



## Research Article

# Using culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy in the composition classroom to engage students in critiquing supremacy culture

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Incorporating texts that promote diverse voices and center critical thinking assignments on combatting white dominance and privilege is crucial to modern pedagogy and curricular development in community college composition classes. This paper suggests a way to help students understand issues of supremacy culture in education and society. The author developed a student-centric activity in English Composition 102: a survey to provoke discussion where students were asked to name American celebrities, authors, directors, inventors, artists, and athletes. The students named primarily white men in each category except celebrities and athletes. The celebrities' category included relatively balanced ethnic, racial, and gender diversity; in the athletes' category, students predominantly identified Black men (football and basketball stars). This paper considers the impetus and results of the assignment—including the pedagogies with which it aligns. Further, the author advocates for the presence of culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy in community college composition curriculum, ideally by creating collaborative professional development workshops.

**Keywords:** Community college, composition, pedagogy, supremacy culture

## 1. Introduction

Traditional pedagogy, a.k.a. colonial or settler-colonial pedagogy, stems from white Eurocentric experiences, beliefs, and practices. Colonists of what would become the United States “forced assimilation and deculturalization. . .and the erasure of Indigenous cultures, beliefs, and practices” (Banks, 2022, p.9) and replaced it with white European standards and normativity. Educational researcher Lam (2006) explained that public schooling lacks multiethnic cultural diversity due to its basis in Eurocentricity: Difference was dealt with through eradication and the idea that “all Americans should read from the same largely white, Western canon and adopt a common set of values and linguistic conventions” (p. 213). As such, there is a need for new pedagogical approaches to college curriculum. Culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy offers instructors an opportunity to challenge commonly accepted white standards. Changing curriculum and offering in-class activities may create spaces which encourage students to reflect upon, examine, and critique white supremacy conventions not only in education but also in society.

## 2. Background

I have taught English Composition classes at a semirural community college in central Arizona (U.S.A.) since 2005. The main campus lies adjacent to Sacaton, a city that is part of the Gila River Indian Community. The Tohono O’odham Nation Reservation is approximately 25 miles to the southwest of the campus. The college is also a Hispanic Serving Institution [HSI]. According to a demographic report from 2020, 38% of students identify as white; 37% identify as Hispanic/Latino; 6% identify as Black or African American; 5% identify as Native American; 2% identify as Asian; 11% identify as either two or more races or unknown; 1% identified as

nonresident alien; 61% identify as women (Institute of Education Sciences, 2020—the data is limited by binary genders in their documentation).

These numbers reflect an important truth: my college—like so many other institutions of higher learning and the United States in general—is culturally diverse and comprised of more women than men. What was I doing to incorporate and reflect that diversity in my own classes? Was I doing enough to decenter the years of Eurocentric, “white supremacist, settler, capitalist, cisheteropatriarchal/transmisogynistic/misogynoir, ableist and other hegemonic gazes” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 14) present in K-12 public education? State-run schooling, according to educational researcher Lam (2006), too often deals “with difference by eradicating it—all Americans should read from the same largely white, Western canon and adopt a common set of values and linguistic conventions” (p. 213). Students of all races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, emotional, mental, and/or physical abilities, and genders in K-12 are then tested on what those in the dominant group consider common knowledge. Such standardized (to the prevailing cultural norms) testing leads to inevitable failure for many students who are not (or cannot be or refuse to be) fully assimilated into the dominant culture. The students, often too young or too assimilated, then assume that they themselves are at fault due to “a natural lack of skill, intelligence, or effort rather than institutionalized forms of racism or limited resources” (Hemphill & Blakely, 2014, p. 13).

Students then enter college likely accustomed to or expecting the continuing, damaging progression of white normativity. I would argue that students are so acclimated to the systemic promotion of white supremacist education, it never occurs to them to hope for anything else. And they frequently receive nothing else because not enough attention is paid to pedagogical strategies in higher education (San Pedro et al., 2020, p. 177); most researcher-scholars focus on K-12 instruction. San Pedro et al. (2020) insisted that a shift must be made from schooling practices (“rote memorization as sites of social reproduction and socialization” (Patel, 2016, p. 397)) to productive learning practices:

Learning spaces that forward equity-centered and assets-based pedagogies must refuse traditional classroom practices that work toward replicating what is already known and, instead, embrace pedagogical practices that engage in the messiness and unpredictability of dialogic learning in order to co-discover and co-generate knowledge that connects our lives, families, and communities to course topics, readings, and direction. (p. 178)

Thankfully, my master’s degree program and the schools where I began teaching after graduation emphasized diversity and inclusion through the texts chosen and teaching methods instructors used; furthermore, discussion-based (dialogic) learning was encouraged. The lecture model of a professor bestowing knowledge (monologic learning) still present in most university undergraduate programs has been generally dismissed in the community college environment, perhaps because community college instructors teach small classes (20-25 students in most humanities-based courses versus 300+ at a university) and do not have teaching assistants for follow-up, smaller-group discussions.

