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2D1. "You Can Be a Bridge": Toward Cultural Citizenship in Elementary Classrooms

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**“You can be a bridge”:
Toward cultural citizenship
in elementary classrooms**

Dr. Noreen Naseem Rodríguez
Iowa State University

Defining Asian American

- My positionality as a teacher/researcher
- Not just a racial category (1980 Census)
- Panethnic terms mask incredible diversity in class, language, culture, religion, immigration, and more (Espiritu, 1992)
- Ethnic vs. racial self-identification
- Sociopolitical history
- Captures similar historical experiences and contemporary issues
- Political-racial identifier - return to the roots of the movement (Philip & Curammeng, 2015)



Asian American Citizenship

- Distinct disenfranchisement on the basis of citizenship
 - Naturalization Act of 1870: “Aliens ineligible to citizenship”
 - Legislation crafted specifically to exclude Asian entry over time (Page Act of 1875, Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, “Asiatic Barred Zone” in Immigration Act of 1924)
- Asians viewed as racially unassimilable
- Denial of many basic rights (public schooling, testifying as witnesses in court, owning property, marrying outside of race)

Asian American History in Schools

- Communities of color generally absent from history/social studies curriculum except when relevant to Anglo-European experiences or actions (Cornbleth, 1997; Wills, 2001)
- Asian Americans especially invisible in dominant narrative of history (An, 2016; Heilig, Brown & Brown, 2012; Pang, 2006)
 - Chinese in the 1800s (railroad, Chinese exclusion)
 - Japanese American incarceration during World War II
- Elementary focus on holidays continues to exoticize Asians/Asian Americans and situate them as foreign others (Hartlep & Scott, 2016; Pang, Colvin, Tran & Barba, 1992)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

— — —

- Resistance to oppressive aspects of society to foster societal & individual transformation
- Racism as normal part of U.S. society that permeates every aspect of social life (Delgado, 2013)
- In education, CRT can deepen understanding of educational barriers faced by people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2002)

Asian Critical Race Theory

- Call for Asian American legal scholarship (Chang, 1993) to address issues of discrimination unique to Asian Americans
- AsianCrit in education centers racial realities at the core of the Asian American educational experience (Museus, 2014)
 - (Re)Constructive History
 - Story, Theory & Praxis

Instrumental Qualitative Case Study

Spring 2016
Major city in Texas
Large urban school district

Three veteran Asian American teachers willing to diverge from traditional elementary social studies curriculum

- ELYSE
- KRISHNAN
- VIRGINIA

Data Sources: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, teacher and student artifacts

Teacher Participants: Professional Experience

Pseudonym	Grade(s)/ Subject (s) Taught	Years Teaching	Degrees/Teacher Preparation
Elyse Huynh	3rd Grade, All Subjects	8	B.A. in Sociology, Post-baccalaureate in Elementary Education
Krishnan Kamath	3rd & 5th Grade Spanish Language Arts & Social Studies	6	B.A.in Architecture Studies, Texas Teaching Fellows
Virginia Ye	2nd Grade, All Subjects	10	B.S. in Elementary Education, M.Ed. in Language & Literacy

Teacher Participants: Asian American Intra-Group Diversity

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Birthplace	Immigrant Generation	Languages Spoken	Religion
Elyse Huynh	Vietnamese American	Germany	1.5	English, Vietnamese	Christian
Krishnan Kamath	Indian American	Kenya	1.5	English, Hindi, Gujarati, Spanish	Hindu/Jain
Virginia Ye	Chinese American	U.S. (Texas)	2	English, Cantonese	Southern Baptist

FINDINGS

- (Re)Defining Asian American
- (Re)Defining What It Means to be an American (citizen)
- ***Promoting Cultural Citizenship***



Cultural Citizenship

- Process of “claiming membership in, and remaking, America” (Rosaldo, 1997)
- Emphasizes the agency of marginalized groups in establishing and asserting human, social, and cultural rights to enfranchise themselves (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Kang, 2010)
- Distinct from traditional discourses of “kinds of citizen” that focus on formal processes of civic action (following rules, voting)
- Initially focused on Latinx populations but has expanded to other groups, limited use in education

