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DEI in Action: Using Collaborative Professional Development to Disrupt Supremacist Pedagogy

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Abstract: Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are more than buzzwords. They are concepts that promote sustainable, civic-minded, non-discriminatory environments in academic, professional, and personal lives. DEI work may be accomplished in many ways; one option in academia may be providing professional development workshops targeted to faculty. This article explores how the author (full-time faculty member at a community college) created a collaborative professional development workshop—using community engaged critical research and participatory action research—for community college faculty, staff, and students and based on interactive tasks in first-year composition classes. The article provides context for the urgent need for DEI work, in part, through the disruption of supremacist pedagogy. It also explains and reflects on the in-class activities and workshop outcomes.

Keywords: Diversity, equity, inclusion, community college, English composition, professional development.

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Introduction

In response to an ever-growing need to collaborate with colleagues and disrupt the attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work in higher education, in March 2024, I offered a critical professional development (PD) workshop grounded in student responses and experiences related to DEI coursework I give in English Composition 101 and 102 (the first-year series of composition classes) at a semi-rural community college in central Arizona. The workshop was intended for a primarily faculty-based audience and developed using community engaged critical research (CECR) and participatory action research (PAR) methods. The purpose of this article is to reflect upon the outcomes and lessons learned in sharing disruptive pedagogical practices with higher education faculty and share professional development content determined to be generative in shifting attitudes by, ideally, inspiring other colleagues to apply disruptive pedagogies or actions in their classes.

Positionality

Positionality and accountability are important for all researchers. Positionality affects the totality of the research process (Holmes, 2020, p. 3). Holmes indicated that reflexivity—a critical examination of how a researcher's beliefs, assumptions, and experiences influence them and their work—"should allow for a reduction of bias and partisanship" (p. 4). However, being human means total objectivity is impossible. While I have consciously reflected upon my whiteness and privileges, I understand that white people, like me, benefit from systemic racism because whiteness is constructed as a "normative baseline" against which all other people are measured (Bhopal, 2023, p. 113).

I am a cisgender, middle-aged, middle-class, white woman with an advanced degree. I am the descendant of two white, Midwestern, middle-class, college-educated Baby Boomers, one of whom was a teacher, so I have had the privilege of knowing how to read, write, and speak Dominant American English since I could read, write, and speak. I am—for all intents and purposes—the colonizer I am desperately attempting to depose. My positionality has shaped my teaching and my research as it has shaped every aspect of my life.

I recognize the white privileges I have, which allow me the opportunity to address troubling issues related to historically marginalized people's societal and educational experiences without much (or any) reprisal. I also understand that my privileged position (being white, middle class, educated, etc.) impacts my perspectives. My belief in working toward making classrooms more diverse, equitable, and inclusive certainly influenced my studies and how I interacted with participants (colleagues, students) of my professional development workshop. Additionally, I know that my positionality allows me the space and time to expound on my beliefs, and people will listen without the judgments and stereotypes reserved for historically underrepresented or excluded folx (e.g., ABILPOC—Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latine, and People of Color; LGBTQIA2S+--Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Two Spirit, plus.). For example, if I advocated for including more Black writings in course curriculum, I will not be dismissed as an "angry Black woman." It is a sad privilege, and, to summarize the sentiment of anti-racist educator and lecturer Tim Wise (also white): I look forward to the time where a Person of Color can say the same things I do and be taken as seriously as I expect to be taken (Killoy et al., 2008, 0:2:58-0:3:06).

