

Developing an Institutional Approach to Culturally Sustaining Practices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

Melanie Flores

National Louis University, Chicago

Saunti Knauth

National Louis University, Chicago

W. Jason Stegemoller

National Louis University, Chicago

This paper discusses an initiative to develop an intentional approach to implementing culturally and linguistically sustaining practices at a Hispanic Serving Institution in the United States. Such practices are vital because students who identify with languages and cultures that have been marginalized societally often face similar marginalization within universities. To drive the development, a cultural competence survey was created and administered to university faculty and staff to measure changes that take place after professional development. The work is facilitated by a process of culturally relevant professional development and data gathering in which insights gained from faculty, staff, and students inform further iterations of the survey. The process of developing and administering the survey, and iterating it according to discussion and data, cultivates our institutional conversation and knowledge base about culturally sustaining practice and moves toward a climate in which all students feel that their unique identities are welcomed and validated.

Keywords: Hispanic-Serving Institutions, universities, culture, culturally relevant pedagogy, surveys

Institutions of higher education within the United States play a vital role in economic attainment since the majority of new jobs require post-secondary education (Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish, 2016), especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Carnevale, Smith, and Melton, 2011). Universities must ensure that institutions are welcoming environments for students from all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, as the demographics of the United States continue to diversify, institutions of learning must also evolve in order to educate the "new mainstream" (Enright, 2011). According to the 2017 U.S. Census, the Hispanic and Latino population is estimated to be 55 million people, comprising about 17% of the total population (U.S. Census, 2017). Latina/o students' attainment of bachelor's degrees, 21%, lags behind that of white students, 45%, and black students, 32% (Carnevale & Fasules, 2017). In order to address this disparity, the United States Department of Education provides grants to Hispanic-Serving

Institutions (HSI) to strengthen programs in order to increase opportunities for Latina/o students and other underrepresented students. The Department of Education defines HIS's as institutions that have "an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent that is at least 25% Hispanic students" (U.S. Department of Education).

This article describes our university's intentional approach to preparing faculty to educate the new mainstream. The mission of National Louis University is Access, Innovation and Excellence. NLU was founded in 1886 and is one of the oldest and most progressive universities in Chicago. NLU is a broad access, four-year private, non-profit, Hispanic-Serving Institution. National Louis University is one of the largest teacher preparation institutions in Chicago and is comprised of the National College of Education, the College of Professional Studies and Advancement and the emerging Undergraduate College. The institution operates within a distributed structure across six campuses in Illinois and in Florida.

In 2017, NLU began implementing its HSI STEM Grant, which works toward increasing Latina/os and other underrepresented minorities in STEM fields as well as working towards increasing faculty and staff use of culturally sustaining practices at the institution. To achieve this, the HSI team developed a tool to measure the use of culturally sustaining practices as well as designed professional development workshops. This article describes our process, shares initial findings, and provides recommendations for implementing the tool, or adapting it for use at other institutions. The tool is available at <http://bit.ly/nluculture>.

Defining Culturally Sustaining Practices

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) published the landmark article *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, which has become the foundation for pedagogy that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 16-17). For the purposes of our work at NLU, culture is viewed broadly as "a set of non-genetic information that is available (i.e., information exists), accessible (i.e., information can be acquired), and applicable (i.e., information is usable) to a group of people" (Kashima, 2014, p. 25).

This cognitivist definition of culture, along with Ladson-Billings work, drove the development of the survey instrument to measure the extent to which culturally sustaining practices are implemented within the institution. Culture is also very much a social process which, as Bantz (1993) explains, "is an outcome and a process that arises in the meaningful activity of people. As action becomes meaningful, members of a culture develop expectations about the activities of members... These patterns of expectations include norms, roles, agendas, motives, and styles" (p. 25). Because culture is made up of contextualized practices, it is beneficial to develop tools that aid in the creation of multiple, contextualized definitions of culture. Our work operationalizes culturally sustaining practices as those that exhibit two primary goals:

to increase the cultural competence of NLU faculty and staff and to create an approach to culturally relevant practice that is situated within the NLU university context.

Culturally Sustaining Programming at NLU

The professional development program was developed by the third author, who is an associate professor in English as a second language and bilingual education in NLU's college of education. The program consisted of two components: an online component consisting of three modules about culturally relevant practice, and a series of three face-to-face meetings. He created the online modules, called eNuggets, in consultation with the assistant provost at the time, the director of the HSI grant, the first author of the paper, and a technical specialist in charge of creating the graphics and design elements. The discussions about the topics of the eNuggets resulted in the following three topics, which were also the topics of each of the in-person meetings:

1. Meaning: What does it mean for NLU to be an HSI?
2. Implications: What is the role of positive campus climate and classrooms in persistence, retention, and graduation?
3. Methods: What are culturally responsive practices, and what do they look like in teaching, advising, coaching, and program/development management at NLU?