## **2.1. Culturally Sustaining and Revitalizing Pedagogy in Composition Classes**

One of the most successful ways I have decentered—shifted power from myself to the students—my English Composition 102 class is through the application of culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy [CSRP]. CSRP was extended from culturally relevant pedagogy [CRP] and culturally sustaining pedagogy [CSP].

### *2.1.1. Culturally relevant pedagogy*

Culturally relevant pedagogy was developed by Ladson-Billings (1995) in an effort to reform teacher education specifically addressing “concerns of educating teachers for success with African-American students” (p. 466). Ladson-Billings (1995) explained her “theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469).

Ladson-Billings (2014) revisited her theory and explained that she was aware of authors who had taken her “previously developed ideas and synthesiz[ed] them to create new and exciting forms. . .that meet the needs of this century’s students” (p. 76). Ladson-Billings was referring to culturally sustaining pedagogy (named first by Paris in 2012):

In developing this theory, . . .these authors use culturally relevant pedagogy as the place where the “beat drops” and then layer the multiple ways that this notion of pedagogy shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity—that is, that they become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects. (p. 76)

### 2.1.2. *Culturally sustaining pedagogy*

Alim et al. (2020) offered a succinct definition of culturally sustaining pedagogy and explained the necessity of enacting “a critical framework for centering communities” (p. 261).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy is a critical framework for centering and sustaining Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander communities as these memberships necessarily intersect with gender and sexuality, dis/ability, class, language, land and more. First and foremost, CSP explicitly names whiteness (including white normativity, white racism and ideologies of white supremacy) as the problem, and thus, decentering whiteness and recentering communities is our point of departure. (p. 261)

The authors offered the context of the United States, and specifically the K-12 public education system, as the setting for the cultural acceptance and promotion of the “white settler capitalist gaze” (p. 262)<sup>1</sup> to the detriment of all students but particularly BIPOC folx who have lived their entire lives being measured by white standards (and always found lacking, which is, in part at least, the purpose of the system to begin with).

### 2.1.3. *Culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy*

Lee and McCarty (2017) acknowledged culturally sustaining pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy as important pedagogies for teaching minoritized students; however, they “extend this conversation to new realms” arguing that “in Native American contexts, CSP must also include culturally revitalizing pedagogy” (Lee & McCarty, 2017, p. 62—emphasis in original). Lee and McCarty (2017) defined CSRP as having three components:

First, CSRP attends directly to asymmetrical power relations and the goal of transforming legacies of colonization. Second, CSRP recognizes the need to reclaim and revitalize what has been disrupted by colonization. For many Indigenous communities this centers on endangered languages, and thus, we focus on language education policy and practice. Finally, Indigenous CSRP recognizes the need for community-based accountability. Respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and caring relationships—what Brayboy et al. (2012, p. 436) call “the four Rs”—are fundamental to community-based accountability. CSRP serves the needs of Indigenous communities as defined by those communities. (p. 62)

The authors also explained that CSRP addresses the “emotions entangled with the legacy of colonization” (Lee & McCarty, 2017, p. 62). Acknowledging those emotions through an “inward gaze” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 92) allows those students to reflect on the internalization of colonial oppression and how it has affected their lives.

I argue that culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy may be applied to not only Native American students but can, should, and does connect to *all* students. Revitalizing is a synonym for rehumanizing. Oxford University Press (2023), defines the transitive verb as follows: “To restore to vitality; to put new life or vigour into.” Cambridge Dictionary (n.d. b.) says, “to give new life, energy, activity, or success to something.” Collins Online Dictionary (n.d.) states, “to bring vitality,

<sup>1</sup> The “gaze” is a philosophical concept generally meaning “the realization of being seen and interpreted by others and adjusting one’s conduct accordingly” (Moe, 2015, p. 1). “White settler capitalism” incorporates the concepts of European colonization, white supremacy, and for-profit ideologies,” which, when combined lead to the “ongoing legacies of land theft, genocide, and enslavement” (Paris, 2019, p. 219), in this case, within education.

vigor, etc. back to after a decline.” Certainly, “after a decline” is an understatement for the treatment of BIPOC history, education, and acknowledgment. Fernández (2019) maintained,

historical and curricular examples of how Western “truth” has accomplished this [dehumanization and colonization of knowledge], from Manifest Destiny to the Indian Removal Act to Eugenics up until current day examples such as Standing Rock, mass deportations and detention of Latinx and Muslim folx, the killing of black and brown folx by law enforcement at a disproportionate rate, as well as the MAS program being labeled as “anti-American” and promoting “anti-Western” ideals. (p. 7)

Offering decolonized and humanized curriculum in a variety of ways in a community college composition course (and all other courses) may lead to a revitalization of interest in education and community and begin to counter the staggering statistics among BIPOC folx (as compared to non-BIPOC folx) concerning completion of a college degree. For example, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021) offered a table with graduation rates from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, time to completion, sex, control of institution, and percentage of applications accepted: Selected entry cohort 2014: 51.2% of white students graduated versus 27.2% of Black students and 27.1% of American Indian/Alaska Native.

#### 2.1.4. Other important terms

While the application of CSRP to English Composition 102 is the touchstone of this paper, other terms and phrases may appear in this paper and should be defined.