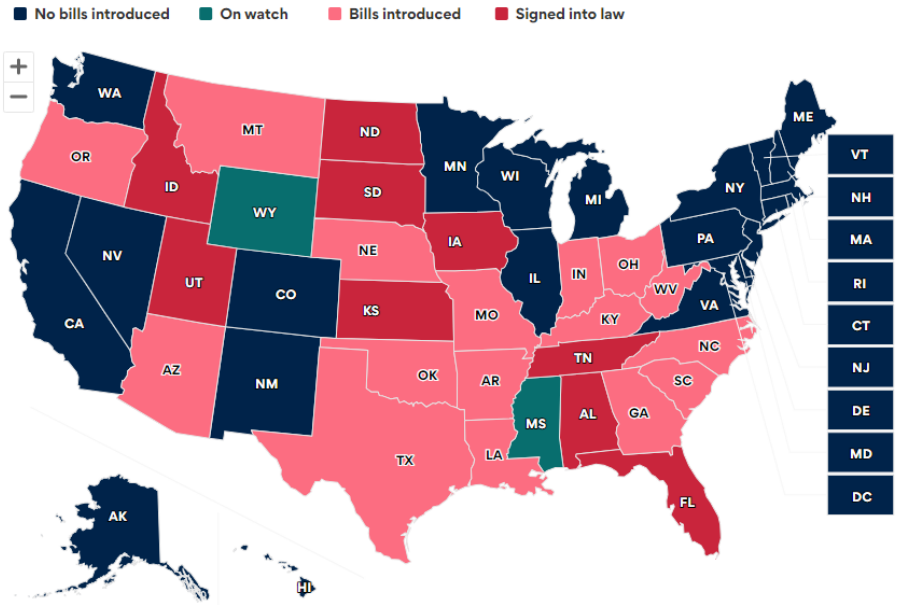
Attacks on DEI in Higher Education

There is a burgeoning, urgent need to disrupt Eurocentric supremacist pedagogical methods and actively promote DEI work. For example, in April 2023, Florida governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill "banning the state's public colleges and universities from spending money on diversity, equity and inclusion programs" (Diaz, 2023, para. 1). Additionally, the law banned "what can be taught in the state's higher education institutions. General education courses can't 'distort significant historical events or include a curriculum that teaches identity politics,' or critical race theory" (Diaz, 2023, para. 6). Likewise, the Texas Senate, in 2023, approved a bill like the Florida one, but added that university system boards of regents, who are appointed by the governor, would be required "to create policies to discipline or even fire employees who participate in any efforts to foster diversity" (McGee, 2023, para. 12).

As of May 2024, "There are currently more than 30 bills across the U.S. targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at public colleges" (Bryant & Appleby, 2024, para. 1). It is likely not a coincidence that the below map used red and blue to mark which states have anti-DEI laws in place (or have introduced bills) versus the ones that do not (Bryan & Appleby, 2024). If overlaid with a map showing politically "red" (conservative/Republican) and "blue" (progressive/Democrat) states based on federal and state voting trends (Andre, 2024, image 1), the images would be nearly identical (see Figure 1, Bryan & Appleby, 2024).

Figure 1

States Where DEI Legislation Has Been Introduced, Been Approved, or Failed



Additionally, in June 2023, the Supreme Court of the United States "effectively ended race-conscious admission programs at colleges and universities across the country" (Totenberg, 2023, para. 1). Chief Justice John Roberts composed the majority opinion in favor of ending affirmative action, saying "that the nation's colleges and universities must use colorblind criteria in admissions" (Totenberg, 2023, para. 3). The problem: colorblind ideology negates affirmative

action and ignores the lived experiences of ABILPOC (Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latine, and People of Color) folx who have always been measured against white standards. "Colorblind racism is fundamentally about denying the reality of ongoing racism, and/or the impact that historical forms of racism still has on the present" (Burke, 2019, p. *i*; see Figure 2, Balfour, 2024).

Figure 2

The Dangers of the "I Don't See Color" Mentality

What Can We Do?

For those already employed in academia, one option is encouraging or offering critical collaborative professional development (PD)—from many voices and disciplines—related to the active pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Fernández (2019) encouraged *critical professional development*, which advances "critical, social justice-oriented professional development for teachers" (Kohli et al., 2015, p. 11). Adding collaboration to critical professional development "allows teachers to capture each other's fund of collective intelligence" (Schmoker, 1999, p. 100). For preservice teachers and professors, implementing humanizing pedagogies into pre- and postsecondary education may move schooling, and possibly the larger society, toward community engaged, equitable, inclusive landscapes. Andrews and Castillo (2016) recommended that teacher educators help preservice instructors "unlearn many of the firmly rooted biases, stereotypes, and assumptions they harbor that prohibit them from adequately meeting the academic, social, emotional, and psychological needs of students in schools" (p. 112). However, for seasoned faculty, on-going education, such as professional

development, may assist them in reconsidering and revitalizing curricula and pedagogy leading to significant disruptions in supremacist ideologies present in education.

Background

Work to disrupt ideologies that maintain unjust power structures (generally considered Eurocentric supremacist ideologies) is not new. The nation state that is now called the United States of America was founded on the revolutionary notion that citizens in the "New World" deserved life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Some colonists were distressed by "taxation without representation" and being governed by a monarchy 4,500 miles away, which led to the formation of a group of white, land-owning anti-royalists whose actions may be summarized by Patrick Henry in 1775: "Give me liberty or give me death" (2017, para. 9). The rhetoric and actions of the rebels evolved into the Revolutionary War.

Tragically, such a radical change—the separation from "Old World" thinking and governance—occurred at the expense of the Indigenous peoples who had been living on the continent for thousands of years, and the enslaved people who were kidnapped from Africa beginning in 1619. Enslaved labor and the theft of land and appropriation of resources were necessary (according to the European settler colonists) to generate the conditions that enabled the formation of the Nation. Since the seventeenth century in the U.S., tensions between Eurocentric racism and multiculturalism have been consistently present.

