IIUM EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING

editors

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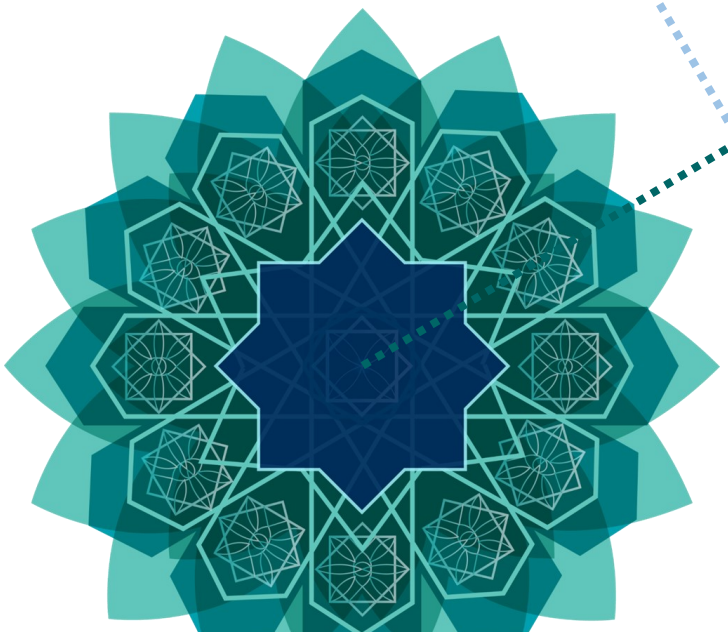
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

IIUM EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING

CENTRE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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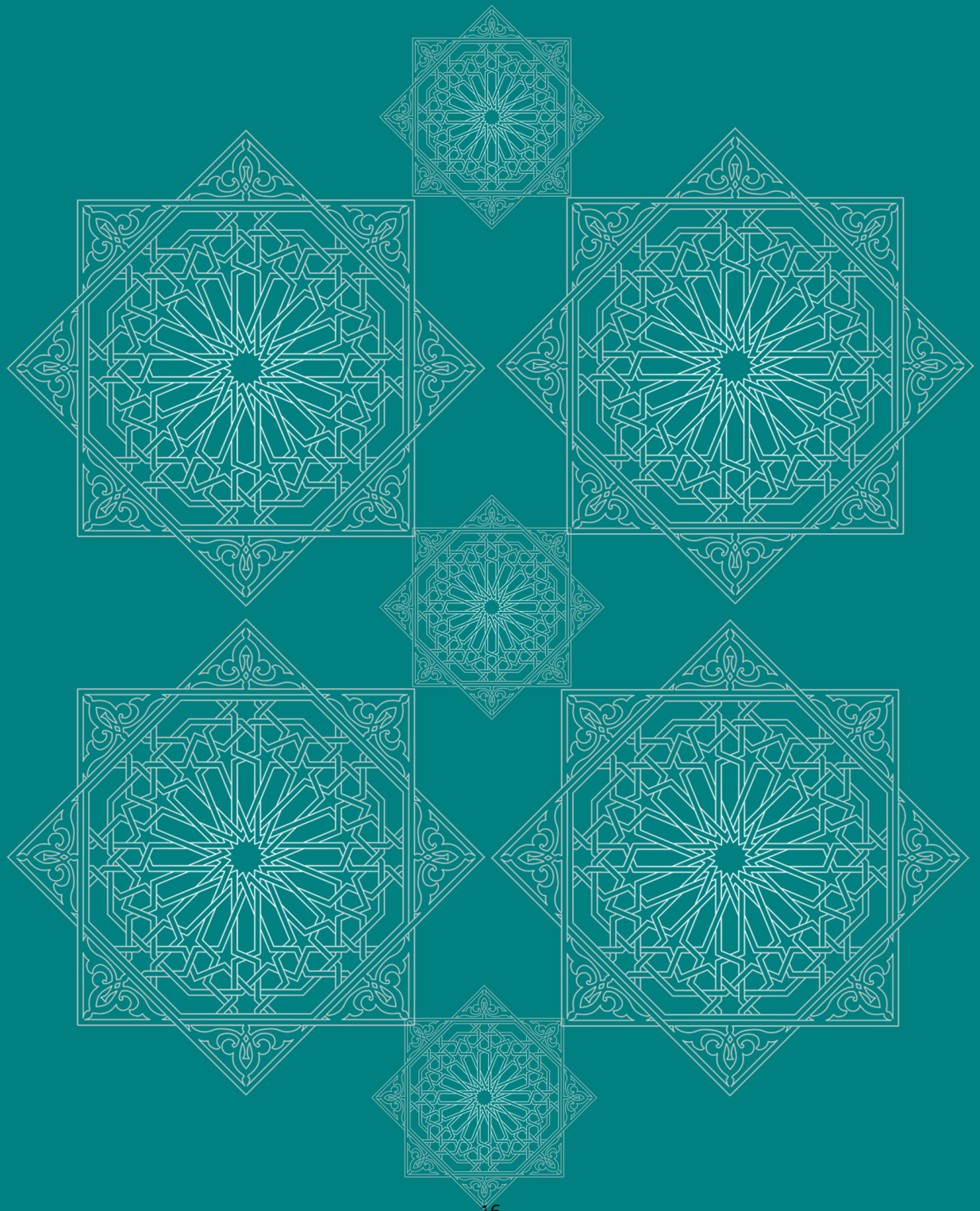