*Colonization*: “the act or process of sending people to live in and govern another country: [Example]: European colonization of the Americas, with its cycle of war, disease, and slavery, decimated the indigenous peoples” (Cambridge, n.d.).

*Culture Norms*: The shared behavior standards, rules, or expectations for members of a community. Specifically, for this paper, when norms are referenced, I mean United States culture norms, which, I argue, are dominated by Eurocentric, cisgender male, heterosexual beliefs and attitudes. Gelfand and Jackson (2016) offered additional insight:

People look to cultural norms when they cooperate, conform, express prejudice attitudes, and drink too much on Friday night. Cultural norms are responsible for both cultural endurance—such as the continued existence of gender typecasting in Hollywood blockbusters—and for cultural change—such as the recent surge in Americans’ preferences for unique baby names and increased environmental conscientiousness, as some of the world “goes green.” (p. 175)

*Decolonization*: First, to acknowledge Eurocentric dominance and recognize the ways that power relations shape the production, dissemination, and application of knowledge in all areas of Western modern life. Second, to dismantle long-established colonial practices through the revision and replacement of such practices by highlighting and including the contributions, ideas, and experiences of all people (Mintz, 2021; Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d; Saini & Begum, 2020).

#### *Patriarchy*:

A social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; broadly: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.)

*Settler Colonialism*: Settler colonialism, as explained by Veracini (2010), is both intimately related to colonization and migration, but also distinct from both (p. 3). Settler colonists “are *founders* of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them” (Veracini, 2010, p. 3—emphasis in original). Settler colonists generally assume the land they settled was theirs to begin with, and the systems they set up favor the settlers while displacing or eliminating Indigenous people (Veracini, 2010, p. 4).

*Supremacy Culture (a.k.a. white supremacy culture)*: Beliefs and systems in place that allow white people to maintain power over people of other races. Supremacy culture may often be unconsciously reinforced and considered a culture norm (Mer, 2020). While white cisgender women do experience benefits from supremacy culture, it is primarily heterosexual white cisgender men who benefit most.

*Systemic Minoritization*: "The process of making a person or group subordinate in status to a more dominant group or its members" (Dictionary.com, n.d.). This term is relatively new but becoming popular in social justice circles and favored over "systemic racism" as "minoritization" actively acknowledges the victimization of non-dominant members of society.

## 2.2. Operationalized CSRP

In the spring semester of 2017, I introduced a new activity to my English Composition 102 students: the Race & Racism Survey. Since that time, I have offered this task and collected responses every semester. Only recently, however, have I begun asking the students to complete a self-reflection on the survey and consider what (if anything) they may have learned.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Research Design and Participants

The present study employed a quasi-quantitative approach to gather data and conduct analysis. An anecdotal survey was assigned in a class session, and the results were discussed at the next class session. Additionally, a follow-up survey was conducted to learn whether the students had been impacted by the initial activity and discussion.

Fourteen students were enrolled in the spring 2023 English 102 composition course at the time the anecdotal survey was conducted. Eight identified as women; six identified as men. Their responses adequately represented responses given since the survey was introduced in 2017.

### 3.2. Data Collection

The survey occurs as a pre-activity as we transition into the second of four sections of the class, Section II: Race & Racism. The activity is no-credit, but each time I offer it, I inform the students it will directly relate to and drive our conversation at the next class session.

The activity is in survey form. It used to be done on paper in face-to-face classes; now, the survey takes place in our learning management system (Blackboard). There are six categories for which I request the students to fill in names, labeled as follows: Media Celebrities, Authors, Directors, Inventors, Artists (photographers, sculptors, painters, etc.), and Athletes. I give students no context and limited instructions to complete the survey: 1. Do not look anyone up; just go with who you know. 2. If you don't know anyone for a category, leave it blank. 3. Please name no more than four people in each category. 4. Name United States citizens when possible.

While this no-credit assignment is on-going, for this paper, I will refer only to the results collected during spring semester 2023, which adequately reflect the responses from all previous semesters.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

After the survey was completed, I compiled their replies into boxes. I also qualify that I have not offered them a "real survey" as compared to what they have learned in a psychology or statistics class. I call the activity an "anecdotal survey" intended to encourage critical thinking and discussion. While the learning management system in which the survey is conducted (Blackboard) does record their names with the responses, I do not include such information with what I present to the students. Furthermore, because this activity is designed only to fuel discussion, I do not note when names are repeated (for example, nearly every student writes "Leonardo da Vinci" under artists, and a majority of respondents include "J.K. Rowling" for authors).

Table 1 presents how the students responded to the survey regarding the total number of responses, the number of women named, the number of men named, the number of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) folx named, and the number of non-BIPOC (white) people named.

Table 1

*Summary results<sup>2</sup>*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Total responses</i>	<i># of Women</i>	<i># of Men</i>	<i># of BIPOC</i>	<i># of non-BIPOC (white)</i>
Media Celebrities	19	8	11	9 (47%)	10 (53%)
Authors	11	3	8	0	11 (100%)
Directors	7	2	5	1 (14%)	6 (86%)
Inventors	5	0	5	0	5 (100%)
Artists	9	0	9	1 (11%)	8 (89%)
Athletes	13	1	12	11 (85%)	2 (15%)

The survey results demonstrated that, in general, community college students were more familiar with celebrities and athletes—generally part of popular culture—than they were with authors, directors, and inventors, which may be considered academic or cerebral culture. Students in primary and secondary school (K-12) are often taught about authors, inventors, and artists. Directors may not be an academic subject, but the students were more familiar with celebrities who appeared in front of the camera rather than those behind it, who ultimately control what the larger culture sees.