The in-person meetings were called the *HSI Professional Development Series on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. The meetings, called Lunch and Learns, took place once in December, January, and April, for one hour at noon on NLU's Chicago campus. The sessions were led by the third author, and they consisted of a presentation supplemented with a PowerPoint and a subsequent discussion among the attendees about the topics in the presentations. They were also broadcast via videoconferencing for those who could not attend in person, recorded, and stored in a university repository that faculty could access along with some relevant articles.

In the first Lunch and Learn, the following working definition of culturally relevant pedagogy (Prater & Devereaux, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2001) was presented to provide a basis for beginning discussion:

University faculty and staff who teach and engage in culturally relevant ways:

1. understand and value the role of diversity
2. can infuse cultural knowledge, students' experiences, important issues and languages/dialects
3. can adapt curricula, programming, and pedagogy to the dynamics of differences in the classroom (Prater & Devereaux, 2009)
4. "understand culture and its role in education"
5. "take responsibility for learning about students' culture and community"
6. "use student culture as a basis for learning"
6. "promote a flexible use of students' local and global culture" (Ladson Billings, 2001, p. 98).

Through discussions during and after the workshops, the working definition evolved to incorporate the concept of culturally sustaining practices (Paris, 2012). Culturally sustaining practices strive to encourage students to maintain and develop their unique identities, strengths and talents. The following questions were discussed in small groups during each of the Lunch and Learns:

- Lunch and Learn 1:
 - How can institutional agents use their knowledge and roles on behalf of Hispanic students and other students of color at NLU?
- Lunch and Learn 2:
 - What is CRP?
 - What is the purpose of CRP?
 - Do the questions in the survey effectively represent CRP?
 - What should NLU's approach to CRP be?
- Lunch and Learn 3:
 - How relevant is the working definition of culturally relevant practice?
 - How would the definition of culturally relevant practice play out at NLU?
 - How could the definition be made more relevant?
 - What do students' experiences tell us about CR/S Practice at NLU?
 - What do faculty, staff experiences tell us about CR/S Practice at NLU?

The professional development series reached over 80 individuals in the university community. Before the first Lunch and Learn, 43 people had completed the eNuggets, 88% of whom were adjunct faculty; the remaining 12% were professors, instructors, and staff. Each Lunch & Learn had an average of 35 registrants composed of adjunct faculty, instructors, staff, administrators, and faculty from both the College of Education, and the College of Profession Studies and Advancement.

After participating in the sessions and engaging with faculty and staff, participants indicated in evaluations that it was helpful to come together and engage in discussion. However, participants shared that more resources are needed, and it is important to continue conversations and further discussions to a deeper level and create more concrete culturally relevant and sustaining practices.

In the professional development dialogue sessions, faculty and staff continued to dissect the HSI team's tool and provided insights on their experience using culturally relevant pedagogy. They also expressed practices they would like to apply in their classroom and in coaching and mentoring students.

Methodology

The HSI team's goal is to increase the use of culturally sustaining practices by 20%. However, this goal was proposed without a clear system to measure the increase. In a sense, the team was working on a rationale of measurement as a driver of change. In other words, the process of developing and implementing a tool that defined and

measured culturally sustaining practices would be a positive force for dialogue and consensus and would inform the work of faculty and staff.

There have been significant efforts to measure cross-cultural competence (Matsumoto and Hwang, 2013), but fewer resources for considering culturally sustaining practices in higher education. The process began by asking the external evaluator on the HSI grant, Dr. Ann Mullis, to review existing tools and draft a survey to use. She drew across several tools and compiled items under the domains of cross-cultural empathy (Wang et al. 2003); self-efficacy (Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, & Ng, 2004; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995); cross-cultural openness (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994); and teaching strategies and knowledge. As noted by the evaluator, no tool was found that focused specifically on practices in higher education. To further develop the tool for that context, faculty and staff with experience in promoting culturally responsive pedagogy in k-12 settings and higher education settings were convened. That group brought in items used but not yet validated in k-12 settings.

The resulting tool focused on two domains: 1) beliefs and experiences, with items drawn largely from those compiled by the evaluator's review; and 2) strategies and approaches, drawn from less formal surveys used in K-12 settings and the experience base of faculty and staff. Five categories of strategies were identified: use of materials, actions to understand diversity, actions to connect to students' culture, creating a respectful environment, and specific teaching strategies to respond to cultural diversity. The response scales for the strategies was revised to match that used in regularly administered surveys of campus climate. In those surveys, respondents are asked about their satisfaction with aspects of climate, and the importance to them of that aspect (Levitz, 2015). This allows for a "gap analysis" of satisfaction with items considered most important. For the tool, faculty and staff were asked to rate both how often they used a strategy, and how important they felt the strategy was to serving students effectively.

