# The CAFE Espresso:
# A short read on a robust topic



## Ubuntu pedagogy:
## Humanizing the learning environment

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**"Ubuntu pedagogy"**
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### The basics

Longwood's own Dr. Alecia Blackwood gave the keynote speech for the pre-Spring workshop series, focused on the pan-African concept of ubuntu and its role in teaching. Her research emphasizes six principles to create better learning environments:

> **U**nderstanding of self,
> **B**uilding relationships and setting boundaries,
> **U**nifying the class to work together,
> **N**urturing students' intellect,
> **T**eaching from a position of love and care, and
> **U**sing evidence-based practices to meet diverse needs.



### Where to begin

Why not start with Dr. Blackwood's first principle: understanding of self. As she writes, "[o]ne way to explore ourselves is by unpacking our unique social and cultural identities" (Blackwood 29-30.) That process can widen our perspectives about others with whom we work and teach—especially our students.

### What to try

Print out personal and social identity wheels like the ones here. Fill these out to help you reflect on who you are at home and at work. Self-knowledge facilitates understanding why you act and react the way you do—which can in turn help you seek to understand how and why your students act and react as they do.

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> "Ubuntu is the very essence of being human. It speaks that
> my humanity is caught up and is inextricably
> bound up in yours." Archbishop Desmond Tutu

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Next, think specifically about how your identities affect your teaching or expectations of students. We sometimes are unaware of our own assumptions about educational norms. For example, I still remember the day I found out that my students didn't buy or keep their books. I was fortunate that my parents bought my college books, and I only got rid of some books when they began to fall apart—over 30 years later. As a second generation student in a book-loving family, I didn't realize that this wasn't everyone's norm until I reflected on myself and my identities. You might ask yourself:

- How do my personal and social identities impact my beliefs about higher education? Do my students have a different message?
- Was learning fun for you in college? Were you able to take courses you enjoyed, or did you take courses you had to take or were expected to take?
- Did you have a professor or teacher who supercharged your learning process? What did they do or not do?

Finally, why not read up on the subject? I recommend two books to start with:

> *You Can't Teach Us If You Don't Know Us and Care About Us: Becoming an Ubuntu , Responsive and Responsible Urban Teacher*, by Omiunota Nelly Ukpokodu (Peter Lang Pub., 2016). While this text focuses on urban, grade school students, it does an excellent job of describing Ubuntu pedagogy, why to implement it, and specific examples of how one can use it.

> *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*. (Teachers College Press, 2010.) Gay's work is cited by scholars who work with ubuntu pedagogy. Her book can help readers to understand the why behind the success of teaching for rising potential students.