[Graphic description: Colored silhouettes/profiles of heads & faces of children of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.]

Equity by Design:

Teaching and Learning as Cultural Endeavors

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Teaching and Learning as Cultural Endeavors

In this *Equity by Design* brief, we bring a cultural lens to focus on the pernicious and persistent educational inequities in academic achievement that Students of Color continue to experience. Historically, these outcomes were long misunderstood as achievement issues, or an "achievement gap." Ladson-Billings (2006) reframed this troubling issue as an *equity debt*. This important reframing highlighted educational disparities not as evidence of within-child deficits, but rather as a debt owed to Students of Color after long histories of inequitable educational opportunities. The educational debt is an historical accumulation of unequal educational opportunities such as having separate and unequal schools, Native American boarding schools and residential programs, tracking that did not include broad pathways to higher education for Students of Color, inappropriate special education assessment practices, disproportional representation of Students of Color in subjective disability categories, and other discrepancies contributing to achievement discrepancies. We posit that culture is one means of paying back this equity debt in the education.

In this brief we look at how teaching and learning can be understood as two interconnected *cultural* endeavors that support learning, particularly for Students of Color. Although culture can be a powerful idea to bring to teaching and learning, it can also be confusing. We, of course, want to think of culture in deep and complex ways (beyond food, holidays, and dress), but

then we move into the culture-is-everywhere-and-everywhere explanations which are not very useful to practice. Teaching and learning are undoubtedly connected activities, yet they can all too often be understood in ways that are very limiting for Students of Color. For this reason, we dive into thinking about teaching and learning as cultural endeavors in a few different ways. First, we start with a working definition of

[Image description: Elementary-aged students of different racial/ethnic and gender expressions, listening to their teacher read to them.]

what we mean by culture accompanied by some guiding principles. Second, we recognize some of the scholars that have helped lay a cultural foundation for thinking about teaching and learning. This also facilitates an understanding of the evolutions of some of the terms that have made their ways into schools and in order to help teachers understand how these works are connected, build upon each other, and differ from each other. Next, we provide three stories from the authors, which help bring culture alive in teaching

and learning accompanied by reflective questions. Finally, we provide a curated set of resources that teachers can access to continue their own learning or to think about as curricular tools.

What is Culture?

Though we focus on culture as it pertains to Students of Color in this brief, we do not use culture as a euphemism for Students of Color. It is not uncommon for educators and researchers to refer to "culturally and linguistically diverse students" when they are really referring to Students of Color. Indeed, we understand that *everyone* has culture. In fact, we argue that *all* students are culturally and linguistically diverse (Giroux, 1997).

We also recognize that school and classroom cultures are largely based on white cultural norms where Eurocentric cultural practices are treated as normative practices, or the standard (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 2017). For example, Eurocentric ways of speaking, interacting, and participating are normalized, given value and power, and centered. It is from these cultural norms that comparisons and determinations of 'differences' are made (e.g., behavior, participation, ability). Even still, white cultural norms are often considered invisible and often difficult to define for those who call them their own (Love, 2019). Eurocentric cultural norms can often lead to Students of Color being (mis) understood due to differences that are sometimes perceived as deviant or deficits (Annamma et al., 2013; Artiles, 1998).

Consequently, culture-free approaches to teaching and learning are not actually culture-free, but rather perpetuating

Eurocentric cultural norms. So, if we know that culture-free or culturally-neutral teaching and learning do not really exist, what can we do? Surprisingly, we now have more than two decades of research demonstrating the positive impact of thinking about teaching and learning as cultural processes (see upcoming sections). Yet, Students of Color continue to lack access to teaching and learning environments that support them as cultural beings, evident in the continuous inequities in academic outcomes as well as disparate graduation and higher education attendance rates (Irwin et al., 2021).

