

Yup'ik Culture Tree

SURFACE CULTURE (Leaves & Branches)

- Food, clothing, celebrations, Yuraq, Yugtun Language
- Easy to observe and easy to misunderstand

SHALLOW CULTURE (Trunk & Upper Roots)

- Eye contact, personal space, body language
- Concepts of time, communication style

DEEP CULTURE (Roots)

- Core beliefs, worldview, spirituality, connection to nature and animals
- Notions of identity, family structure
- Cultural values, storytelling, traditional teachings and practices
- Subconscious, deeply ingrained

How to Apply the Culture Tree in Your Practice

1. Move Beyond Surface Culture

- Celebrate surface elements (e.g. cultural foods, celebrations), but don't stop there.
- Connect these elements to deeper cultural meaning.

2. Build Awareness of Shallow Culture

- Learn about different **communication norms** (e.g. eye contact, silence, tone).
- **Validate diverse behavior patterns** instead of labeling them as misbehavior.
- Use **classroom norms** that are flexible and inclusive.

3. Engage with Deep Culture

- Build **authentic relationships** with students and families.
- Ask reflective questions like:

“How do my students’ cultural values shape how they learn?”

- Design instruction that connects with **students’ identity and experiences.**

Instructional Strategies Aligned with the Culture Tree

Strategy	Culture Tree Level	Description
Storytelling & Oral Traditions	Deep	Honors cultural knowledge systems
Cooperative Learning	Shallow	Supports cultures valuing collaboration
Scaffolding Academic Yugtun Language	Surface → Deep	Helps bridge students’ home language to school language. For example, using students’ Yup’ik name.
Cultural Inquiry Projects	All Levels	Lets students explore and present their cultural backgrounds

Final Thought:

Culturally responsive teaching is not about celebrating differences once a month—it’s about making Yup’ik culture central to learning, identity, and connection every day. The Culture Tree helps us do that intentionally.

*****If you have questions about any of these concepts, always consult with local Elders, culture bearers, Yup’ik teachers, or parents.*****