#### 4. Findings

I began the discussion of the survey results with the following critical thinking questions: 1. What do we value as a society? 2. Who do we value as a society? I also ask them if they notice any patterns in the results. The students immediately notice that there are no women or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) folx in the inventors' category; they also recognize the limited number of female and BIPOC names under authors, directors, and artists. We did not discuss who they did name, but who was glaringly missing. I then asked the students what I consider to be the big question: Why do the results look this way? Sometimes, a student identified that the findings reflected what the U.S. education system values (traditional, heteronormative, Eurocentric assimilation), but often, there was silence.

I then moved to facilitating the discussion by presenting—in a document I shared with the students—my predictions regarding their responses. My first prediction was, despite the fact my college is a Hispanic Serving Institution, and our classes are filled with diversity, I expected that most of the names listed would be white men, except for athletes and entertainers. My second prediction was that when BIPOC folx and women appeared in the lists, it was likely fellow BIPOC folx and women who wrote them there. When students inquired about the basis for such predictions, I explained that within the current cultural and educational systems, BIPOC folx and women are taught and participate in white cisgender male (mainstream/dominant/supremacist) culture via education, homelife, religion, and media. All traditionally minoritized groups are expected to know, understand, and participate in supremacist culture, but that same expectation does not exist for those who are not minoritized (primarily white heterosexual cisgender males). Paris (2019) explained the double standard within the school system,

which continues to perpetuate beliefs in the superiority of White, middle-class, monolingual, cis-hetero-patriarchal-ableist ways of being at the expense of all others. Indeed, notions of “difference” are generally set against these [culture] norms, so that difference and diversity are implicated in projects of erasure and deficiency (even as they claim to be projects of “inclusion”), codes for what is not White, not cis, not dominant English monolingual, and so on. (p. 218).

<sup>2</sup> Gender assigned as self-identified by the named figure; only rarely and recently have students named non-gender binary folx.

Students also asked about why the “Media Celebrities” and “Athletes” sections are more diverse, at least racially. We discussed the differences between popular culture versus education or government culture. Popular culture is generally considered the people’s culture:

It is determined by the interactions between people in their everyday activities: styles of dress, the use of slang, greeting rituals and the foods that people eat are all examples of popular culture. Popular culture is also informed by the mass media. (Delaney, 2007).

Mass media changes rapidly, driving and reflecting trends. Pop culture leans toward progressivism, especially regarding large budget films. For example, as Lucasfilms worked on *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, executives were conscious of the need to build diversity into the film. Kiri Hart, former senior vice president of development at Lucasfilm explained to *New York Times* writer, Holt (2017), ““The characters that end up on screen are there because there is a groundswell of energy around this idea of creating a more honest reflection of the world around us” (p. 16).

Contrarily, K-12 educational reform, including textbook adjustments and curriculum, is much more slow-moving, and recently appears to be moving backwards in some areas of the United States. For example, in 2022-2023, eighteen states had “passed a law or other policy restricting certain lessons on race and racism” (Pendharker, 2023, n.p.), including in Florida where in 2022, Governor DeSantis signed the “Stop W.O.K.E. [Wrong to Our Kids and Employees] Act” into law, which “essentially prohibits instruction on race relations or diversity that imply a person’s status as either privileged or oppressed is necessarily determined by his or her race, color, national origin, or sex” (Powell, 2023).

Over the years of offering the race and racism survey activity, I have received pushback from a few students, who claim the U.S. has achieved racial and gender equality. In response, I began including recent census data from the U.S. Census Bureau. As of the 2020 census results, the U.S. population is made up of 64% white people (of Western European descent) and 36% People of Color. Specifically, 63.7% of census respondents claimed to be white; 16.3% claimed to be Hispanic or Latino; 12.2% claimed to be Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic; 4.7% claimed to be Asian alone, non-Hispanic; 1.9% claimed to be two or more races, non-Hispanic; .7% claimed to be American Indian and Alaska native alone, non-Hispanic; .2% claimed to be some other race; and .2% claimed to be Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone, non-Hispanic (Jensen et al., 2021).