If everyone has culture and culture is everywhere, what does that mean for teaching and learning? Some guiding principles follow:

- **Think of culture as a verb rather than a noun** (Anderson-Levitt, 2012; Street, 1993). If you ask someone about their own culture it is quite common to hear references to food, language, dress, or holidays. While culture is connected to such artifacts, what is often missing in these conversations is that culture is also what humans <u>do</u>, their participation in practices and activities. In order to deepen our understandings of culture, it is helpful to shift our understanding of culture from nouns to verbs.

- **Culture is hybrid and dynamic** (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Erickson, 2011; Nasir & Hand, 2006). Students of different races can sometimes adopt cultural practices that are not associated with their racial group. One example of this is an Asian or Latinx student engaging in African American English[1] or a Black student engaging in Chicano English (see Alim & Reyes, 2011 and Rosa &

Flores, 2017). This hybridity can come from sharing geographic spaces or from (social) media spreading cultural practices that hold value but may not be from one's own culture. Aside from culture being hybrid, it is also dynamic—constantly changing. What this means for teachers is that we need to recognize that different cultural groups can have varying cultural practices. It is safest to assume what Artiles and colleagues (2005) refer to as within-group diversity. That means that even at a school that is 98% of one race, one could still expect a lot of diversity.

- **Culture is not only based on race and ethnicity but can be also based on shared communities** (Artiles, 2003; Ferguson, 2003; Gee, 2009; McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Culture is more than racial and ethnic groups. It refers to communities with shared practices; this can include affinity groups. Gee (2009) has shared a popular culture example being children that collect Pokémon cards (and now we can revise that to say people that play Pokémon Go). Participants in this popular cultural affinity group have a shared language, shared practices, and perhaps shared identities related to this interest. McDermott and Varenne (1995) found that sometimes individuals become a part of a cultural group based on their participation in school. For example, students that are classified as being "at risk[2]" or having a disability. For some

individuals, they identify with disability as a part of who they are, yet for others they become disabled through their participation in school.

- **Schools and classrooms have cultures** (Artiles, 2003, 2015; Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). Youth can participate in classroom cultural practices but still not identify with them. Human beings are complex and belong to many cultural groups—some of which they identify with strongly and others they participate in but do not identify strongly with. Some students, for example, may even engage in classroom practices in ways that purposefully challenge the cultural norms that are in conflict with their own cultural practices. Artiles (2003, 2015) introduced a three-cultures framework for thinking about culture being not only as what individuals possess, but also something institutions (such as schools) have, and what the individuals that come together within those institutions create together.

- **Culture is connected to time—it's historical and future-oriented** (Cole, 1998; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Culture is historical since it is passed onto individuals as cultural practices that they are likely to reproduce, but it is also future-oriented since humans have agency and they might choose *not* to reproduce certain cultural practices. Humans are also improvisational and may produce new cultural practices that get passed on. Teachers can also play

[1]When two non-dominant cultures share space they may engage in transcultural practices. This is different from cultural appropriation which involves someone taking cultural practices from a community they are not a part of.
[2]"A Nation at Risk" was published in 1983, which quickly shifted to some students being at risk—i.e., low-SES, students of color. Ladson-Billings (2014) has referred to this framing as a pedagogy of poverty, or the belief that poor students and students of color are different kinds of students, or "at risk" students.

a role in improvising new cultural practices in their schools and classrooms that go against the grain of their institutional culture. For instance, they may bring a knew curricular tool such as translanguaging[3] into their practice.

Cultural Foundation Builders in Education

[Image description: Silhouette of a team holding the foundation of a bridge, as children and adults cross.]
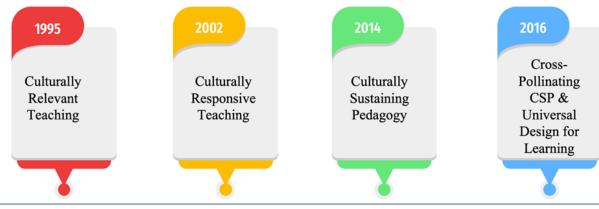
It is not uncommon for educators to hear the terms culturally relevant, culturally sustaining, and other iterations of the concept thrown around in professional dialogue. This may be from school leaders or colleagues discussing school needs, or practices they engage in. It is also very likely that, as an educator, you have found yourself in a professional development training focusing on one of these topics. While we agree that these concepts hold a lot of value, they are often expected to be implemented without sufficient understanding of the differences, the historical evolution of the concepts, and even the critiques. In order to engage more deeply in culture in teaching and learning, we provide a brief synopsis of these foundational scholars that have paved critical pedagogies for making schooling for equitable for Students of Color.