Promoting Cultural Citizenship

Aspects of cultural citizenship (Rosaldo, 1997) present in the three teachers' enactment of Asian American histories:

1. Presenting difference as a resource
2. Recognizing citizen construction as dynamic
3. Including the voices, experiences, and perspectives of students of color
4. Speaking the language of rights and agency

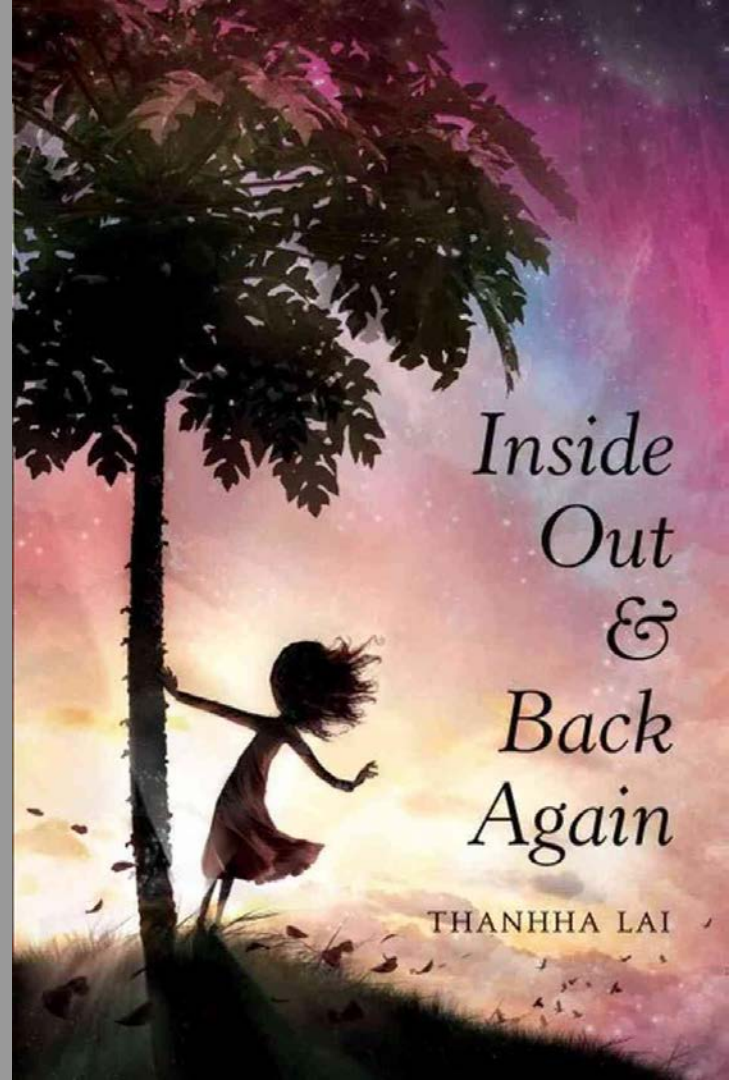
Promoting Cultural Citizenship

PRESENTING DIFFERENCE
AS A RESOURCE, NOT A THREAT
(Flores & Benmayor, 1997)

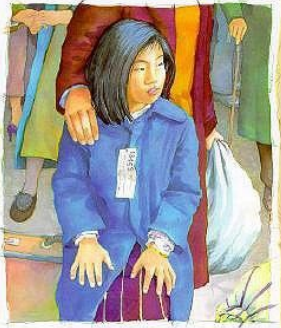
Cultural citizenship is
“the right to be different
and to belong in a
participatory democratic
sense... even when such
differences... potentially
could be used to make
certain people less equal
or inferior to others”
(Rosaldo, 1994, p. 402)

I definitely wanted to open their minds to people who are immigrants, or people who don't know English very well... helping them understand that the norms are different in different cultures. And with kids, they've only been alive for either one or nine years. Sometimes **they don't realize they have norms** until they've been taken out of their norms... **You learn about yourself when you read or learn about someone else's experience.**