I suggested to the students that a logical way to measure if the U.S. is truly a place of equality for all (as some people claim), then, statistically, the results of each category should align with the census percentages because that would mean groups are equally represented according to the number of members of a certain group in the country. I have had students complete this activity every semester since 2017, and the results have never aligned with census data in part, I theorized to the students, because I asked only for “Americans” without qualifiers<sup>3</sup>. I did not ask for “female athletes” or “Black authors” or “Latinx inventors”; I simply asked for “Americans” and many students readily admitted (regardless of their personal race, ethnicity, and/or gender) that when someone says “American,” they picture a blond-haired, blue-eyed white person (and usually cisgender male). Such admissions did not imply that my students were racist; what is indicated is a trend of implicit or unconscious bias. Devos and Banaji (2005) conducted a study in which they asserted that many Americans may explicitly state that the term “American” is inclusive and egalitarian; however, when investigated, implicit prejudices were revealed:

It is our contention that conscious assumptions of egalitarianism in viewing social groups will influence explicit reports, whereas deviations from this principle will emerge on assessments that cannot be consciously controlled – these are instead dominated by the history of intergroup relations within the United States, the actual hierarchy of social groups, and an internalization of that hierarchy in understanding who prototypically represents the nation. The idea of an ethnic

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<sup>3</sup> The survey requested “name U.S. citizens when possible; “American” is often synonymous with “U.S. citizen.”

hierarchy among U.S. citizens may be disavowed consciously and, at the same time, revealed in implicit responses. (p. 448)

The authors conducted six studies and established the following conclusion: "The conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of the six studies presented here is unambiguous. To be American is to be White" (Devos & Banaji, 2005, p. 463). Based on anecdotal evidence during class discussion, this assumption (that when people hear "American" they picture "white") has not altered much despite the changing demographics of the United States.

After presenting the students with the data, my predictions, and statistical breakdown, I asked them an important critical thinking question: What does it all mean?

#### 4.1. Post-activity Survey among Participants

After the students completed the survey and we had our discussion, I asked them to participate in a follow-up survey to the activity. The survey was not graded, offered in Microsoft Forms, and completely anonymous. My goal with the post-activity survey was to gain additional insight into the extent to which the assignment may have benefited them.

There were four questions in the post-assignment survey, and I received a total of nine responses (in a class of 14 students, 64.3% response rate). Collated data results appear in the Appendix.

- Question 1: Think back to the race/racism survey I asked you to complete between Feb. 15 and Feb. 20 (see "Assignments" to refresh your memory on the survey and "Misc. Materials" for the results).

Please respond to the following statement:

The survey discussion helped me better understand the concepts of race and racism.

- Question 2: The survey discussion helped me better understand the lack of representation of People of Color and women in traditional K-12 education.
- Question 3: A. Who is someone you think should be more well known (whose name should appear with the frequency of those other names listed in the results of the survey)? Consider focusing specifically on authors, directors, artists, and inventors.  
B. Why did you choose this person?
- Question 4: Do you have any suggestions about how to educate others about traditionally underrepresented people who have contributed to the areas of arts, humanities, and science?

The post-activity survey indicated that 64% of students (all nine who completed the post-activity survey) in a composition class agreed ("somewhat" or "definitely agreed") that the race and racism survey helped them better understand the concepts of race and racism and better understand the lack of representation of People of Color and women in traditional K-12 education (questions 1 and 2). They also exhibited an investment in their own educations and the education of future learners by offering suggestions for inclusive learning (questions 3 and 4). To affect sustainable change, Irizarry (2017) noted building coalitions, maintaining the feeling of empowerment, and the ability to recognize "the sociopolitical contexts in which they [the students] were being educated are what moves students from apathy to agency" (p. 92). Two students advocated for "doing research," another recommended "speak and represent other culture's [sic] on a daily not just on a specific month of the year." One student who claimed not to have a suggestion advised "putting more people of color in textbooks and schools" while another used the inclusive "we" to urge, "We could educate others about telling them how much people have contributed to society, and how lots of important icons are minorities." These responses demonstrated agency on the part of the students. Rather than passively waiting for the institution to change, they were ready to offer changes to the institution. Chavez (2021) suggested that we (instructors) should not be surprised by students' investment in their education: "The end game is shifting. Today's young people demand an education that is as much about equity and power as it is about reading and writing" (p. 169).



## 5. Discussion

My hope when I offered the race and racism anecdotal survey assignment was that students would make connections to and reflect upon their colonized and dehumanized K-12 educational experiences. Irizarry (2017) explained:

The overwhelming majority of the students' time in school was spent learning discrete facts that might be referenced on standardized tests but were rarely applicable to their lives. It was seldom that students were encouraged or assisted in making connections between the content they learned in schools and their lived experiences or future goals. (p. 89)

And what content did they learn in school? It tends to mirror the content and representation that I received thirty-plus years ago: Eurocentric/white artists, authors, and inventors. While directors may fall into pop culture, the results are always distinct from "in-front-of-the-cameras" celebrities and athletes; it became clear who, traditionally, has had the opportunity to be *behind* the camera (primarily white men).

There are other benefits to the survey activity that align with creating "an unquiet pedagogy," as advocated by Kutz and Roskelly (1991). The authors offered suggestions "for helping students feel a part of the mainstream of school culture, and, at the same time, for changing the course of the stream of that culture" (Kutz & Roskelly, 1991, p. 115). Firstly, the lesson is based *entirely* on the students' responses, which created for them investment in the discussion. Kutz and Roskelly (1991) encouraged instructors to "build on what learners know. Use students' own references and habits, let them tell their own stories" (p. 115). The learners *saw* firsthand what they knew – what they'd been taught in a formal school environment versus what they have learned through their personal interests, hobbies, friends, family members, etc. In their personal lives, they *can* name and *do* recognize diversity in entertainment and athletics, but they have been educated in such a way that what is considered "important" is what they learned in school, and what they have learned is "white history, white literature, white art, white theatre, white poetry, white drama. I know we don't call it that. That's sort of the point" (Killooy et al., 2008, 0:20:42-0:20:47).