Students of Color have historically struggled with school how teaching and learning are organized in school, yet culturally imbued pedagogies have advanced important equity shifts in schools. Rather than framing those struggles as an issue *within* the children, groundbreaking scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and Geneva Gay (2002) introduced the concepts of culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogies. More recently, H. Samy Alim and Django Paris (2014) have built on that work with the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogies, with Federico Waitoller and Kathleen King Thorius (2016) continuing that momentum with cross pollination work. Though these concepts are related and build on each other, there are also nuances to the principles and guiding the work. We provide a brief description of each of these foundational concepts in order to provide you with a historical understanding of where this work is rooted, how it has evolved, and how the concepts differ.

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[3]Translanguaging is the use of two (or more) languages as one language system. It allows bilingual individuals to utilize their full linguistic repertoires.

Cultural Foundations in Teaching and Learning

1995	2002	2014	2016
Culturally Relevant Teaching	Culturally Responsive Teaching	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy	Cross-Pollinating CSP & Universal Design for Learning
Gloria Ladson-Billings	Geneva Gay	Django Paris & H. Samy Alim	Federico Waitoller & Kathleen King Thorius
"Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy"	"Preparing for culturally responsive teaching"	"What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward."	"Cross-pollinating culturally sustaining pedagogy and universal design for learning: Toward an inclusive pedagogy that accounts for disability"

Dr. Ladson-Billings on *Culturally Relevant Teaching*: In the foundational work *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, Ladson-Billings (1995) builds on her investigation of successful teachers of Black students with a need to advance a theory that examines the intersection of teaching and culture. She theorized pedagogy arguing that Black, Native American, and Latinx students should be able to achieve academically while affirming their cultural identities and practices. Through her examination, she identified three characteristics of culturally relevant educators:

1. They had high expectations and believed their students were capable learners. They facilitated learning, and saw themselves as part of the community.
2. They had strong relationships with students and structured learning in ways for students to learn from each other and hold each other accountable.
3. Teachers had flexible beliefs about learning and brought passion to knowledge and learning. They also saw knowledge as something to be constructed with supports.

Through these principles, culturally relevant teachers were able to foster "academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 477-478).

Dr. Gay on Culturally *Responsive Teaching*: The concept of culturally responsive (CR) teaching was coined by Geneva Gay (2002) in her research on supporting the educational success of ethnically diverse students through teacher education. CR teaching focuses on pushing past basic and flat understandings of ethnically diverse communities, and highlights the importance for all students to have the opportunity to use their diverse

cultural knowledge and frames of reference within their educational experiences.

CR teaching is a learned practice that requires time to become a part of an educators' understanding and routine. Gay (2002) outlines the following five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching:
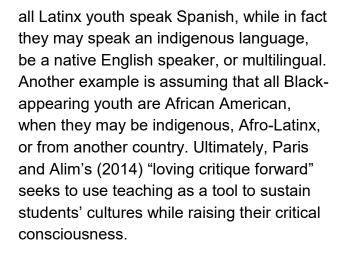
1. *Develop a cultural diversity knowledge base*: which includes explicit knowledge on subject matter as well as cultural characteristics and contributions to various fields of work.
2. *Design culturally relevant curricula*: requires the process of reviewing formal lessons to identify multicultural strengths and weakness within the designs and material.
3. *Demonstrate cultural caring & building a learning community*: which occurs by creating a partnership with your students to support their achievement through action, based upon respect and validation.
4. *Cross-cultural communications*: built upon the understanding that different cultures use different language structures and styles of communication.
5. *Cultural congruity in classroom instruction*: match the style of teaching and engagement expectations based upon a multicultural understanding of learning processes and styles.