The Civil Rights Movement and Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s made significant strides toward inclusivity in all areas of life, including education. However, while ABILPOC folx and women were permitted—not necessarily encouraged—to integrate and/or pursue education, the education they received primarily revolved around white cisgender male history, white cisgender male literature, and white cisgender male social structures. Students in K-12 and beyond are often able to name the Founding Fathers but are often left speechless when asked about important historical (or even modern) figures other than Eurocentric cisgender males, such as inventors, artists, and authors. Exceptions may include George Washington Carver (a prominent Black agriculturist and inventor of the early 1900s), Georgia O'Keeffe (a modernist painter of the mid-1900s), or Emily Dickinson (a likely bisexual poet) in the mid-late 1800s who has long been a part of the American literary canon (Pagnattaro, 1996, p. 33). Among some American literature instructors, the traditional canon has been only semi-jokingly referred to as "the dead white guys and Emily Dickinson."

The endeavor to make workspaces and education more diverse, equitable, and inclusive advanced in the 1960s; education scholars took notice and began work on refining pedagogy to match progressive societal shifts (Davis, 2022, p. 10). For example, Bloom et al. published *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation* in 1965; the authors recognized that economically marginalized students (many of whom were identified as African American) needed more than reading, writing, and arithmetic to succeed in school. Such students also needed their basic needs met, including food and clothing. Additionally, the authors stated, "In the early years of school. . .the negro student. . .should learn under the most positive set of human interactions. Integration will contribute most effectively to better attitudes and relations" (p. 32). Texts like *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation* and others published in the 1980s and 1990s, along with her own experiences teaching African American learners, inspired Ladson-Billings (1995) to develop culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Ladson-Billings explained CRP as follows: "[The pedagogy posits] effective pedagogical practice is a theoretical

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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). In many ways, CRP—when applied to education—decenters whiteness and promotes equity by acknowledging multicultural achievements and contributions to society.

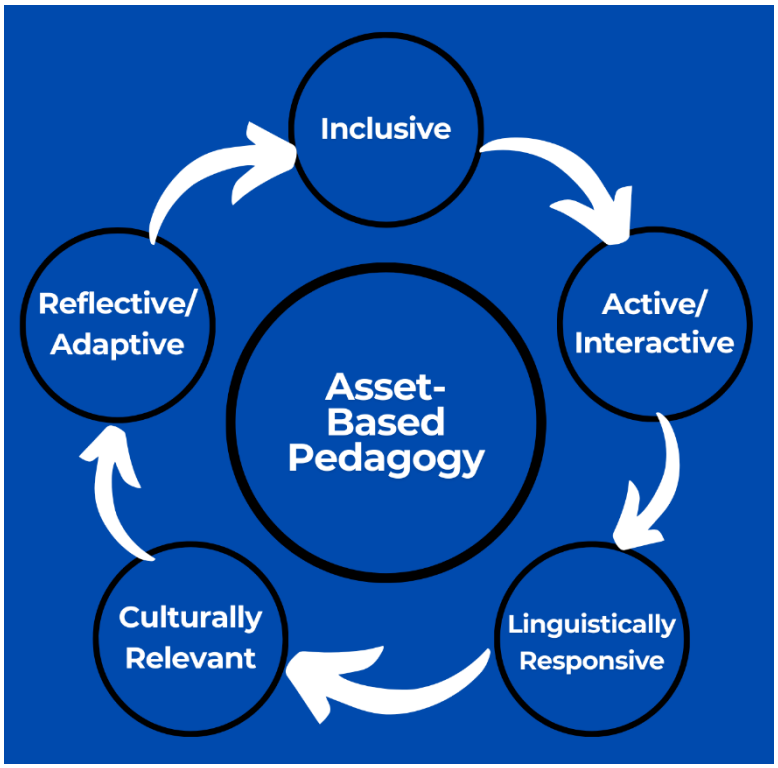
Numerous other scholars and educators took up the gauntlet to decenter whiteness in their teaching and overcome the deficit or traditional banking concept of education (Freire, 1970/1993). The banking concept of education was explained by Freire: "Education thus becomes the act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (p. 45). Flint and Jaggers (2021) acknowledged that asset-based pedagogy (ABP) was one theory that offered "counternarratives to deficit ideology outcomes" and could help academics enhance education for all students while creating a more inclusive environment for historically underrepresented students (p. 255). López (2017) defined ABP:

> Cumulatively, ABP scholarship shares a fundamental belief that teachers who possess an understanding of the sociohistorical influences on traditional marginalized students ' trajectories (*critical awareness*) are better able to cultivate students 'knowledge by building on their prior knowledge (*cultural knowledge*) and incorporating knowledge that validates students 'experiences (*cultural content integration*) into their instruction. Accordingly, ABP is believed to help students develop identities that promote achievement outcomes. (p. 193)

Often, ABP focuses on assisting K-12 teachers in developing and modifying their classroom dynamics. However, Mein (2018) published "Asset-Based Teaching and Learning with Diverse Learners in Postsecondary Settings," to outline "the conceptual underpinnings of an asset-based framework for teaching and learning (ABTL), [highlight] key characteristics of ABTL with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, and [provide] examples of ABTL in the [postsecondary] classroom, across disciplines" (p. 1; see Figure 3, Mein, 2018, p. 4).