In other words, non-BIPOC folx may experience "cultural invisibility" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 198) which describes "how people in dominant positions frequently fail to recognize the nature of their own culture, or that they even have a culture, since their beliefs, language, practices, and worldviews are constantly reinforced by the institutions, people, and media that surround them" (Hemphill & Blakely, 2014, p. 15). Being grouped into "the norm" is a privilege, and since white people are the dominant racialized group in the U.S., another term for "cultural invisibility" is "white privilege," "defined as 'the unearned advantages and benefits that accrue to White people by virtue of a system normed on the experiences, values, and perceptions of their group'" (Hemphill & Blakely, 2014, p. 18). An assignment like the survey in English Composition 102 served to disrupt the hegemony through discussion and reflection.

Kutz and Roskelly (1991) also advised the following: "Make room for lots of talk in the classroom. Knowledge gets shared primarily in oral ways; that means that talk and listening promote literate behaviors" (p. 116). The survey activity is based on class discussion and can only be successful if the students participate, and *they always do*. BIPOC folx and women in the class, especially, begin to recognize and articulate "their long histories of academic neglect and marginalization within schools" (Irizarry, 2017, p. 90). Sometimes, there was pushback (primarily) from the white men in the class who, despite the anecdotal evidence and the stories from their peers, insisted on the advancement of the contrived American meritocracy myth of "pulling yourself up with your bootstraps" like "everyone else" to be successful. Lui (2011) suggested, however, "that by not acknowledging there are greater structural social inequalities at play, there may be a tendency to view students who" do not succeed in education, employment, or life "as having failed on their own terms" (p. 384).

## 6. What's Next?

Participating in the race and racism anecdotal survey with students has helped me consider several aspects of education, leading to the following reflexive questions: 1. What did I learn about power, status, and privilege in K-12 and how has that impacted my life and teaching? 2. What can I learn from students who have had different experiences than I have had? 3. What should we (college instructors, specifically) be doing differently to truly unsettle settler-colonial education and “cultivate transformation and thriving futures” (Pewewardy et al, 2022, p. 10) for all students? Numerous scholars and professors have offered suggestions to decolonize and diversify curriculum and classroom spaces.

### 6.1. Curriculum Changes

Garcia (2021) stated, “What is missing from the curricula are contributions made by POC [People of Color], whereby part of the problem stems from an overemphasis on White-American and European achievements” (p. 379). Because BIPOC students have not been exposed to literature, history, etc. about themselves, they have come to believe they have no history and have offered no contributions to American society, which is simply untrue. “Well thought out lesson plans on race and ethnicity will play a crucial role in a society comprised of people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds” (Garcia, 2021, p. 379). In other words, everyone benefits from critical multicultural pedagogy and teaching may become a “healing craft” that takes “into account the spiritual and physical needs of students; a teaching strategy that starts when teachers listen to the values and beliefs of students. . . is important for the mental health of diverse peoples” (Garcia, 2021, p. 380).

The Race & Racism Survey allowed me to decenter my English 102 classroom by offering students a chance to reflect on their K-12 experiences and what is lacking in education (BIPOC folx and women, primarily). The responses to the survey – for example and specifically regarding the naming of inventors – demonstrated that students, regardless of race or gender, were unable to name non-white male historical figures who made a lasting impact on United States’ society. Yet, Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell have been included on every survey response since 2017. I often admit to the students that I am also woefully ignorant, and without the use of Google, I can name only Madame C.J. Walker, who invented hair care products for Black women.

Irizarry (2017) conducted “a two-year ethnographic study of Latinx high school students in a participatory action research collaborative” (p. 83) that focused on “students’ teaching practices when they are positioned as teachers and given the power to develop curricula and deliver instruction” (pp. 84-85). The article in which he published his findings indicated students were more likely to be invested in their education if they saw themselves, their histories, and their sociocultural realities reflected in the curriculum (p. 85).

The Mexican American Studies [MAS] program developed in 1998 by Tucson, Arizona, educator Curtis Acosta was founded on the philosophy of “helping Latino [*sic*] youth feel empowered and achieve their full academic and human potential” (Fong, 2014). The philosophy was operationalized by creating curriculum using Xicanx(o/a)<sup>4</sup> Indigenous epistemologies, which decenter traditional white-dominant curriculum in favor of including and celebrating the history, culture, and ways of knowing and being of BIPOC folx, specifically Xicanx and Indigenous peoples. Arce (2016) explained the benefits of “implementing Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies [in K-12 programs] to empower Xicana/o students through the development of strong ethnic, cultural, and academic identities” (p. 14). The program was successful. Fong (2014) offered the statistics:

In 2011, the high school dropout rate for MAS students in Tucson was 2.5 percent, as opposed to 56 percent for Latino students nationally. A study by Tucson United School District [TUSD] found that

<sup>4</sup> Xicanx(o/a) is a transition from “Chicanx(o/a)” with the “X implying an Indigenous [here, specifically, the Aztecs] consciousness as central to one’s identity” (Medina & Gonzales, 2019, p. 3).