According to Gay's (2002) work these elements are key to the process of deconstructing educators pre-established knowledge which may act as obstacles to understanding and implementing CR pedagogical practices. Educators must then begin rebuilding a holistic understanding of the complexities of authentic multicultural education. Establishing a holistic knowledge base is key for developing learning opportunities that are intertwined with relevant and relatable material.

Drs. Paris and Alim on *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*: In Paris and Alim's (2014) *What Are We Seeking to Sustain Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward* they build on the foundational work Ladson-Billings contributed, with a "loving critique" that Students of Color need more than culturally *relevant* instruction. Far too often students enter educational systems and leave having lost the language of their households, cultural ways of communicating, important cultural aspects of their identities. For this reason, Paris and Alim (2014) introduced the concept of culturally *sustaining* pedagogy (CSP); they argue that we must seek to sustain students' cultures.

CSP shares some of the same key principles as CRP, but also takes into consideration that culture is constantly changing, and *youth* culture needs to be taken into consideration. One example of this is hip-hop culture, which can be a powerful pedagogical tool coming from youth culture. Yet, at the same time they caution against embracing hip hop as a pedagogical tool without opening up spaces for students to critique the ways that they might be participating in and reproducing marginalizing discourses such as homophobia, sexism, and racism. Alim and Paris (2014) also caution that there is a tendency to assume a unidirectional correspondence between language, ethnicity, race and culture. For example, that

all Latinx youth speak Spanish, while in fact they may speak an indigenous language, be a native English speaker, or multilingual. Another example is assuming that all Black-appearing youth are African American, when they may be indigenous, Afro-Latinx, or from another country. Ultimately, Paris and Alim's (2014) "loving critique forward" seeks to use teaching as a tool to sustain students' cultures while raising their critical consciousness.

Drs. Waitoller and King Thorius on *Cross-Pollinating Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Universal Design for Learning*: As we unravel this timeline and evolution of foundational cultural pedagogies, we feel it is essential to bring in Waitoller and King Thorius's (2016) article *Cross-Pollinating Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning: Toward an Inclusive Pedagogy* That *Accounts for Dis/Ability.* While the previously introduced scholars laid critical foundational work, there was a silence in their discussions of cultural diversity as it relates to disability. The authors argue that racism and ableism cannot be separated due to a history that wove them together (e.g., the eugenics movement). They offer, as a means to simultaneously address racism and ableism, a cross-pollination of CSP and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to ensure individuals with dis/abilities benefit from asset-based cultural pedagogies through extension of key UDL principles (i.e., multiple means of representation, engagement, and action/expression).

CSP can be enriched with concepts from UDL to include students with disabilities. UDL supports the framing of disability as a necessary part of the developmental process of "fluid cultural identities" versus static cultural identities (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016, p. 382). This cross-pollination can be used to disrupt ableist practices that define what is considered the "norm" in educational performance and assimilating those with differences. This includes a more critical exploration of the cultural facets of disability in education which can position part of the students' identity (disability) as a deficit in order to access supports and resources.

The flip side of the same coin is that UDL principles can also be enhanced through inclusion of CSP principles. While UDL has been lauded as important principles for improving access for students with disabilities, there has been little attention to racial, ethnic, language, and cultural differences (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016).

CSP and UDL are equity-focused and promising educational concepts that have already improved educational opportunities ad outcomes for many students. Yet, neither of these alone address the cultural complexity of students of Color with disabilities. Waitoller and King Thorius's call for cross-pollination brings these important concepts into conversation.

Quotes from the Foundational Scholars

Gloria Ladson-Billings - "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" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483).