ADAPTING TO REMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Siti Zubaidah Anuar

The Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning is launched to ensure the continuation of teaching and learning despite the COVID-19 pandemic. For lecturers, teaching online might not be the preferred mode of teaching that they want to offer students. However, under the circumstances, everybody has to teach from a distance. Just like FAQs, the question asked the most is, "Are we ready?" The only answer is, "We have to be." This section is to help lecturers to set the motion ready by giving guidelines from a culturally responsive teaching (CRT) perspective. This can be CRT-applied in the online classroom setting (synchronously or asynchronously).

CRT allows for a fluid student-lecturer relationship, where both sides can interact with one another by building a dynamic interpersonal relationship through online learning. Lecturers are advised not to conduct a one-way lecture online (synchronously via Zoom/Google Meet). Instead, they should use the online video conference to have a more meaningful discussion, a two-way-communication that allows students opportunities to ask questions and seek clarification. The class can be broken into sessions that will not burden the students' use of internet data.

Since the situation disallows for a physical meeting to happen, the fluidity of online learning communication can be harnessed to create the connectedness between lecturers and students. Collaborative learning which leads to students being responsible for one another, should be encouraged. Just like the face-to-face (F2F) classroom, students are expected to abide by set rules and to uphold values practiced in F2F classroom. At the IIUM, it is a norm to start a class with the recitation of *Surah Al Fatihah.* The same should be continued in the online meeting platform especially video meetings (Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Webex etc).

Students should also be reminded to respect each other by agreeing to "a set of rules" that is customised for each section or classroom. For example, when typing answers in an online forum, they should use full forms of spelling instead of online chat abbreviations such as "BRB" for Be right back, "TTYL" Talk to you later, "OFC" Of course, "AAF" As a matter of fact and hundreds more. They have to agree that these abbreviations are not suitable to be used in an online formal classroom setting, whether synchronous or asynchronous. The use of text abbreviations would be seen as disrespectful to the lecturers and other students. Instead, proper usage of language must be highlighted in the academic setting, even if it is online. They also should agree that the use of emojis to express feelings or opinions are not suitable for an online class. Students should also be aware that their choice of words and reactions demonstrate that they respect the online space they are sharing with others.

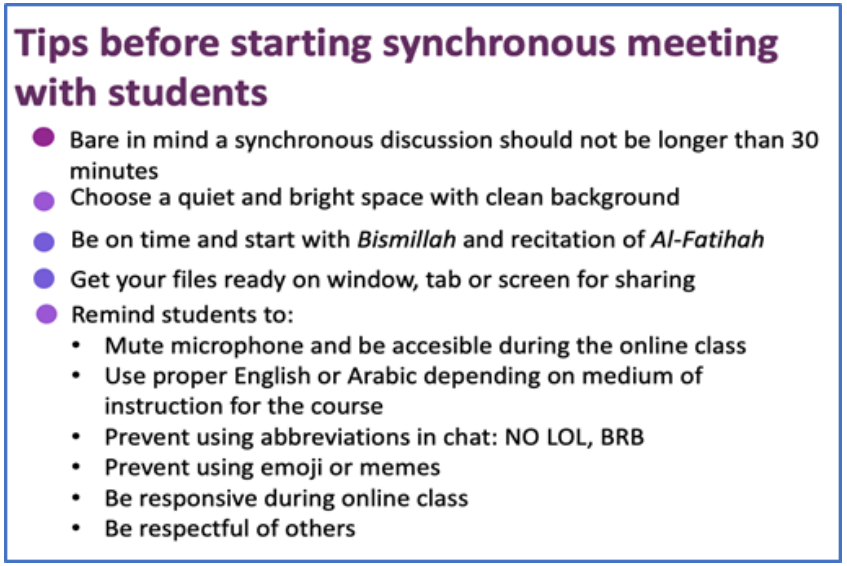

Figure 21. Tips for synchronous meeting with students

Students have to be told what is expected from them during online sessions. Being active and responsive to questions during synchronous classes is a form of respect to the lecturers and lets the lecturers know that they are paying attention to the session.