98 percent of MAS students reported they did homework, and 66 percent went on to college. The program was widely regarded as helping Latino youth feel empowered and achieve their full academic and human potential.

Despite the positive outcomes of the program, the Arizona Department of Education, the State Superintendent, the Arizona Attorney General, and the State Legislature, in 2010, outlawed the MAS program (HB2281), which led cofounder and director of the program, Arce (2016), to declare:

These attacks on Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies and K-12 Chicana/o Studies from the state and local school district is testimony that the colonial project for Xicana/o, and other Indigenous people and communities of color, is not a remnant of the past, but that colonization remains a very real dehumanizing and oppressive force. (p. 12)

The college where I work is a Hispanic Serving Institution, which means it “has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students” and “the U.S. Department of Education offers 3 discretionary grants to support Hispanic Serving Institutions” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). As such, my college may benefit from listening to the Hispanic/Latinx/Chicanx population (and all other traditionally underserved folk), learn from them what their educational and personal needs are, and adapt course content and services accordingly.

A reasonable first step toward course content adaptation may be introducing CSRP into a single class—such as English Composition 102—through an experiential assignment. The Race & Racism Survey and subsequent discussion appeared to unsettle supremacy culture among students. Students became animated and invested in the conversation. They took offense to the blatant lack of diversity in their K-12 courses. Thankfully, many scholars and instructors have shared ideas, experiences, and research about how to combat colonial oppression in academia, which may guide us to reimagine our curriculum and rehumanize our classes.

## 7. Moving Forward and Concluding Thoughts: Inspiration and Reformation

Such calls for educational reformation are not new, but they may be more imperative than ever before. As the demographics of the U.S. change and globalization continues to impact us all, ideally, education must also transform. Instructors and students at every level may advance diversity and inclusion work in small ways, and, luckily, there are plenty of forebearers to guide us.

Revolutionary pedagogical leader Paulo Freire, in his influential text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—published originally in 1970, advocated for the removal of barriers and the inclusion of decolonizing pedagogies to reduce the propagation of white supremacy by understanding and accepting that no one is “marginal” or “other.” Freire (1993) explained:

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not “marginals,” are not people living “outside” society. They have always been “inside” —inside the structure which made them “beings for others.” The solution is not to integrate them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves” (p. 47).

In short, students—who have long been blamed for their lack of educational success—are almost never the problem. The system has neglected and/or excluded them for years, but it may be changed to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion, which may allow all students to succeed rather than only the children of oppressors. Freire’s paramount text offered the history of pedagogical problems, philosophical grounding, and advice for liberatory practices. Many scholars have referred to and built upon Freire’s pedagogical philosophy.

Freire wrote the Forward to Kutz and Roskelly’s (1991) *An Unquiet Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom*, and he acknowledged that the authors had “liberated themselves from the North American culture of how-to manuals” and “extracted [Freire’s] valid principles so they could be re-created and reinvented in the North American context” (ix). Both Kutz and Roskelly were experienced English composition instructors who recognized the woeful inadequacy of teacher training (p. 6). They expressed, “Our population is increasingly diverse and comes with a variety of cultural traditions, and we believe that teachers need to learn how to use

the diversity of American cultures to create a richer school environment" (p. 10). Their text consisted of three units: (1) Language, Thought, and Culture; (2) Literacy and the Learner; and (3) Theory into Practice. The sections included pedagogical proposals, anecdotal experiences from instructors and students, and two powerhouse chapters called "Creating the Classroom Community: New Roles for Teachers and Learners" and "Reinventing the Curriculum." Though their text is over thirty years old, the contents and suggestions remain wholly relevant.

bell hooks (1994) claimed the classroom "remains the most radical place of possibility in the academy" (p. 12), which makes it the perfect arena for revolutionary reform. Such reform means those persons in privileged positions must listen to and learn from traditionally underrepresented voices and adjust accordingly to dismantle the supremacist, misogynistic, classist system currently dominating classrooms. It means introducing texts and contexts into curriculum and policy that represent the modern, diverse United States. It means rehumanizing education to be a communal practice and space that encourages critical thinking as well as hope.

hooks (1994) encouraged transgressive teaching and promoted education as a system that could move beyond the boundaries or restrictions of the dominant culture. hooks's boundary-pushing pedagogical practices were scaffolded on the "interplay of anticolonial, critical, and feminist pedagogies" (p. 10). Such interplay blended multiple perspectives, reviews, and reconsidered systems of domination and how to eliminate them and provided "new ways to teach diverse groups of students" (p. 10). Her seminal text *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) formulated numerous recommendations for Engaged Pedagogy (chapter 1) and encouraged educators to embrace change (chapter 3).

Educator Felicia Rose Chavez released a how-to book of progressive teaching strategies called *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* (2021). While Chavez's text focused primarily on creative writing, the stories (personal, observational, experiential) and approaches to teaching she shared were applicable to all teachers regardless of discipline. The text followed an instructional format. Chavez began with the objective of her text: to decolonize the creative classroom ("Introduction"). The subsequent chapters addressed the numerous challenges BIPOC folx face in academia, specifically the continued issue of being "outside looking in" (Chavez, 2021, p. 21).

