

Intersections of Identity, Culture, and Curriculum on the Threshold of a Latinx Transforming EdD program at a Hispanic Serving Institution

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ABSTRACT

A constellation of emergent research is devoted to critiquing the institutional identities of Hispanic Serving institutions (HSIs) as primarily Hispanic-enrolling institutions and then exploring frameworks and practices aimed at transforming them into what García (2019) terms Latinx-serving institutions. The purpose of this essay is to explore the intersections of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining approaches and as potentially decolonizing curricular spaces of EdD program (re)design at HSIs. This essay draws from two qualitative studies exploring critical approaches to curriculum and pedagogy and program redesign in order to re-align questions about serving Latinx students toward practices of critical consciousness situated at the intersection of identity, culture, and curriculum. Findings include the ways in which those notions are different and similar, and the unique lens each offers the teachers and EdD program redesign. Implications discussed in this essay highlight the possibilities and problems of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining approaches for EdD program redesign and how they might look when applied in HSI EdD programs. Such findings are not only useful in lending insight into the specific complexities of HSI efforts to develop EdD programs that better serve Latinx students in transformative ways. These findings also indicate that the process through which this is undertaken benefits from critical consciousness aimed at individual and collective conscientization among students and faculty as well as curricular outcomes shaped by discourses of social justice.

KEYWORDS

critical consciousness, EdD program redesign, Hispanic Serving Institutions

INTRODUCTION

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) embody complex territory. The HSI designation represents a liminal curriculum lived on fertile thresholds betwixt enduring yet damaging systems of power and privilege and the complicated aims of ameliorating the existential and practical challenges these whitestream systems pose for Latinx students caught in-between ideals of equity and access and hegemonic traditions of higher education.

Existing policy holds that the designation HSI means that an institution has reached the threshold of 25% namesake student enrollment. However, what the letter of the law designates as “Hispanic serving” may not correspond to the spirit of such a term. As García (2019) asserts, the HSI label is “a racialized designation, meaning it is connected to and evolves from the racial and ethnic identities of the students” (p. 2). Despite HSIs’ minority-serving designation and this designation’s explicit, discursive connection to notions of race and ethnicity identity, culture and curriculum at HSIs are often basically indistinguishable from their Whitestream peer

institutions (García, 2019; García & Okhidoi, 2015; Núñez et al., 2016). On the other hand, HSIs represent a terrain with significant potential to enact powerful change (Espinosa et al., 2018; García, 2019; Martinez, 2018; Wong Lau, 2017).

It is no surprise that doctoral programs at HSIs are positioned similarly. Yet, literature pertaining to doctoral program identity, culture, and curriculum at HSIs is scant. Research regarding EdD programs at HSIs is scander still. Situated within this gap and between two larger in-progress studies, we draw from author one’s dissertation research exploring the ways in which critical consciousness is embodied in culturally sustaining curriculum and critical pedagogy by bilingual educators in k-12 settings and apply it to an ongoing, 3-year ethnographic case study critically exploring the process of EdD program redesign and curricular transformation within the context of a large HSI located on the U.S./Mexico border. In so doing, this essay explores how EdD programs can embody and negotiate principles of culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining approaches framed by an ethic of critical consciousness. Furthermore, this essay offers a different sort of



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mapping that re-aligns questions about serving Latinx students toward practices of critical consciousness situated at the intersection of identity, culture, and curriculum in a Latinx transforming EdD program.

Towards these ends, this essay travels the intersections among notions of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining curriculum and pedagogy and what these interstices mean in terms of identity, culture, and curriculum of EdD programs as framed by a praxis of critical consciousness. We end with a discussion of implications for practice and further research that might sustain an ongoing process of becoming a Latinx transforming - in contrast to a Hispanic-Serving - EdD program.

DATA SOURCES

As discussed in the introduction, data sources for this article include a dissertation study exploring critical approaches to pedagogy and critical consciousness and an ongoing ethnographic case study on EdD programs at an HSI in the U.S. Southwest.

One study on which this essay draws on is the first author's dissertation research exploring the ways in which critical consciousness, culturally sustaining curriculum, and critical pedagogy are enacted by bilingual educators in k-12 settings. The main research question of this case study was "how does critical consciousness show up in dual language educator's work?" Data collection, which is still ongoing, included interviews with bilingual educators in dual language programs, document analysis of lessons, and other texts associated with their teaching. Central to this study was an in-depth analysis of culturally-attentive approaches to teaching. This involved a systematic literature review (which is ongoing) that looked for the intersections and departures among the central ideas in this literature. Through this analysis, nuanced differences between closely related notions became evident. In particular, it became apparent that scholars and practitioners sometimes misconstrued and understood three distinct notions as though they were interchangeable. It seems that in some cases, educators may draw on the various theories holistically, without attending to their distinctions (Rodriguez, 2014). In this way, we became aware of the need and the utility of understanding the ways in which culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy are different, the ways in which they are similar, and what this might mean in practice. Understanding these nuances within the menu of options critically-minded educators encounter when attempting to attend to culture in the classroom makes each item on the menu more useful and more actionable. Understanding the differences make it clear what elements of culture are being attended to by certain pedagogical and curricular moves, and which elements require the educators' further consideration and attention in order to meet the thresholds set by the definitions of each notion. In addition, in teasing out the nuanced differences and similarities, the notions themselves may be more faithfully put to use - and subsequently, have a bigger impact in the classroom.