Students also should know that they are given the voice in the online classroom. They should be encouraged to let us know if and when they have issues with the internet connection that they have to be excused from the online meeting. Students should be encouraged to be active in online classroom discussions. In some cases, we may be surprised that students who appear as introverts in a face to face classroom setting can actually be more active in an online discussion because they do not have the fear of 'talking in public' as in a physical setting. In the "set of rules" that we give, it should be outlined how students can interact with each other; they have to pay attention to the language used to interrupt, give opinions or ask questions effectively. Taking turns should be encouraged. It is also effective for us to call out the student's name to answer a question in an online meeting/discussion. In Google Meet for example, we are not able to see the student who speaks when we are sharing the screen. In this case, it is good if the students are told in the "set of rules" to call out their own names before asking or answering questions. "*Ahmad here, Professor, is it possible if* …." This way, the discussion will be more systematically conducted. Alternatively, we could pose the question first and call the name of the student to answer. In its own unique way, students will have the feeling of connectedness with us. However, for a meeting platform such as Zoom, we can actually see the material we are sharing on our screen and the student asking questions simultaneously on the screen. So, it's just a matter of knowing the conferencing app being used and its features.

Since most students are located in their first space (homes), they are close to the family and the home culture - the attitudes, the home values, and the traditions. It is good for us in the first few meetings to get to know the students' cultural backgrounds. We should also share our own cultural background which will allow the students to get to know us better. After all, we are sharing the virtual space together. The google classroom, iTa'LeEM or any other platform are considered as shared platforms where we meet, communicate, and get connected. Something as simple as talking about where our workstation is in the part of the house will get the students comfortable about sharing their own learning station situation. This is when the lecturer would find out more about the students' background. Some students may be the only child studying in the house or some might have to share the same laptop with their other siblings, whilst some might need longer time to adjust to online learning and some might not have a proper space to focus on both synchronous and asynchronous materials shared by the lecturers. This is to reiterate the importance of a fluid lecturer-student relationship that will lead to a more dynamic online connectedness.

Basically, ice-breaking questions can help build rapport between lecturers and students in the first few online classes.

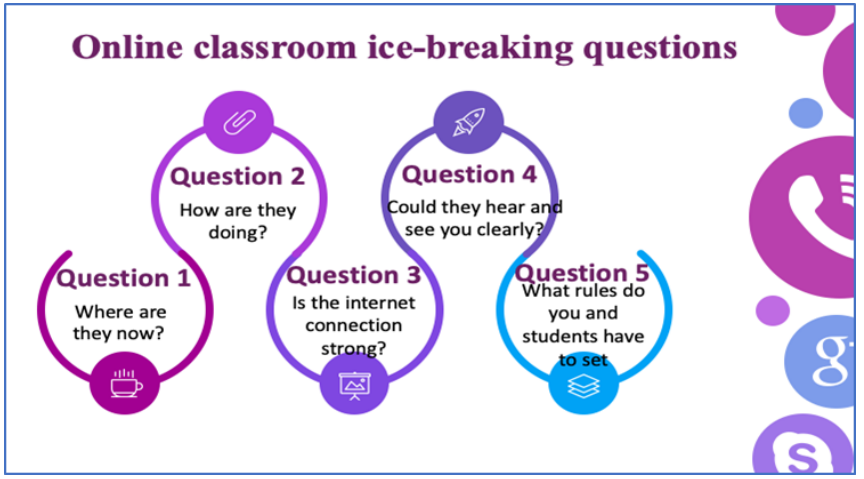

Figure 22. Online classroom ice-breaking questions

CRT has a set of principles that we can transform as guidelines to make us better online teachers during ERTL (Gay, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Villegas et al., 2002.) We need to have that sociocultural consciousness of our students and ourselves. Understanding our own situation will help us identify our strengths and challenges. Do we even have the basic skills to use an online platform? Do we have a support system at the kulliyyah or the department level? Do we have someone to turn to when we could not set time for an online google quiz for our students? The best way is to be engaged with experts from the University who could assist us in some areas of operating online

teaching.

Being reflective of our own work culture at home is another aspect of CRT that we need to look at. As lecturers, our core business is teaching, and we need to set up a space where we are comfortable to conduct synchronous online classroom. We need a quiet setting with clear background and minimum noises from the environment. It is good to have our own corner where there is enough brightness for the students to view us clearly during online meetings or when we are recording our lectures. We also need to make sure that our internet connection is stable, and if there is a need, an upgrade to the data is encouraged. The students need to know that we are concerned about their education and we are doing the best we can from a distance.