Geneva Gay - Culturally responsive teaching is defined as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively... academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own culture and experiential filters" (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

H. Samy Alim and Django Paris - "Culturally sustaining pedagogy must resist static, unidirectional notions of culture and race that reinforce traditional versions of difference and (in) equality without attending to shifting and evolving ones." (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 95)

Federico Waitoller and Kathleen King Thorius – The necessity to interweave UDL and CSP stems from the reality that "Students with dis/abilities have experienced oppression with great consequence for who accesses learning, whose abilities are recognized and valued, and who participates in decision making in schools. Thus, pedagogies that value ethnic, racial, and language differences simultaneously and intentionally must be committed to disrupting those that have historically pathologize students' abilities" (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016, p. 367).

Stories and Reflective Questions for Thinking About Culture in Teaching and Learning

Alicia's Story: Laura and her Mexican Mum in Finland

Not all school systems design and assess learning in the same way. We would like to share an example from one of our co-authors, Alicia, a scholar-mother that spent time working as a scholar in Finland.

We lived in Espoo, Finland, for few years. Not only was the white, winter landscape in stark contrast to the desert landscape of my homeland in Sonora, Mexico—it was also culturally very different. One of the most profound differences was in the education system. I enrolled my seven-year-old daughter, Laura, in a Finnish school, which allowed me to broaden my understanding of what counts as learning.

In Finland kids spend a lot of time outside, no matter the weather. It was not unusual for me to visit her school and find Laura playing outdoors with her classmates, with damp gloves and her shoes and trousers dirty. This was different form the school systems I was more accustomed to, where students were expected to have clean and neat uniforms. Yet, I noticed that she normally had a big smile even when playing in the freezing snow!

Like many parents, I would ask Laura about her day at school. Unlike when she attended school in the US and Mexico, Laura had a lot to share while attending Finnish schools. She would describe things like going to the forest and having a picnic near a big tree,

running and playing games, counting trees and plant species, finding a bunny and two squirrels, listening to the teacher tell stories about the trees and animals and reminded us to take good care of our nature, taking the train back to school with a pitstop to buy ice cream, and being the special helper that served her classmates the snack.

As an immigrant mother from Mexico, it was hard sometimes to understand the Finnish school system. A Finnish mother told me that the idea of outdoor learning has been around for centuries, so it is not unusual for Finnish children to spend the entire day outdoors playing and learning about the natural world. One thing was for sure: Laura seemed very happy and was certainly learning a lot.

We don´t live in Finland anymore and just the other day Laura told me "Mum, I miss going for excursions, having my theater day, and taking the train and visiting different places with my teachers and classmates."

It's easy to romanticize the Finnish system, but we also faced inequities as immigrants and as native Spanish speakers learning the Finnish language. I faced difficulties with understanding and feeling included. Yet, when it came to learning, I now wish Laura could be disconnected from screens and escape the walls that surrounded her all day at school. I think of all of the learning that happened while making cakes, cleaning, and preparing snacks at school. I know this experience helped her develop in ways I probably do not even fully understand yet, but what I do see is that she developed critical life skills, her

physical wellbeing was part of learning, and she has incredible curiosity.

I do not share this example to put Finnish schools on pedestal, but rather to illustrate that there are other ways of structuring and thinking about learning.

[Image description: *Elementary-aged students of different racial/ethnic and gender expressions outside learning about gardening with their teacher.*]

Reflecting on Alicia's Story:

- Institutional cultures have certain cultural practices that are normalized and consequently seldom questioned. In what ways does the Finnish system described in this vignette give rise to questions about teaching and learning?
- What cultural practices are used as evidence of learning in your school? What cultural practices described in Alicia's story would not be seen as learning in your school? Why not?