In this article, we apply a triptych of frameworks from the above dissertation research to interpret data from stage one of a multi-staged, ethnographic case study critically exploring the process of EdD program redesign and curricular transformation at an HSI in which we both participated as researchers and participants. Additional participants in this study included doctoral faculty and

students in an EdD program at the 2nd largest HSI in the U.S., located a literal stones-throw from the U.S./Mexico border in one of the most economically depressed regions in the U.S. While over 92% of the total student population at the HSI under study is identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 87% of EdD program students identify as Hispanic or Latinx and less than 50% doctoral faculty participants in this study identify likewise. In order to inform our study exploring—in an in-depth way—the process of EdD program redesign and curriculum transformation at our HSI, this study used a qualitative, single case-study design (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Data collection began in spring 2018 and included a survey, a focus group, a semi-structured interview, and document analysis data. Sources used for this article include content analysis of syllabi, curricular content analysis, dissertation thematic analysis, analysis of doctoral-faculty authored white papers around guiding questions of redesign, and aggregate and program-completer data. Principles of culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining approaches framed by a praxis of critical consciousness shaped, and continue to shape, our work to become a Latinx transforming EdD program at an HSI.

EdD programs at HSIs are an important part of a pipeline of potential Latinx educational leaders who, through the pedagogical and curricular decisions they make, may end up reproducing - or countering - the Eurocentric systems they likely struggled through themselves. It is key that EdD programs at HSIs create emancipatory curricular structures, employ critical pedagogical strategies, and foster critical inquiry that model ways that long-established systems can be decolonized, and decolonial experiences and Eurocentric epistemology and ontology challenged. In turn, EdD graduates can take these experiences and extend them to their professional and scholarly orbit after leaving the HSI. As hooks (1994) argues, theory can meaningfully assist in moving reflection along to productive ends. Yet, as findings from both the studies that inform this article suggest, literature concerning practical applications of theoretical notions aimed at decentering Eurocentric approaches to pedagogy and decolonizing curriculum represent a dense thicket of intertwining definitions and frameworks - so dense in fact that these sometimes serve to impede rather than inform transformation both in terms of teaching and EdD program design. In what follows, we hope to help navigate this thicket and untangle three tendrils of culturally attentive education most prominent in the literature: "culturally relevant pedagogy," "culturally responsive teaching," and "culturally sustaining pedagogy." In untangling the thicket, we provide some clarity for how each is unique and uniquely useful for the HSI EdD critical pedagogues or other critical stakeholders.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

In this section, we draw from dissertation research on intersections of critical pedagogy and culture to introduce Ladson-Billings' (1995) ideas about culturally relevant pedagogy. We compare and contrast it with other approaches that attend to cultural matters in pedagogy in order to suggest that while notions of relevance are critically useful, they can fall short. Drawing from our research of EdD program redesign, we then show how this argument can be extended meaningfully to apply to EdD programs by providing examples, from our research at our HSI, of what cultural relevance that might look like as a factor driving EdD program redesign.

According to Ladson-Billings' (1995) seminal article "Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy," culturally relevant pedagogy



ought to “problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). Furthermore,

culturally relevant teaching must meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness.

Next, I [argue] that culturally relevant teaching is distinguishable by three broad propositions or conceptions regarding self and other, social relations, and knowledge. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483)

Since then, numerous scholars (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Cartledge, et al., 2016; Choi, 2013; Durden & Truscott, 2010; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Esposito et al., 2012; Freire & Valdez, 2017; Howard, 2003; Hyland, 2009; Leonard et al., 2009; Maye & Day, 2012; Morrison et al., 2008; Ortiz, 2009; Saint-Hilaire, 2014; Schmeichel, 2012; Young, 2010; Wortham & Contreras, 2002) have taken up her term to write about issues one can view as interrelated with critical pedagogy and critical approaches to curriculum. Some scholarship addresses ways to “do” culturally relevant pedagogy in practice (Morrison et al., 2008; Saint-Hilaire, 2014; Young, 2010), including work by Ladson-Billings (2008) herself. Other prior scholarship addresses culturally relevant pedagogy and its intersections with special education (Cartledge et al., 2016), dual language education (Freire & Valdez, 2017), at-risk students (Maye & Day, 2012), indigenous education (Ortiz, 2009), notions of social justice and equity (Esposito & Swain, 2009; Schmeichel, 2012), school reform (Esposito et al., 2012), and teacher education, reflection, or professional development (Durden & Truscott, 2010; Howard, 2003; Hyland, 2009). In addition, some scholars have addressed culturally relevant pedagogy and its intersection with English-learning students (Choi, 2013; Leonard et al., 2009) and Latino students (Wortham & Contreras, 2002).