In chapter one, called "Preparing for Change," Chavez (2021) explained a troubling reality: "English classes, in particular, position people of color as 'Other' in order to satisfy a meticulously curated white supremacist agenda: a 'classical' education" (p. 22). Included in that "classical" education are too often primarily white writers (and usually men), Standard American English grammar expectations, and the overwhelming belief that students of color fail because they "don't belong" in higher education, rather than focusing on the "systematic institutional and cultural racism" (p. 22) that permeates the United States.

Additional chapters in Chavez's text offered guidance about how to change writing classes to allow the recognition, appreciation, and support of all voices. Chapter eight ends the instruction manual with a question I have taken to heart and may use as a response if (when) I receive resistance in my own attempt to decolonize, unsettle, and rehumanize composition courses: "Why choose the old way when there's something so much better, truer, and infinitely more human, within our grasp?" (p. 178)

Editors Pewewardy, Lees, and Zape-tah-hol-a Minthorn compiled a compendium of resources in their text, *Unsettling Settler-Colonial Education. The Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model* (2022), in which they propose to "[Indigenize] our education system" (p. 2). The authors/editors explained, "The purpose of this volume is to put forth the TIPM [transformational indigenous praxis model] as a structure to support educators in decolonizing and indigenizing their practices" (p. 3).

There are four dimensions of the TIPM intended to combat 500 years of discounted and suppressed indigenous ways of knowing: (1) Contributions Approach; (2) Additive Approach; (3) Transformation Approach; (4) Cultural and Social Justice Action (pp. 4-7). Recognizing that educators may face resistance from peers, students, politicians, etc., as they begin incorporating the

TIPM, Pewewardy et al. (2022) urged the formation of “critical conscious study groups” (p. 7 – emphasis in original) to find support while doing the important work of unsettling centuries of Eurocentric education models.

My goal is to develop collaborative professional development workshops—based on what I have learned with and from my students—where community college instructors may learn about pedagogies that culturally sustain and revitalize or share what they’re doing in their own classes to create diverse, equitable, and inclusive curriculum.

I took my cue from Dr. Anita Fernández and others, who established the Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Organizing [XITO] in response to the 2010 legislative attack on and outlawing of Mexican American Studies in the Tucson Unified School District. Fernández (2019) understood “the need for decolonizing and re-humanizing Ethnic Studies professional development” (p. 2). In other words, “professional development for Ethnic Studies shows that content-area professional development alone is not enough” (p. 2). Educators need professional development that includes the skills to “interrogate systems of oppression, in particular race” (p. 2).

As such, Fernández (2019) offered “critical professional development” (p. 2—emphasis in original) which is a social justice-focused type of training intended to counteract the oppressive banking methods of teaching as described by Freire (1993). Instead of teachers considering students as “empty vessels” waiting for knowledge to be poured into them from “on high,” such professional development as explained by Fernández would take into account how colonization affects education and “sustains cycles of oppression” (Fernández, 2019, p. 2). While XITO was founded specifically for high school curriculum, the concepts are easily applied to college-level classes. Through collaborative and critical professional development, community college instructors would be given the space and tools to address colonizer oppression and combat it by revitalizing the Freirean concepts of love, trust, and respect that may lead to an honest revolution in education. Gonzalez (2017a), one of the original MAS teachers in Tucson, asserted:

Teachers who deeply and genuinely care are revolutionaries who are compelled to transform society. This sense of agency driven by the innate emotion of love is the catalyst for improving the human condition and, I argue, what teaching is anchored on. (p. 138)

Driven by love, empathy, and a shared goal of transforming education to be diverse, equitable, and inclusive, community college instructors have an opportunity to truly transform students’ lives and thereby society as a whole. For me, the Race and Racism Survey activity, combined with four weeks (of a 16-week class) of additional reading, analysis, and discussion all centering around CSRP to unsettle supremacy culture, has helped me (re)envision curricula, classrooms, and community college as spaces that may divert or even end the damaging, systemic promotion of white supremacist education.

Other instructors may make different choices in their approaches to engaging students in critical and reflective thinking and the on-going issue of racism in education and society. Many scholars and educators have published suggestions for understanding and implementing progressive pedagogies and curricula, including Adrienne Maree Brown (2017), *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*; Felicia Rose Chavez (2021) *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom*; Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young (Eds., 2017), *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*; Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade (2022), *Equality or Equity: Toward a Model of Community-Responsive Education*; Geneva Gay (2023), *Educating for Equity and Excellence: Enacting Culturally Responsive Teaching*; bell hooks (1994), *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*; Asao B. Inoue (2015), *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*; Cornel Pewewardy, Anna Lees, and Robin Zape-Tah-Hol-Ah Minthorn (Eds., 2022), *Unsettling Settler-Colonial Education*; Iris D. Ruiz (2016), *Reclaiming Composition for Chicano/as and Other Ethnic Minorities: A Critical History and Pedagogy*.

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