Michelle's Story: Learning About The Transformative Power of Culture in Environmental Learning in Mexico
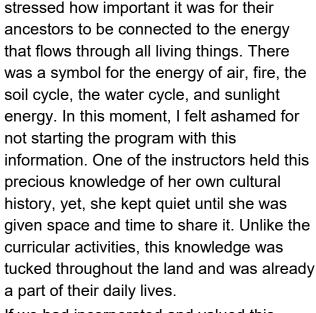
Opportunities to learn (OTL), one of the foundational hallmarks of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, are often framed as access to and participation in physical spaces (e.g., general education classrooms) and curricular learning activities. Oftentimes UDL is used as a resource to increase OTL for all students, yet, without attention to culture, Students of Color may not actually have the same OTL since culturally-neutral curricula, are in fact, based on Eurocentric norms. Environmental education (EE) is a field of study that focuses on learning about the natural world, which can be done in the classroom or in natural ecosystems. In this story, Michelle, shares an experience from her work in Mexico implementing an EE curriculum with colleagues. Despite using an academically rich curriculum, she finally realized how much more OTL her students could have had if they had considered culture.

As a special education teacher, I have found myself drawn to EE, which focuses on engaging students in a hands-on manner to learn abstract concepts in the natural world. Although EE programs are vastly different, one constant in the curriculum is the curation of an experience that the students can later anchor their learning to. At an EE center in Arizona for example, hugging the old grandpa saguaro (the spines were lost on the bottom a long time ago) was an experiential anchor used after hiking back to the center and learning about the life cycle of a saguaro.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to work in central Mexico to develop the materials, train instructors, and pilot components of a copyrighted environmental learning curriculum during a summer camp. The focus of the developed activities was to teach students the overarching systems that connect all life on earth and to help them understand that they are a part of the systems, not outside of them. It was through this personal connection that students were given the tools to determine how they can make their own unique changes to their daily behaviors to live a more pro-environmental life. For me, this approach to learning about the water, air, dirt, and energy systems was new and innovative.

While in Mexico, the program was structured with a combination of instructors leading activities, nature walks, and time for students to freely explore. Though many would have considered the program a success, on the final day of the summer camp I realized we had missed a major connection that would have impacted the students' OTL. On that final day, one of the instructors, Angie, was the lead and took us to a local hill with petroglyphs carved into the rocks on top.

Once on top of the hill, Angie led the students to a large rock with many interconnecting petroglyphs. A few of the symbols looked rather identical to the imagery used in the EE curriculum. As I was noticing this and taking notes, Angie began to tell the story behind the imagery and the purpose behind that specific location on the hill. While listening to her tell the students about their ancestors who use to live in the area, she began to trace the carvings and

stressed how important it was for their ancestors to be connected to the energy that flows through all living things. There was a symbol for the energy of air, fire, the soil cycle, the water cycle, and sunlight energy. In this moment, I felt ashamed for not starting the program with this information. One of the instructors held this precious knowledge of her own cultural history, yet, she kept quiet until she was given space and time to share it. Unlike the curricular activities, this knowledge was tucked throughout the land and was already a part of their daily lives.

If we had incorporated and valued this knowledge prior, I believe the relevance of the curricular activities would have been clear to the students and the other instructors, and had been much more meaningful. The students who were usually tired and ready to go home by the end of the day were invigorated and asking too many questions to keep up with. They were making connections to lessons from the beginning of camp, and the pride in having their ancestral knowledges connected to the scientific concepts was evident through their faces, postures, and renewed interest.

As educators, we are faced with many challenges, and determining the best way to meet the various learning needs of students is the main one. I shared this story because it was an important learning anchor for me. It was the first time I realized that by not starting with students' cultural knowledge, I was positioning them as knowledge receivers rather than creators. I had positioned myself as an expert for the students, though unintentionally. On the other hand, Angie put the power and ownership of the knowledge back in their hands through this experience, and the

result was confident statements of knowledge and understanding from the students, stories upon stories being told to the instructors, as well as each other, about their own experiences. It was through these stories they were telling that I was able to grasp how much they had actually learned, with the catalyst being their own cultural history and knowledge.

Reflecting on Michelle's Story:
- Is a "strong" curriculum enough to support learning for Students of Color?
- How did power dynamics come into play in Michelle's story? What might that mean for teaching? Are there different individuals that could contribute to teaching and learning for your students? What attention would you need to play to power connected to cultural differences?