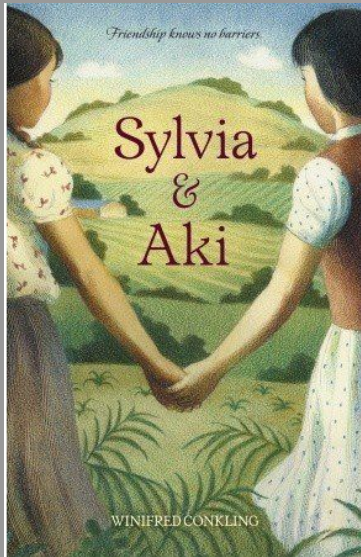
ELYSE



the bracelet



Yoshiko Uchida · Joanna Yardley



If you're purposely putting a bunch of words together and saying that that's part of a language, that's pretty much like **making fun of another language**... when I was little and people would find out that I was Chinese, they would just say a bunch of random words to me that didn't make sense, they weren't even real Chinese words, and **that was very hurtful because my language is important to me**... So can we try to say (the Japanese phrase) correctly? That's us trying to learn to say words correctly. Same with Spanish, when I'm trying to learn Spanish, I'm going to try my best to say it correctly. **So we can be respectful.**

VIRGINIA

Promoting Cultural Citizenship

PRESENTING DIFFERENCE
AS A RESOURCE, NOT A THREAT
(Flores & Benmayor, 1997)

- Deliberate emphasis on culturally *and* linguistically diverse groups in social studies curriculum
 - Develop historical empathy toward the Other to broaden understandings of diverse citizens
 - Drew on own experiences as the Other to foster student empathy
-

Promoting Cultural Citizenship

RECOGNIZING CITIZEN CONSTRUCTION AS DYNAMIC
(Rosaldo, 1997)

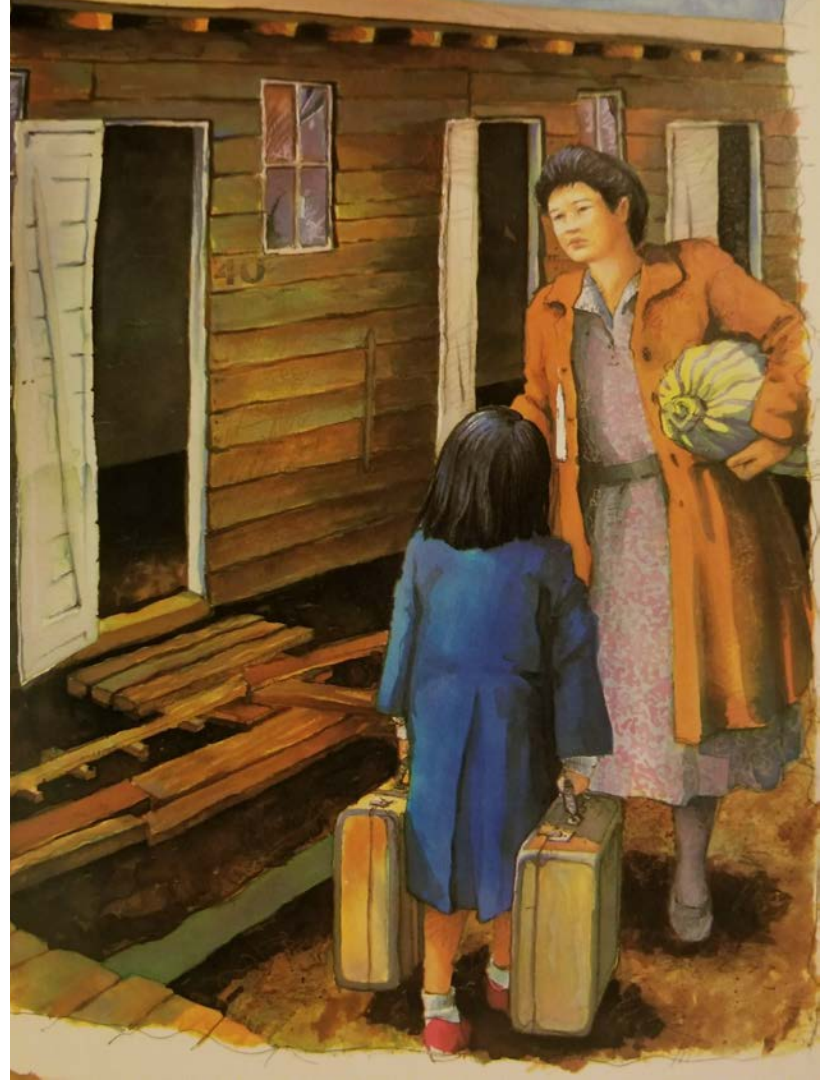
Respect as a defining demand of cultural citizenship, which is an ongoing, contested and urgent process