Existing scholarship helps illustrate the uniqueness of notions of cultural relevance in education, a finding which emerged from the first author’s dissertation research process. Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that culturally relevant education includes support for the development of three things: academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Crucially, the second and third items set culturally relevant theory apart. For example, Gay (2002) notes that culturally responsive teaching uses culture as a lens for teaching curriculum, but does not mention the development of cultural competence and leaves critical consciousness underexplored. Paris (2012) notes that culturally sustaining pedagogy is infused with the potential to promote a multilingual, multicultural, and democratic society but places less emphasis on academic success or achievement. Seen this way, making use of all notions of culture in education can contribute in unique ways, where use of a single notion may miss crucial critical details. Each notion is one item on a menu of meaningful and useful cultural attentive resources. Each is uniquely important and brings uniquely important critical elements to the menu of options for the critically minded pedagogy or stakeholder. Applied in combination, but not treated interchangeably, they all hold promise. Each draws the critical educator’s attention to important elements of curriculum and pedagogy that may be present or may be missing in their efforts, and all notions must be considered in combination in order to meaningfully attend to culture in the classroom. Therein lies the importance of understanding the nuanced differences.

In fact, Ladson-Billings’ notion of culturally relevant pedagogy has proven a durable curricular framework for linking academic success to cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness across a variety of k-12 and HSI settings (Koontz & Lewis, 2020). These studies indicate that cultural relevance is no less important for the graduate student than for the elementary, secondary, or undergraduate student.

In the HSI and especially EdD program context, a culturally relevant approach, particularly in terms of curriculum, helps us incorporate the work of scholars of color in the preparation of scholarly practitioners of color, cultivate research with an explicit focus on its value to communities of color, link issues of academic rigor to key knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to cultural competence and social justice, and think more deeply about what these mean to scholarly practitioners, the work they do, and the inquiry such work generates. The curriculum of what is sometimes called “ethnic studies” could facilitate a culturally relevant experience, for example. Better yet, offering a series of such courses could be seen as a culturally relevant step. Best and most relevant of all, “ethnic studies” content could be integrated into a wide array of existing courses that represent not only the humanities but also the sciences. In this way, namesake students at HSIs could be the beneficiaries of a culturally relevant redesign, whether they be students in the Colleges of Education or in another field.

For our majority-minority EdD program, in which the majority of students teach and lead in Latinx school and community contexts in U.S./Mexico border regions, the notion of “cultural competence” provides a useful point of departure. But it stops short of encapsulating the degree and variety of cultural, social, and linguistic capital practitioners in our program expertly wield on a daily basis. Professionally, students in our program cross multiple borders - geographical, socio-political, cultural, linguistic, and emotional - to name a few, each day in efforts to improve education in border regions. Surviving such crossings and working to transform the educational terrain takes more than competence. It requires expertise. Helping students translate this cultural expertise into the scholarly prowess needed to navigate the colonization higher education arguably entails (even at or perhaps particularly at an HSI) requires a curriculum that is beyond relevant. Working alongside students to decolonize such curricular terrain as we inhabit it entails epistemological as well as intellectual rigor.

First and foremost, all coursework offered at an HSI ought to problematize the systems around teaching and learning in the United States. An HSI doctoral education, and even more acutely an EdD program, must reflect a critical bent. Arguably, a doctoral program in social foundations is barely worthy of the title if it were not critical. Even more remiss would be an EdD HSI program that in fact reproduces problematic notions of teaching and learning - the same ones that marginalize namesake students their whole lives - instead of challenging them. Still, we understand colonial notions of what a good education and a good program can withstand the test of time. Garcia’s (2017) findings regarding the dearth of ethno-centric curriculum at HSIs highlight this reality and painfully so. For this reason, curricular transformation that moves in the direction of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical consciousness is key.

In alignment with Ladson-Billings’ (1995) vision, HSIs may put cultural relevance into practice in a number of ways. They may find or expand coursework often called “ethnic studies,” and/or integrate such curriculum into a wide array of humanities and science courses institution-wide. They promote research and publication by minority-

identity students in order to create new knowledge and curriculum that responds to the need for cultural relevance across disciplines. Such support might be flexible and concretely supportive in ways that target such minority-identity students' needs, in order to further assure the production of new curriculum and knowledge. This would include the financial support as well as the academic and moral support needed for participation in authentic research and publication. Whether at national and international conferences or in multilingual peer-reviewed journals, a culturally relevant EdD program at an HSI ought to foster namesake students' original knowledge production in ways that challenge the restrictions Eurocentric academic traditions have historically placed on individuals with non-White, immigrant, non-English speaking people living in the U.S. Who speaks and who listens? Who writes and who reads? This matters. The importance of publication prestige and a scholarly audience for *anyone* in academia underscores just how much more important such prestige and audience could be for budding Latinx or Hispanic EdD scholars. As members of a group or multiple groups whose voices have historically been overlooked, muted, and ignored, opportunities for research, publication, and presentation represent an opportunity to amplify knowledge production of traditionally marginalized people. This would indeed be relevant curricular transformation in service of namesake students' academic needs.