Taucia's Story: A Cultural Anchor for Thinking about Learning

Years ago, when I was still a K-8 teacher I had an experience that I consider one of my cultural anchors. Cultural anchors are what I call experiences that have such important cultural lessons that I anchor them in my heart to guide my teaching practice. Even now, at the university, these anchors continue to shape my practice. But, this one lesson that I am sharing did not happen at the school where I taught, nor did it even involve children. It happened at a community garden in a community where I spent a lot of time volunteering. Many immigrant Latinx families from various countries would come to tend to their family gardens within the larger community garden space. Their countries and regions of origin would come out in

their various approaches to building their mounds and planting their seeds.

[Image description: Natural beehive of wild bees found inside a tree trunk after tree cut.]

Don Julio was an older man that would occasionally come spend time at the gardens alone. From time to time, I would sit and chat with him which would result in little pieces of his life story. I knew he was from Oaxaca, Mexico. He had also shared with me that he could not read or write very well. One Saturday I arrived to the gardens and watched Don Julio leaning against a gate. As I approached him, he motioned to a citrus tree and whispered—*mira* [look]. I looked in the direction of his nod, but I wasn't sure what we were looking at.

Finally, he explained that he followed a bee to its hive located inside an orange tree. I looked at the tree with zero evidence of a hive, but I was fascinated that he had found it. Don Julio asked me if I wanted to join him in harvesting the honey, and we arranged to meet before sunrise the next day.

It was September in Phoenix, so when I arrived the next morning I was wearing leggings and a short sleeved shirt since even in the early morning it was warm. I felt a bit of embarrassment creep up my face when I saw Don Julio wearing pants, boots, a long sleeve button up shirt, a bandana tied around his neck, a hat, and gloves. I rummaged through my car and found a towel that I wrapped around my shoulders and over the top of my head. We walked back to the orange tree in the darkness of the early morning, and Don Julio began the harvesting process.

It was like watching poetry. He moved quietly and calmly through an array of activities—lighting a small fire at the base of the tree, fanning the smoke, using a small hatchet to cut a hole in the base of the trunk. He moved expertly through cycles of fanning and chopping. I stood nearby holding onto my towel tented over my head feeling quite useless, but still intrigued by what was happening. Finally, Don Julio called me in closer and asked me to squat down and look in the hole he had opened in the tree trunk near the earth. Suddenly, I could see a thick wall of bees moving around, calm from the smoke he fanned into the hole. The process continued for a couple of hours. Don Julio began reaching into the tree trunk, pulling out pieces of the hive and handing them to me to put in the giant bowls he had brought. I did my duty, occasionally panicking when a bee would land on my towel too close to my face or hand. I vigorously shook my towel to rid myself of the bees. Don Julio moved calmy, now without gloves. He would occasionally reach into his sleeve and pull out a bee with the tenderness a mother shows a newborn. The chunks of hive

continued to be passed. At one point Don Julio handed me a piece and said—*prueba la* [try it]. I took the piece and licked it then set it aside as Don Julio watched. He picked it back up and handed it to me again and finally spoke with a slightly firmer voice—*muerda la* [bite it]! I took the piece and placed it in my mouth, and sunk my teeth into it. An intense sweetness filled my mouth. I giggled like a child with such delight. Don Julio turned back to the hive to finalize the process. He pulled out a bee that he explained was the queen. He held her gently in in his hands whispering something to her, then moving his hands up to his ears and listening in return. He then returned her to the hive, and covered the opening with a piece of wood and a couple of small nails. He explained that he was thanking the queen for the honey, and that in return she shared a secret.

That was the day I decided that I didn't believe in the idea of illiteracy. Don Julio invited me into a world he was extremely literate in. His father and uncles had taught him how to locate and harvest honey from beehives in the mountains of Oaxaca. He understood the code breaking and meaning making of this literacy, and when he invited me in, I knew nothing about this literacy. There were times when I was embarrassed by not knowing things that he might have considered common sense, but he never made me feel ashamed. Instead, he drew me in and allowed me to participate in the ways I was capable. Don Julio was not only very literate, but he was also a wonderful teacher.

