, all students were able to engage and contribute. I observed that it took several weeks for some students to set aside their expectations for what college courses and geography should be like (e.g. lecture-centered classes, maps, and fact memorization). However, by the end of the semester every student had developed the ability to demonstrate understanding and applicability of Cultural Geography theories and concepts in their journal responses and/or observation and analysis assignments at a satisfactory level or better. This is a marked improvement over previous iterations of the course in which I was less intentional about integrating cultural responsivity and place-based activities focusing on students' own cultural experiences, interpretations, and places. While only based on one semester's worth of data, the outcomes suggest that using an approach to teaching Cultural Geography that centers students' subjectivities can be successful in terms of teaching content.

This approach is also helpful in terms of process. Centering students' cultural geographies helped build a sense of belonging and community in the classroom and encouraged students to work together to produce knowledge by fostering more meaningful and empathetic group dialogues. Notably, students became genuinely interested in their classmates' diverse experiences and perspectives, which many of them had previously not considered or had assumed to be equivalent or comparable to their own. One student indicated, "Once we

started talking I didn't want to stop." Another student said, "I'm from the same town as [student] and I didn't expect that we are so different."

In their self-reporting via journal reflections, in particular in their reflections on observation and analysis assignments, students expressed a belief that these activities helped them become better critical thinkers, ask better questions, and/or learn to understand everyday places in more complex ways. For example, the first observation and analysis assignment asked students to observe the cultural norms of a specific place, explore how they are communicated, identify the ways in which they are conformed to and/or resisted, and reflect on their impacts. Following this exercise, students made comments such as, "I didn't notice the cultural norms that exist in [local coffee shop] and how everyone conforms to them so closely until I had to pay attention" and "I'm comfortable in my church, but the same signs and symbols that are normal to me might make someone else uncomfortable."

Additionally, while I did not record attendance numbers, I anecdotally observed a higher rate of attendance this semester than in previous semesters, and I did not observe an attendance drop-off toward the end of the semester, which is something that has occurred previously as students experience end of semester fatigue. I understand the sustained high attendance as both a cause and effect of a more engaged class. At the same time, I also want to acknowledge that the observed increase in student engagement and participation could be due to a large or small degree to the increase in my own excitement level due to trying out a new approach to teaching. Nonetheless, this is important to note as it is not typical for all students to make it through courses with a passing grade on the access campus where I teach. A relatively large percentage of my students work full time, are engaged in care-giving for their children, siblings, or parents, and/or have other time consuming responsibilities.

All of the members of five out of six discussion groups reported via journal reflection a positive response to the experience and noted that their group had become proficient in respectful dialogue by the end of the semester. Students explained that they became friends with the other members in their groups and that the discussions were something they looked forward to. Two members in the sixth group were neutral and one had a negative response, noting that a group member tended to dominate the discussions and made dialogue uncomfortable. I did not become aware of this problem until the end of the semester and will be more vigilant in catching and addressing issues with group dynamics earlier in future semesters. Nonetheless, the framework for and expectation of respectful listening worked very well for five out of six groups. Based on my observations of the level of engagement and student reflections, I believe it encouraged students who might not otherwise interact to get to know one another and feel relatively comfortable talking and learning together. As one student explained, "I'm usually really quiet, but once we were friends we all opened up a lot more." Another

noted, "I didn't dread coming to school." To me, these quotes indicate that building relationships and a level of comfort in the classroom can perhaps be even more important than the content covered. If students dread coming to school, are they engaging and learning?

All members of the same 5 out of 6 discussion groups that reported positive experiences reported via journal reflection that they felt a connection to other group members, had a good experience sharing their perspectives and experiences, and learned from their classmates. Several students expressed interest and surprise at the different ways their classmates related to the same course concept or understood the same article or issue. Students identified that small nuances surfaced in the ways their classmates related course concepts to assigned discussion readings. The discussion group that was less successful at connecting and occasionally struggled with respectful dialogue had one member who would often dismiss his classmates' experiences and interpretations. This made other group members feel uncomfortable and hindered the processes that facilitated the positive energy and learning that occurred in the other groups. While this group was less successful than the other groups at connecting with each other on a deep level through dialogue, they were able to relate course concepts to the assigned current events readings.