Two decades after her seminal piece on the term, Ladson-Billings (2014) embraced a shift in conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy, as manifested in a subtle but significant shift in the terminology to culturally *sustaining* pedagogy. However, inbetween this shift, Gay's (2002) conceptualization of culturally responsive teaching entered the milieu. Gay (2002) extended Ladson-Billings' work under the term "culturally responsive teaching" in ways that provided practitioners and scholars a framework for utilizing aspects of students' cultures in pedagogical ways to boost academic success. The next subsection addresses this shift in the literature from culturally *relevant* pedagogy to culturally *responsive* teaching, what this looks like in practice and why this is significant, especially for EdD program redesign, more specifically for EdD programs at HSIs with transformational aims.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE APPROACHES

This section addresses Gay's (2002) ideas about cultural responsiveness in education in order to illustrate its uniqueness as well as its utility in an HSI program (re)design and making such a program one that is Latinx Serving. We compare and contrast it with other notions that attend to cultural matters in education and examine where notions of responsiveness are useful and fall short. Then, we show how it can be extended meaningfully from k-12 education to apply to higher education. Finally, we provide examples of what that cultural responsiveness might look like in an EdD program and from our own research and our own program at a borderlands HSI. We do so in order to demonstrate the usefulness and meaningfulness of understanding the nuanced differences and similarities between the triptych of culturally attentive approaches, particularly in HSI EdD programs.

An extension of culturally *relevant* pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) is culturally *responsive* pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is in epistemological alignment with the notion of cultural attentiveness, but is more precise than culturally relevant pedagogy

about the use of a cultural lens for better teaching. Gay (2002) describes culturally responsiveness in education this way:

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters... (p. 106)

Scholars who took up this term have written about its intersection with teacher education and professional development (Gere et al., 2009; Sleeter, 2011; Warren, 2018), teaching in secondary (Herrera et al., 2012), as well as post-secondary settings (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009), urban education (Grant & Asimeng-Boahene, 2006), and literacy (Moje & Hinchman, 2004; Souto-Manning, 2009). Some scholarship has focused on culturally responsive pedagogy in relation to the education of students labeled as Puerto Rican (Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007), Latino (Irizarry, 2007), indigenous or native peoples (Bishop, 2008; Savage et al., 2011), African American (Howard & Terry Sr, 2011; Ware, 2006), and English-learning (Santamaria, 2009). Memorably, Ware (2006) equates culturally responsive pedagogy with the notion of being a "warm demander." Other scholars have suggested ways that it can be applied to improve various elements of a minoritized student's experience from literacy to math to science instruction (Taylor & Sobel, 2011). For all the reasons we elaborated in the previous section on cultural relevance, notions of cultural responsiveness are just as applicable in higher education as they are in k-12 education.

As previously noted, nuanced distinctions between the triptych of culturally attentive theories emerged in the process of conducting the first author's dissertation research. Understanding those nuances makes each more useful. While Gay's (2002) notion of culturally responsive pedagogy falls short of explicitly including language as a factor, her definition is useful to our context and our study in that she states that educators would do well to use cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students to teach those same students. This description is more specific than Ladson-Billings' (1995) encouragement of attention to cultural competence in culturally relevant teaching and thus more concretely useful to our work. On the other hand, culturally responsive teaching, as defined by Gay (2002), mentions critical consciousness but does not center it as does Ladson-Billings' (1995). In this way, both theories bring uniquely important elements to the menu of options for the critically minded stakeholder. Applied in combination, but not treated interchangeably, they both hold promise. When the nuances of culturally sustaining pedagogy are added to the mix with the first two notions, the triptych of culturally attentive theories is the most powerful in the hands of the critical educator. No one in isolation will do, but together they weave the strongest threads of a rope to lasso "culture" and use it meaningfully and critically in classrooms of all ages.

Culturally responsive pedagogy also aligns with our professional stance, our thinking about our work at a borderlands HSI, and our thinking around this study. In fact, the thread that runs throughout all the literature cited here is the notion that educators



should critically examine and question their practices and perspectives and turn their gaze to the practices and perspectives of their students who come from historically subordinated groups as do culturally and linguistically diverse students. Does it matter whether the student is an 18-year-old outgoing high school senior, an 18-year-old incoming college freshman, or a 22- or 32-year-old graduate student starting an EdD program? Do people's upbringing, family, and community cease to influence their identities and what is responsive for them? We argue that this is not likely.

Gay's (2002) notion of culturally responsive pedagogy does well to go beyond notions of cultural relevance. Its focus on the lived-curriculum joins notions of the personal, cultural, political, and professional in ways that make use of cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students to teach those same students. This entails an epistemological as well as a pedagogical shift. Similar to the notion of culturally relevant curriculum, the notion of cultural responsiveness explores what transforming the EdD curriculum might mean within a pedagogical context of HSIs. But it also helps us think about the ways in which we are implicated as - curricular workers, teachers, students, and researchers - in concrete, discursive, and epistemological projects dominated and constrained by colonial logic. As literature regarding the curriculum of HSIs demonstrates, most institutions labeled as such continue to be characterized by the same Eurocentric curriculum that much of higher education employs. As Pinar (2004) writes, "curriculum communicates what we choose to remember about our past, what we believe about the present, and what we hope for in the future. Curriculum debates - such as those over multiculturalism and the canon - are also debates about the American national identity" (p. 20). García (2017) notes that currently only 2% of the curriculum at HSIs focuses on racial/ethnic experiences. Furthermore, she asserts that curriculum has been used to colonize Latinx and other minoritized students and calls for curriculum to not only include but privilege Raza experiences. According to García (2018), fulfilling these obligations in terms of curricular, discursive, and epistemological practice is the work of decolonization. She writes, "Arguably, the coloniality of power must be recognized before HSIs can reconcile the patterns of oppression and exclusion that have kept Raza students on the margins at the postsecondary level" (García, 2018, p. 5-6). So too, with EdD programs seeking to transform their practices. García, Patron, Ramirez, and Hudson (2016) highlight the positive impact of a responsive, identity-supportive curriculum at an HSI. They found that coursework that explicitly focuses on the experience of non-dominant groups, often termed "ethnic studies approach," was especially well received by Hispanic students glad to see their own experiences acknowledged and validated in their day-to-day lives and formal studies. This can be seen to check the box of culturally relevant education, but what more might be done to make the same a culturally relevant and responsive education?