- Addressing the roles of (dis)respect and dehumanization in lessons on Japanese American incarceration

*San Pedro Small Center
Administration Office
March 29, 1945
Santa Anita, California
April 30, 1945*

*Dear Mrs. Reed:
I hope you will forgive me
for not writing to you long, but for
not writing to you now.
How is Mrs. Reed?
I have no family left, my
wife and two children, as I told
you, and now I am alone. I
have no meals, not even bread.
I have no food, not even breakfast
from 6:00 to 7:00, lunch at 7:30
to 12:00, and dinner at 4:30 to 5:00.
The food is so poor, but delicious
(I did not have it, but I see
the dishes on the table and
there are many looks and smiles
in the kitchen. I love to see
the children and the women. I
love to see the children. I love
to have a few and a few months
brother, and I will daily, and I will
out my barracks, about three times
a week, and I will see the
clothes. There is really nothing
I may do in the afternoon, but I
will enjoy playing a few
with a softball. There is a
I have many books, and I will
or write letters. I will
between 7:30 to 10:00 P.M. all
could be out by 10:00 in each
barracks.*

“A dark, dirty horse stall
that still smelled of horses.
And the linoleum laid over
the dirt was littered with
wood shavings, nails, dust,
and dead bugs”
(Uchida, 1996, p. 17)



Promoting Cultural Citizenship

RECOGNIZING CITIZEN
CONSTRUCTION AS DYNAMIC
(Rosaldo, 1997)

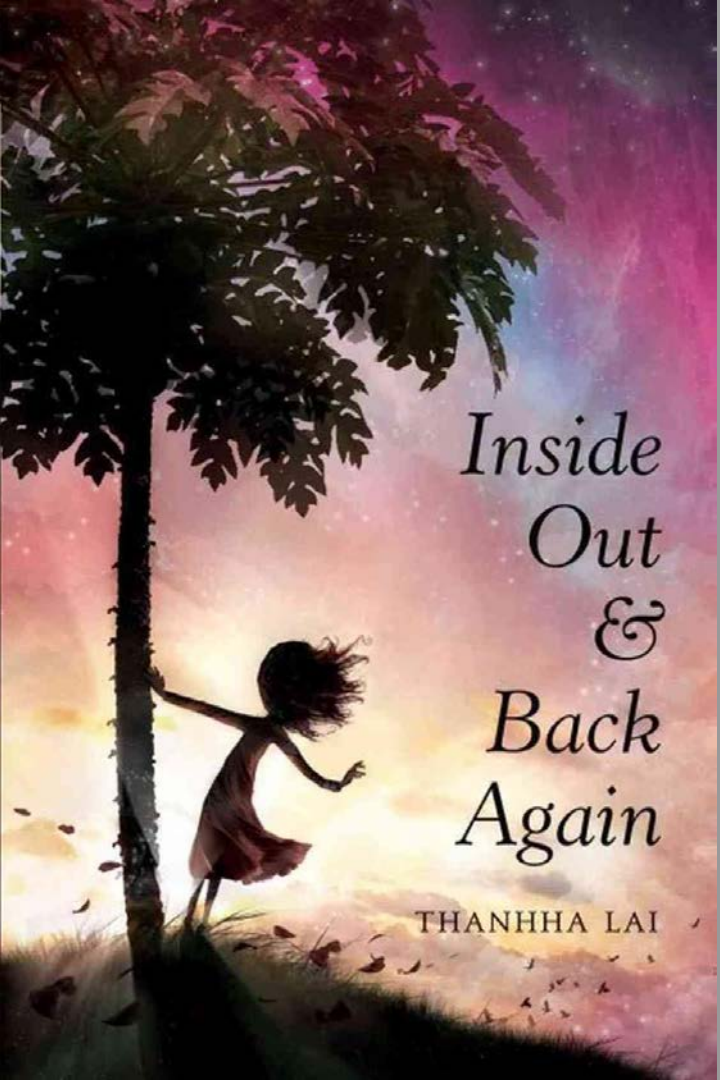
- Highlighted that Japanese Americans were indeed American citizens who were denied their fundamental civic rights
- Lessons on immigration: Shared stories of own immigrant experiences, revealing themselves as both immigrants *and* citizens, disrupting normative depictions of citizen