It is important to know our students' geographical settings. Some will be on campus and some will be off campus (in their hometowns for local students or back in their own countries for international students). Then, the lecturers have to identify the time zone of the students. If there is an issue of different time zones, then the lecturers and other students have to agree to work on a more conducive time for everyone before conducting a synchronous online session. Considering all these factors demonstrate the lecturers' sensitivity towards the students' diverse needs. This leads us to accepting the differences in the students' backgrounds. For this principle of CRT, we also need to find out the students' learning styles. Most of our students are not used to a full online learning class therefore, they might be struggling with the the online platforms used. That is why is it pivotal for the lecturers to find a common ground, a platform which everyone is comfortable with or able to use. As found in the survey conducted by IIUM, some students have requested for the University to give them some training on the use of online learning. Lecturers can assure the students that most of the platforms they use are user-friendly and they will learn to be effective users as they use them more and more. The lecturers have to give time for students to cope with the new normal. In the first few meetings, the lecturers should be able to see the communication patterns and difficulties the students might face. In this situation, the lecturers could share tutorials on how to use the platform and its functions by sharing short videos on the how -to.

That leads us to the third principle of CRT which is useful for online classroom, lecturers as social agents. Lecturers should encourage their students to expand their experience and knowledge and relate to what is close to the current situation. Discussion topics can be geared towards the current situation; for instance, how to help solve unemployment issues post-pandemic or how to live a sustainable lifestyle with the pandemic. As social agents, lecturers have to instigate students to be more independent in finding their own resources. To succeed, the students have to be able to manage their own time to study and help the family. They have to be encouraged to think more critically. Give the students topics that are closer to home so that they can conduct research through observations and report the findings. For social sciences, adaptation to topics can be managed rather easily. Students who have to spend time at home and follow the online lessons will appreciate it if the lecturers give them tasks that allow them to use their experiences and knowledge accumulated at home to be shared creatively and critically in the course. This will give a sense of empowerment to the students where they feel that they are taking charge of their education.

Another principle of CRT is understanding students' personal lives. By doing this, lecturers would understand the students' online classroom behaviour so that lecturers can respond to students' cultural needs and to minimise conflicts that might occur due to misunderstanding. Additionally, students tend to expect immediate feedback when tasks are completed online. It is important to inform students that they should allow lecturers at least 24 hours to give feedback to tasks turned in online.

The last principle of CRT is about being caring. This caring relationship has to be reciprocal to be effective. Students care about the lecturers' well-being and vice versa. Being caring is about moral imperative, social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity (Gay, 2002). By being caring, the students will be affected positively. This is in line with the role of a *murabbi*. Many has argued the effectiveness of a lecturer to perform his or her duty as a *murabbi* if he or she has no face-to- face contact with the students. Having to discuss and teach online is the new F2F interaction. As mentioned earlier, with internet connectivity, we can be accessible anytime and anywhere. We have to make ourselves reachable as much as possible for our students. By demonstrating that we care for the students' well-being, we are humanising online education. Being caring reminds us that there are real persons on the other side of the line.

Principles of being culturally responsive during ERTL might be seen as a less significant matter to consider. However, if we look at the situation that lecturers are facing, being responsive to each other's cultural needs is important to make ERTL more effective for both parties. The ERTL journey does not have to be a lonely one. Lecturers need to be engaged on active discussions with colleagues regarding online classes. Be connected!

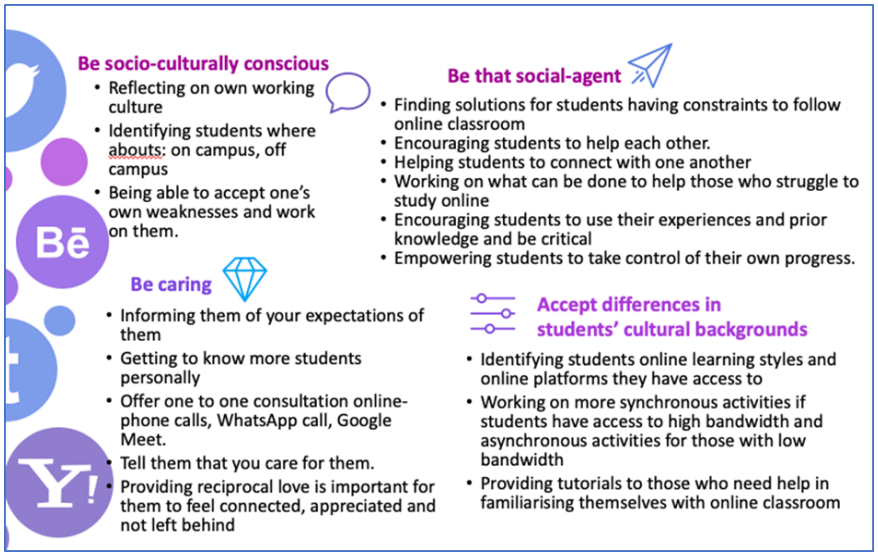

Figure 23. Principles of culturally responsive teaching

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