In accordance with Gay's (2002) conceptualization of culturally responsive teaching, an initial examination of the nature of the institution's mission would be a good starting point. If the examination shows that a critical bent does not infuse the curriculum institution wide, then wide ranging, large scale, long term, and well funded institutional planning and transformation should be the first consideration. This corresponds to Ladson-Billings' (1995) notion of cultural relevance as well. However, applying Gay's (2002) notion in a higher education setting has implication beyond, for example, adding what might be called in some institutions "ethnic studies," or

"Chicano studies," to an HSI's EdD curriculum. It might mean that faculty receive long term, supportive, meaningful training in pedagogical moves that are responsive to the non-majority cultures their students may bring into the classroom, whether an ethnic studies classroom or otherwise. At a minimum, faculty should understand that lecturing might fall outside the bounds of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and responsive (Gay, 2002) methods. Furthermore, they should be encouraged through training and evaluation structures to use more dialogical, interactive, flexible, and culturally competent structures to help deliver and help namesake students process the content at hand (García, 2013). While k-12 teachers receive continuous and copious ongoing education in this area, professors are required neither to have studies on how to teach the subject they are experts in nor be good at it (Jensen, 2011). In fact, in some cases, being a good teacher is viewed as less than being a good grant writer or being a good researcher-publication-achiever. If HSIs are truly trying to extend the pipeline of academically successful namesake students through doctoral studies and beyond, faculty at HSIs must at minimum know that this effort is part of an institutional mission (García, 2013). Faculty should know that they are expected to meaningfully support those students, and that doing so will be institutionally supported through appropriately adjusted tenure and service considerations (García, 2013). They must be supported to understand how they can meaningfully and responsively instruct their namesake EdD students when they do not know how (García, 2018). Ideally, they will strive to help all students - but especially namesake students. They may do so by making themselves explicitly available for extra help, being responsive to student academic and personal difficulties, by providing authentic mentorship (García, 2013), and by telling students what they don't know that they don't know - the secrets of academia and success in majority-culture, Euro-centric spaces.

In this section, we have addressed the notion of culturally responsive pedagogy and its intersections and divergence from culturally relevant pedagogy. We have shown how understanding and applying the nuanced distinctions of each theory can have meaningful impact on the curricular and pedagogical considerations of a critical educator or a critically-minded program coordinator. We have shown its alignment with the hope of what an HSI can be and should be in order to live up to its name. We have also given implications for action when a close examination reveals that an HSI and the EdD program it houses falls short of cultural relevance or responsiveness. Now, we turn our attention to the definitions and unique elements of the third theory in our triptych: culturally *sustaining* pedagogy.

CULTURALLY SUSTAINING APPROACHES

Recent scholarship by Paris (2012) as well as others has extended Ladson-Billings' (1995) and Gay's (2002) work and presents us with the notion of culturally *sustaining* pedagogy. In this section, we contrast Paris's (2012) ideas about cultural sustenance with culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy. Then, we draw from our research of our own redesign efforts to suggest that although key facets of culturally sustaining pedagogy are most often discussed in terms of k-12 educational settings, these also have important curricular and pedagogical implications for EdD programs.

Culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy are closely related to the notion of culturally sustaining pedagogy. In fact, Ladson-Billings (2014) has embraced the shift to "culturally

sustaining pedagogy” in her recent writing. However, the definition of sustaining pedagogy advances more specific arguments concerning the role of language and the support of students’ potential *multiple* cultures than either of its two relatives. It also posits the relationship between language and culture as a key pedagogical nexus. In so doing, Paris’s work acknowledges the assertion of post structural criticalities that language acts in ways that are both culturally constitutive and expressive. In other words, language constructs culture as well as being constructed by it. According to Paris (2012), this process is pluralistic and inextricably linked to pedagogy in which language, as well as culture, is plural. Extending Ladson-Billings’ (1995) and Gay’s (2002) prior scholarship, Paris (2012) writes:

Culturally sustaining pedagogy...has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. (p. 95)

Notably, Paris (2012) expands on the concept of that which might be understood strictly “cultural” to include the linguistic element. While some stakeholders in education may already subscribe to the idea that language is inextricable and reciprocal in its relation to culture, applications of culturally relevant and culturally responsive frameworks too often approach language as a component of or expression of culture that needs to be addressed rather than as the life-source that sustains cultural pluralism. In this way, Paris’s work serves to highlight language as an area in need of pedagogical attention for those who would otherwise overlook or even marginalize its role. Paris (2012) advances notions of both cultural relevance and responsiveness, but extends them, through its explicit aim of sustaining culture in service of student’s identity rather than solely as a tool of traditionally defined Eurocentric achievement. He also extends the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2002) to substantively include pluralism of language and culture. Literature regarding identity, culture, and curriculum at HSIs points toward the promise of engaging bilingual students’ linguistic capabilities toward academic and professional success as a central part of serving Latinx students (García, 2019). Our review of EdD program redesign literature and our assessment of current syllabi in our program, demonstrate there is much work to do in terms of situating language in relation to notions of either cultural relevance or responsiveness or sustenance within the tangible curricular structures of EdD programs.