In response to a prompt asking how comfortable and valued they felt in class and what they took away from the class, students reported that they:

- felt a sense of belonging in a collaborative learning community;
- understand ways in which Cultural Geography relates to their own life; and
- believe that their contributions were valued and an important part of the class.

Unprompted on the topic of motivation, some students explained that they had experienced an increase in their motivation and desire to put effort into the class between the beginning and end of the semester or were more motivated to put effort into their Cultural Geography course than other courses. Students also mentioned, unprompted, that the learning process was just as useful or more useful for them than the specific content of the course, one noting that "learning to listen to understand without judging is useful in many areas."

Implications

The results of this brief one-semester study indicate that introductory level students can successfully learn Cultural Geography and develop critical thinking skills through a culturally responsive instructional approach that takes student subjectivities and dialogic practice seriously. By centering students' own

cultures in the course, students recognize they can make valuable contributions to collaborative learning, thus encouraging participation, building community, and increasing confidence and motivation. It is likely that focusing on familiar places and cultures can make learning academic Cultural Geography (as opposed to an objective, top-down, and fact-based memorization-style approach that is sometimes used to teach introductory level courses) less intimidating for students, encouraging students who might not otherwise engage on a deep level (or at all) to engage and participate more fully.

Findings also suggest that being asked to pay attention to and critically reflect on their own feelings and those of others may help students develop emotional intelligence and empathy. The opportunity to learn from and with each other and make connections between personal experiences and course concepts together can help students understand diverse ways of seeing and experiencing the world, even, as suggested by student journal entries, among classmates who may have initially appeared on the surface to be quite similar to themselves.

Finally, because it took some students most of the semester to understand and fulfill what was expected of them, not only explaining the expectations, but also thoroughly explaining the motivations behind the use of this pedagogical approach during the first week of class may be useful. This may encourage more students to fully engage earlier in the semester, which would allow them to get even more out of the class. Moreover, transparency is a way to build on the culturally responsivity by offering additional respect to students as important members of the classroom community. Instructors using the teaching approach discussed in this article should fully disclose as much as possible about expectations, how students they can meet them, and the purposes for which they are being asked to meet them.

Discussion

Students come to class with preconceived ideas, some that may be cultural centric or discriminatory. I believe this necessitates a pedagogical approach that gently encourages students to begin to see cultural places and practices and contemporary issues through multiple perspectives and invites them to critically examine their own preconceived ideas. This can be accomplished best through an approach that supports and validates students, thus avoiding humiliation. The approach described here is one way of recognizing and validating students' prior experiences and ways of seeing and being in the world while also taking a deep dive into the origins and consequences of these ideas', worldviews', and experiences' origins and consequences. This culturally responsive approach helps students develop a sense of belonging and of being valued in the classroom while helping students broaden and deepen their understanding of their own cultures and the cultures of others.

Through the study of Cultural Geography, students can learn knowledge and skills that are particularly useful in their increasingly diverse and interconnected communities, workplaces, and world. Access to this kind of learning is important for introductory-level students and non-majors who may not have an opportunity to take the kind of upper-level courses that that more often promote critical engagement with the cultural world. This can contribute to increased cross-cultural understanding, which will not only be helpful in students' careers, but can also enhance civic engagement and encourage peace[1]. However, attaining this result necessitates student engagement with ideas and issues they may not have previously considered at all or beyond a superficial level. Understanding familiar places and cultures in new ways through the lens of Cultural Geography before or concurrent with applying cultural geographic concepts to less familiar places, experiences, and issues can be a useful method for teaching introductory-level students.

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[1] At the K-12 level, Powerful Geography is designed to encourage similar, albeit broader, processes and outcomes. Powerful Geography is a framework for new K-12 Geography standards based on a bottom-up approach that considers the unique aspirations, needs, and contexts of each state, school district, and individual student (see Boehm et al. 2018 and www.powerfulgeography.org).

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Erin DeMuynck is an Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh – Fox Cities Campus. Her recent book is *Farmers' Markets in the Green Entrepreneurial City: From Urban Redevelopment Planning to Lifestyle Activism.*