Reflecting on Taucia's Story:

- What could this moment teach an educator about the role of culture in teaching and learning?
- What types of experiences have shaped your understanding of teaching and/or learning?
- What do you think Don Julio's experience would have been had he entered US schools in 6-8th grade?

Cultural Pedagogies Resources

Newsletters, Briefs, & Articles

Resources	Type	Description
Centering Equity in Educator Effectiveness: Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Classrooms	Webinar	"This webinar examines how practitioners can implement culturally responsive and sustaining practices (CRSP) to achieve student outcomes via: 1) academic achievement, 2) cultural competency, and 3) critical consciousness within a standard-based and high accountability culture."
Appreciating Difference: Getting to Know Your Students and Families	*Equity Dispatch* Newsletter	This newsletter contains excellent examples of how other schools and educators are doing getting to know their students and communities.
How Textbooks Taught White Supremacy	Harvard Gazette Article	This article discusses how textbooks taught White supremacy.
Essential reads for adults, young adults, and children	Google Document	A powerful collection of books that center the experiences and lives of People of Color.

Cultural Pedagogies Resources (cont.)

Videos, Music, & Podcasts for Professional Reflection or Discussion

Resources	Type	Description
You love Black culture, but do you love me?	Music video	"Beats by Dre delivers a gut punch with its powerful new spot. "You love Black culture, but do you love me?" it asks, against a montage of captivating scenes of Black individuals from all walks of life. There are sports stars like NASCAR driver Bubba Wallace and tennis pro Naomi Osaka, artists such as rapper Lil Baby, and activists and community figures like Janaya Future Khan and the Compton Cowboys. In each scene, they stare straight into the camera, challenging the viewer to consider what their love for each of their contributions to the world—whether it be in sports, music, or entertainment—actually means when Black people each day still need to fight for equality and justice. The striking combination of word and image deliver a complex message, celebrating Black creativity while questioning the world in which it has been able to thrive."
Hip hop, grit, and academic success: Bettina Love at TEDxUGA	TEDxUGA Video (15:20)	"This impassioned talk explains how students who identify with Hip Hop culture have been ignored or deemed deficient in schools because of mainstream misconceptions associated with Hip Hop culture. Through Hip Hop, these students embody the characteristics of grit, social and emotional intelligence, and the act improvisation- all of which are proven to be predictors for academic success. So where is the break down between formalized education and the potential for success for these students? Dr. Love argues that ignoring students' culture in the classroom is all but an oversight; it's discrimination and injustice that plays out in our culture in very dangerous ways."

Cultural Pedagogies Resources (cont.)

Videos, Music, & Podcasts for Professional Reflection or Discussion (cont.)

Resources	Type	Description
Teaching While White	Podcast	"Teaching While White (TWW) seeks to move the conversation forward on how to be consciously, intentionally, anti-racist in the classroom. Because "white" does not mean a blank slate. It is a set of assumptions that is the baseline from which everything is judged; it is what passes for normal. TWW wants to have conversations about those assumptions: what they are, how they impact our students, and how we can confront our bias to promote racial literacy."

About the Authors

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Taucia González, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Arizona. She earned her Ph.D. at Arizona State University. Her research addresses issues of equity and inclusion for dual language learners with and without learning disabilities (LD). She is currently examining how Latinx and Hmong bilingual youth with and without LD use youth participatory action research to engage in critical literacies and to advance equity and inclusion in their schools and communities. Dr. González teaches undergraduate and graduate courses that prepare future practitioners and researchers to create more inclusive educational systems across intersecting markers of difference.

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About the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center

The mission of the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality, research-based education by expanding states' and school systems' capacity to provide robust, effective opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of and responsive to race, sex, and national origin, and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups. The Equity by Design briefs series is intended to provide vital background information and action steps to support educators and other equity advocates as they work to create positive educational environments for all children. For more information, visit http://www.greatlakesequity.org.

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