While conducting the first author’s dissertation research and in reflecting on the results, we came to understand the nuanced difference and the importance of that understanding. In light of Paris’s (2012) definition of cultural sustenance, language becomes more centered than in the previous two definitions of culturally attentive pedagogy. While our first and overarching finding remains the same as we noted in prior sections - a critical turn in the philosophical underpinnings of the whole intuition - we see that Paris’s (2012) work suggest a bolder move: the implementation of bilingual education at EdD level, especially flexible forms of bilingual education that protect and support a student’s home language instead of trying to erase it. It is bilingual coursework that meets this very condition - sustaining instead of sidelining or erasing a first language - that can be understood as a form of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Considering that namesake students are potentially bringing one or various languages other than English into the classroom, it aligns with an HSI mission and the values of sustaining

education to provide linguistically flexible and linguistically supportive coursework that multilingual capacities in socially and academically generative ways that encourage students to transform rather than simply conform to academic language. Our analysis of syllabi from our own EdD program demonstrates solid curricular efforts to offer a variety of linguistic experiences, from requirements to electives and from the start of the program to the completion of coursework. For example, there are course options in Spanish and English. Class discussions and message boards are often multilingual by design. There are assignments across coursework that can be completed in English or Spanish or both. However, this linguistic support and flexibility halt dramatically at the comprehensive exam and dissertations are still monolingual in the product, even when, as in the case of much of the research produced by our program, is bilingual in process.

Of the various forms of culturally attentive approaches, culturally sustaining pedagogy’s emphasis on language (Paris, 2012) stands to support and advance the capability of HSI students most fully and offers notions of a fertile nexus of language and culture in ways that advance a multilingual turn in higher education and position multilingual students at the curricular center as opposed to at the margins as in the case of white stream curriculum, even at HSIs and often, especially, in EdD programs. Culturally relevant pedagogy contributes to the notion that culture and education are intimately connected and that sociopolitical consciousness is the task of an educator whose calling is social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges that students’ lived experiences should be centered in the curriculum (Gay, 2002), though it falls short of *explicitly* addressing language and notions of social and political justice. Culturally sustaining pedagogy reiterates the notion that culture and language are inseparable and casts an education with such a focus as a tool to sustain a layered, intersecting, pluralistic student identity (Paris, 2012). All lend a useful lens to an examination of the experiences of “culturally and linguistically diverse” students who by definition form 25% or more of the student body of an HSI, and at times much more. As future leaders of their communities and also as likely role models for community members, EdD students at an HSI ought to receive the benefits of a culturally relevant *and* responsive *and* sustaining education such that they can turn around and deliver some of those benefits to the next generations.

What students experience in higher education should be at least as good as what they experience in k-12; certainly, it should not be worse. Culturally attentive transformation could imply simple curricular and pedagogical tools - perhaps even a campus-wide transformation - in settings such as HSIs and especially HSIs in borderlands. This may mean a bilingual option is offered in all areas of study (not just in the humanities, but also in medicine, law, engineering, etc.). This may mean encouraging and meaningfully supporting bilingual scholarship among faculty. It could mean other transformative curricular and pedagogical tools that lead students to experience their higher education as a humanizing, democratic, culturally relevant and responsive and sustaining undertaking - their education a self-decolonizing tool, if we chose to make it such. A tool for social justice.

Much of our own current EdD program redesign efforts to “identify, name, and work to correct White dominance in curriculum design, intended outcomes, and resource material selection” (Pete, 2016, p. 86) are taking place within fertile borderlands of culturally relevant, culturally responsive and culturally sustainable curriculum



and pedagogy. New courses in action research, curriculum transformation, and decolonizing educational sciences were created, and courses in critical Latinx disability studies and bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural curriculum are under development. Redesign work has also focused on building connective tissue among courses aimed at supporting students in developing their own inquiry into what it means to be a scholar-practitioner in a Latinx transforming doctoral program. Critical dialogue around this process gave rise to the interweaving of a shared set of common readings and a suite of shared assignments that feature alternative epistemologies, encourage students and faculty to start from within to “deconstruct the construct of racism,” “deconstruct the neutrality of Whiteness,” and, “practice challenging notions of colorblindness and meritocracy” (Pete, 2016, p. 86) in terms of our own experience and embed pedagogies of place in our courses.