The resulting tool was piloted with a small group of faculty members, and slight revisions were made for clarity of items. The survey was then administered at a faculty meeting of the College of Education and to all participants prior to a professional development session.

A two-pronged approach to developing and using the tool then began and is currently continuing. First, the HIS team will continue to convene conversations and carry out qualitative data collection about the items in the survey and related CRP topics. Throughout the remaining three years of the HSI grant, it is expected that the tool will be iterated based on these activities. For example, the team will want to keep hearing from students on what pedagogical practices and approaches allow for student voice and full representation of their experiences. It is expected that iterating based on data from students will result in a tool that reflects NLU context. Second, the team will determine a version of the tool that will remain constant for the life of the grant in order to capture change on the related performance measure. The tool will be revised in the summer of 2018 based on the first wave of administration and other

data sources. The HSI project evaluator will administer that version in Fall term of each year of the grant.

Findings

Overall, the faculty in the National College of Education at NLU felt confident in their abilities to practice culturally relevant pedagogy. Over half (68%) faculty of the eighty-four faculty members who took the survey feel that it is very like them to have experience in teaching students from a culture other than their own. When asked how confident they are that they understand the cultures that their students come from, 57% reported that they feel confident. The survey also showed that 44% of NLU faculty indicated a need for support or training in effectively working with students from diverse cultures. Table 1 shows the results of the section of the survey that asks about faculty’s beliefs and experiences in response to the question: “Please rate each of the following statement based on how ‘like you’ or ‘not like you’ the statement is.”

Table 1: *Faculty Beliefs and Experiences*

	Like me						Not like me	
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
1. I am confident of my ability to communicate well with students from all kinds of ethnic & cultural backgrounds.	32%	43%	15%	7%	1%	0%	1%	
2. I have experience teaching students who come from a different culture than my own.	68%	22%	5%	2%	0%	2%	0%	
3. I am aware of how culture can influence communication.	69%	21%	6%	2%	0%	0%	1%	
4. I am confident I understand the diverse cultures from which my students come.	27%	30%	27%	11%	1%	1%	2%	
5. I enjoy working with students from cultures that are unfamiliar to me	34%	19%	5%	1%	0%	0%	1%	

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	Like me						Not like me
	7	6	5	4	3	2	
6. I believe students are partners in the teaching/learning process and may have expertise in some areas.	81%	12%	5%	1%	0%	0%	1%
7. In my area of work, I have been able to support my students' success without emphasizing my students' cultural backgrounds.	6%	27%	14%	7%	7%	6%	2%
8. In my career, I have had support and/or training in how to effectively work with students from diverse cultures.	3%	29%	17%	8%	6%	5%	2%
9. I feel I currently need support and/or training in how to effectively work with students from diverse cultures.	18%	26%	20%	11%	8%	13%	14%

In addition to the quantitative results, it was discovered that this tool also resulted in a high level of interest among the higher education community. The process of developing this tool was presented at the Alliance for Hispanic Serving Institutions' Best Practices Conference and it was found that there are additional faculty and staff working at other Hispanic-Serving Institutions were interested in the measurement tool and how this practice could be implemented at their institutions.

Some next steps are to collaborate with other institutions to share the development process of the measurement tool as well as design professional development around culturally sustaining practices for their own institution.

Recommendations

We are finding the measurement of culturally relevant and sustaining practices to be a useful process for building shared understanding and practice at our university.

We developed the below planning guide as recommendations for individuals at other institutions who are interested in the process of implementing a tool to measure CRP. National Louis University's tool can be accessed at <http://bit.ly/nluculture>.

1. Convene a work group (members may play different roles)
 - a. Development:
 - i. HSI Director, staff
 - ii. Measurement expertise
 - iii. Research expertise on culturally responsive pedagogy
 - iv. Teaching experience
 - v. Other
 - b. Review:
 - i. University leadership
 - ii. Institutional effectiveness
 - iii. Office of Teaching and Learning/Professional Development
 - iv. Student representatives
2. Designate responsibility for gathering relevant data
 - a. Current/past measurements of teaching strategies and effectiveness
 - b. Collect student views (e.g. course evaluations, climate surveys, other)
 - c. HSI data - evaluations
 - d. Definitions of culturally sustaining practices
3. Initial Discussions with stakeholders
 - a. Do you have a definition of culturally responsive pedagogy at your institution? If yes, what is it? Does it need revision?
 - b. What do you know so far in relation to your definition?
 - c. How do you expect to use the survey?
 - i. To inform Professional Development?
 - ii. Other University discussion?
 - d. How does it link to HSI efforts?
 - e. Possibly reviewing current tool, or others as a starting point: Does it capture current practices and needs at your institution?
4. Development team reviews further instruments
5. Draft and Pilot Instrument
6. Review pilot data (full team)

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