Promoting Cultural Citizenship

INCLUDING THE VOICES,
EXPERIENCES, AND
PERSPECTIVES OF
STUDENTS OF COLOR

- Selection of Asian American children's literature with Asian American child narrators
- Brought family artifacts as primary sources to supplement texts





When my mom came here, she had an accent and **people thought she was dumb.**

SOFIA, Elyse's Student

I think that the quieter kids like Sofia connect in the sense that **they empathize with being different** or the **cultural struggles**, but just aren't ready to talk about it and share and have the attention on them.

ELYSE

Promoting Cultural Citizenship

INCLUDING THE VOICES,
EXPERIENCES, AND
PERSPECTIVES OF
STUDENTS OF COLOR

- Elyse's descriptions of her own family's journey to the U.S. created moments for her students to share their families' stories and experiences related to culture, discrimination, acceptance, and civicism
- Beyond traditional assimilation stories with a happy ending -
assimilation isn't pretty

Promoting Cultural Citizenship

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE
OF RIGHTS AND AGENCY
(Rosaldo, 1997)

Respect as a defining demand of cultural citizenship, which is an ongoing, contested and urgent process

- Presenting diverse representations of civic identity and civic agency



You might not be able to go to the voting booth and vote, but **you can use your words**. You can make posters, you can make signs, you can write notes, you can write letters - those are all things that you *can* do. What I want you to realize is that **you have a voice and you can say something** about all of these things that **you see are unfair**.

VIRGINIA

Centering Asian American Perspectives and Histories

Using more inclusive
approaches to elementary
citizenship education

- Reveal racism and discrimination in the past *and* present beyond the Black/white binary
- Embody agency and broader representations of what it means to be American (citizen)
- Interrogate student misconceptions about *who* is citizen and *what* citizens do



Counterstorytelling as Praxis: Toward Cultural Citizenship Education

(Solorzano & Yosso, 2002)

- Counternarratives disrupt the multiple conditions and realities of oppression
 - Can lead to transformative understandings of the past and present
 - Place marginalized experiences at the fore rather than as a side note or afterthought
-

Implications for Iowa Classrooms

Asian Americans in Iowa

2000: 1.25% (36,635)

2010: 1.74% (53,094)

2016: 2.5% (78,368)

- Citizenship is more than following rules and voting
- Not all groups have equal access to citizenship and students need to see an array of models of *who* can be citizen and *what* citizens can do
- Students are increasing in diversity (in Iowa and nationally) but teacher diversity is not keeping pace - how can you represent *all* of your students in your instructional resources?

Implications for Teacher Educators

Teach citizenship beyond
“personally responsible”
citizens (Westheimer &
Kahne, 2004)

- Need to infuse historical examples of (in)justice and agency into all classes
- Social studies methods: critical historical inquiry projects and teaching difficult histories
- Collaborate with history and sociology departments, museums, and community organizations to provide ~~an~~ array of diverse local engagement & resources