However, this sort of self-work was not a priority at the start of our initially top-down program redesign efforts. Similar to much of the literature on HSI pedagogical and curricular efforts as well as that exploring EdD doctoral program redesign efforts, our work began firmly planted within the colonial logic of improvement and more specifically, the technology of power embodied in the discursive practices of “continuous improvement.” While this was a familiar discourse to much of the faculty in our nationally accredited college of education, it left us without adequate language to interrogate the way the redesign process and concomitant program transformations embodied colonial logics. In this way, while many faculty members began the process in the spirit of critical pedagogy, this redesign — while successful at boosting outcomes regarding recruitment, student retention, and time to degree — could be seen as in some ways “complicit colonists” (Greene & Oesterreich, 2012). While our redesign efforts proceeded with notions of cultural sustainability, they often seemed to circle back to curricular practices grounded in “dyed-in-the-wool notions of ‘progress,’ ‘advancement,’ or ‘refinement’ that were always White supremacist and Eurocentric notions in the first place” (Jupp et al., 2018, p. 12).

POINT OF DEPARTURE: CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In writing about HSIs, García and Okhidoi (2015) assert that “we can no longer assume that the organizational structures of our current institutions will adequately meet the needs of underrepresented students” (p. 355) without significant changes. Gonzalez (2015) asserts that HSIs must decide to undertake an institutional mission to serve those students instead of merely adding the technical designation “HSI” to their materials. She suggests that HSIs re-orient themselves toward a funds-of-knowledge approach. Further, she suggests that HSI leaders support projects such as testimonio gathering and that HSI administrators consider disaggregated data around identity and student success and then respond with an affirmative initiative to improve the experience of those students not thriving in the current conditions (Gonzales, 2015). As García (2018) notes, becoming a Latinx *servicing* institution requires that we confront and upturn colonial logic. Becoming a Latinx *transforming* EdD program requires a similar upturn, not just in program design. It also requires a rigorous reconceptualization of ways inquiry is framed and a reinvigoration of the ways relationships which constitute knowledge are configured, aligned, and enacted. We end this essay, in much the same place as we began - in the middle, betwixt and between curriculum and pedagogy and among

the interstices among identity, culture, and curriculum. As this essay ends, we want to suggest as Freire (1968) and Anzaldúa and Moraga (1981) have that there is power in these in-between spaces and the critical consciousness they can give rise to.

Critical consciousness, a combination of reflection about and action against oppressive systems, led the first author to graduate studies and brought both authors together in shared reflection. Freire (1968) writes about critical consciousness as the awareness of social, political, and economic realities and their role in maintaining systems of power and privilege, *in addition to* the pursuit of the transformation of those systems. In other words, critical consciousness implies knowledge as well as action. Importantly, some scholars view the term *critical consciousness* as interchangeable with *sociopolitical consciousness*. Freire (2016), who has written prolifically about the possibilities of dual language programming to challenge systemic inequities, uses both the terms “critical consciousness” and “sociopolitical consciousness” in various publications between 2014 and 2020 and sees rich potential for sociopolitical, or critical, consciousness to positively impact students’ lived experiences: “Becoming sociopolitical conscious is the most important tool for educators to fight against oppressive language education policies. The development of sociopolitical consciousness, also called critical consciousness, focuses on the growth of students’ conscientization/conscientização” (Freire, 2016, p. 45).

Though he applies the notion of critical consciousness to dual language and k-12 contexts, we argue that it can be meaningfully extended to examine higher education, HSIs, and EdD programs at HSIs or otherwise. Furthermore, Valenzuela (2016) argues that all educators who work with Latinx youth need expertise in critical consciousness. We argue that there is no sharp line dividing youth-hood from adult-hood. Work by Gay and Kirkland (2003) can be seen to support this notion, as they argue that critical consciousness ought to be part of teacher preparation programs. The connective tissue is clear after a moment of consideration. Consider where a graduate of a dual language program might attend post-secondary schooling. Consider how little an 18-year old changes from high school graduation until beginning college in the fall. An HSI education should be a humanizing, democratic, culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining experience - a culturally critical experience, a truly decolonizing space. This essay suggests that the movement from a Hispanic Serving EdD program toward a Latinx transforming EdD program must take place from the nexus of identity, culture, and curriculum.

We find these notions useful in lending insight into the specific complexities of HSI efforts to develop EdD programs that better serve Latinx students. We also argue that they indicate that the process through which redesign and transformation are undertaken benefits from critical dialogue aimed at individual and collective conscientization among students and faculty as well as curricular outcomes shaped by discourses of social justice. We also assert that one role of critical consciousness is to serve as a threshold between the personal and the political, a mode of “institutional praxis that re-tools institutions” in which students and faculty work together to understand and transform “knowledge production and the curriculum as terrains of tactical and strategic struggle” (Jupp et al., 2018, p. 13). Critical consciousness, when applied throughout all stages of program redesign and beyond, can lead to a more humanizing, democratic, culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining HSI experience and decolonizing space therein where an EdD can in fact become Latinx transforming. Elevating critical consciousness in HSI

EdD spaces can mean the difference between serving up a handshake, diploma, and loan repayment bill to Latinx students and serving up a transformative opportunity that may positively alter the course of a life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FURTHER RESEARCH

We argue that there is value in accurately understanding the triptych culturally attentive theories we have just examined. They, and their nuanced distinctions, help think more deeply about the ways in which we as faculty and students are implicated together in the colonizing logic of curriculum and its redesign as well as the decolonizing potential of embedding dialogic conscientization in the curricular redesign process as well as in our research. Culturally relevant theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995) focuses our attention and efforts on the curriculum of a given program and to what extent it may or may not yet reflect the cultural identity of the students it claims to serve. It also draws our attention and efforts to the need for supporting and promoting not only academic achievement, but also cultural competence and critical consciousness. Culturally responsive theory (Gay, 2002) focuses our attention and efforts on the potential pedagogical uses of students' cultural norms as well as attending to students' cultures in the curriculum of a given program that claims to serve those students. Finally, culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) focuses our attention and efforts not on the potential pedagogical uses of students' cultures and languages (plural!), but also emphasizes pedagogues' obligation to sustain those languages and cultures. This is all the more true when an educator or program claims to serve a certain group of students, as is the case in "Hispanic Serving Institutions."

One implication of this research is the importance of a program (re)design that centers on non-dominant identities, cultures, and experiences. In accordance with Ladson-Billings' (1995) notion of cultural relevance, one vehicle that may do so is called in some institutions "ethnic studies." Ethnic studies, in particular "Chicano studies," can open the door to a culturally relevant and potentially culturally responsive and sustaining teaching and learning in an HSI's EdD program. In fact, we argue that such a curriculum ought to be part of more than an ethnic study or education program or an optional course. Ethnic studies must be a basic requirement for all doctoral students at an HSI that claims to live up to its name.

Another implication of our research lies in the delivery of curriculum, ethnic studies or otherwise. Teaching through the lens of culture is a fundamental element of Gay's (2002) notion of cultural responsiveness, and therefore, pedagogy at the doctoral level must be meaningfully centered. Faculty must understand that traditional lectures are neither expected nor celebrated (García, 2018). Rather, the institution must make clear that more responsive methods are expected and celebrated (García, 2013). Administrative support, collegial mentorship, and institutional buy-in are crucial, and instructors should receive ongoing mentorship in pedagogical methods that may be new and unfamiliar to them (García, 2018). Otherwise, instructors may simply reproduce the Eurocentric teaching they may have experienced in their lives. Then, these students may graduate to become faculty and thus have the future power to teach their respective future subjects either in a more outdated or in a more critical fashion. To be responsive to existing namesake students of an HSI - as well as future namesake students - the institution must truly live up to its designation. To do so, the

required curriculum *and* pedagogy ought to reflect the layers of the students' historically marginalized identities (García, 2018).

Another implication relates to the language element of culture that is highlighted by Paris's (2012) notion of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Crucially, some namesake students at HSIs may be bilingual, multilingual, and/or English language learners in addition to learning a tsunami of new content. In order to promote academic performance of such students - which aligns with both Ladson-Billings' (1995) notion of culturally relevant pedagogy as well as Gay's (2002) notion of culturally responsive teaching - an HSI must provide EdD coursework that explicitly blurs or blends language norms. This flexibility must extend beyond offerings considered "ethnic studies" or language-education courses. This may mean offering all-Spanish coursework in any required subject or organizing courses to be taught by bilingual instructors who offer instruction and associated materials that cross-linguistic borders in both directions frequently. In our own EdD program, we also hope to incorporate more indigenous languages alongside a critical examination of the ways that they are often omitted in bilingual and multilingual efforts. We know we have much work ahead to become *more* culturally relevant, *more* culturally responsive, and *more* culturally sustaining, and we know critical consciousness will illuminate the steps yet to climb.

A critical examination begins with critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, understood as Freire (1968) cast it, is the combination of theory and action into *praxis*. Critical consciousness is most directly operationalized through curriculum and pedagogy. Since the aim of critical consciousness is the pursuit of social justice in order to enact more culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), responsive (Gay, 2002), and sustaining (Paris, 2012) education, one must attend to social justice. It is necessary because, as we have seen in the literature and in our own course redesign efforts, social justice efforts can be subverted by neoliberal notions of educational achievement and success.

Taken together, notions of culturally relevant curriculum from Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally responsive pedagogy from Gay (2002), and the multilingual discursive practices about which Paris (2012) writes help us see how social justice might be operationalized in a k-12 teacher's classroom, in an EdD classroom, or beyond. However, our redesign efforts suggest that without critical consciousness as a praxis of implementation, these gains might be conflated with Whitestream notions of student success that marginalize students of color. In an HSI, the frameworks from the first and second studies show that critical consciousness does not guide program design, even when aims of social justice are central, Whitestream notions of student success can complicate or even dominate discussion of social justice. In turn, this may subvert the ultimate aims of a critical redesign that seeks to at minimum live up to the name HSI. Likewise, initial analysis of our data indicates that lack of attention to critical consciousness may subvert efforts to go beyond "Hispanic serving" to become "Latinx transforming" institutions and programs that provide namesake students with transformational curriculum and pedagogy for a transformed EdD experience and subsequent professional endeavors.

Taken together, these implications help EdD programs attend to identity, culture, and curriculum content as well as the context in an HSI EdD program to be *more* culturally relevant, *more* culturally responsive, and *more* culturally sustaining.



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