Figure 3

Characteristics of Asset-Based Pedagogy



Publishing academic articles focused on ABP, CRP, or other conceptual theories in journals, was a worthy step in dismantling racist education, but more could be and needed to be done. Not all instructors have access to journals, and community college educators work at institutions that focus on teaching with little time or support for researching current trends in academia. Enter professional development (PD). PD created a space for scholars and educators to collaborate on methods to further promote diversity, equity, and inclusion and develop pedagogy and curriculum based on social justice praxis. Such PD ensured "a focus on countering the banking methods of teaching (Freire, 1970) and teaching practices that do not take into consideration the interdisciplinary and community responsive nature of Ethnic Studies and by extension Ethnic Studies teaching" and by further extension any field that includes multicultural students (Fernández, 2019, p. 2).

Methods

Community Engaged Critical Research

Community engaged critical research—also called critical community engaged scholarship (Gordon da Cruz, 2017) or community-engaged research (Beckett et al., 2022)—is at

its core "a dynamic form of sustainability education for social learning and knowledge creation" (Hintz, 2024, para. 2). Gordon da Cruz (2018) outlined six components of community engaged scholarship (see Figure 4, Gordon da Cruz, 2017, p. 366). Beckett et al. described community engaged research as "an intervention into traditional social science research, a methodology that may in fact be more rigorous, actionable, and accountable by centering the knowledges of communities who are most impacted by—and who are experts of—issues of social injustice" (p. 132).

Figure 4

Six Recommended Community Engaged Scholarship Components

1. A focus on real-life social problems that are defined with or by the community.
2. Scholarly investigation of these real-life social problems or public issues.
3. Community-university partnerships that are collaborative and reciprocal and in which community partners have shared authority in defining success.
4. The generation of knowledge to address and improve public issues that is collaboratively developed by universities and communities.
5. The utilization of institutional resources and knowledge to address these real-life social problems.
6. The production of scholarship with relevance to faculty members 'research and teaching practice.

In short, CECR seeks to dismantle supremacist, colonial models of research by engaging researchers, students, and those who are researched "to collaboratively develop and apply knowledge to address consequential social issues," including racism, hierarchical power dynamics, ecological crises, positionality, and more (Beckett et al., 2022; Gordon da Cruz, 2017, p. 366; Hintz, 2024). I implemented CECR for my professional development workshop by focusing on the real-life problem of Eurocentric supremacist pedagogy dominating many community college classes. Additionally, the workshop was collaborative (interactive with attendees) in hopes of generating knowledge and solutions to implement additional DEI work into curricula.

Participatory Action Research

PAR proposes a localized approach to research and subsequent action. One goal of participatory action research "is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people through research, adult education, or socio-political action. It is also to empower people to provide deep processing through knowledge construction and use" (Morales, 2016, p. 158). It is a collaborative method that acknowledges local, pressing issues (such as revisiting and revising the problems of using supremacist pedagogy in an ever-expanding multicultural society) and taps into participants 'experiences and expertise to offer solutions to such issues (Lawson, 2015, p. x). PAR acknowledges that "there are no easy answers or ready-made solutions," and

stakeholders in an institution (like a community college) must engage together to problem solve (Lawson, 2015, p. x).

Morales (2016) described the key components of PAR as applied to professional development, which she defined as a needed practice that should include teachers teaching teachers and should be an on-going practice with the following seven elements: "1) a focus on change, 2) context-specific, 3) emphasis on collaboration, 4) a cyclical process, 5) liberatory, 6) PAR is not just another method, and 7) success is some personal or collective change" (p. 157, 159). I employed PAR in creating my professional development workshop because the presentation focused on change and emphasized collaboration through interactional activities with attendees in hopes of generating change.

The Workshop

The professional development workshop I crafted took place at the semi-rural community college where I have been employed for nearly twenty years. It was offered as part of the Conversations with Colleagues series developed by a committee during Covid when we were all working from home and had much less contact with fellow college staff. College employees may present any topic of interest to the college community.

It is important to note the college is located in central southern Arizona, a traditionally conservative area (Pinal County, 2024) and is a Hispanic Serving Institution, which means at least 25% of the undergraduate population enrolled full-time is of Hispanic heritage. The college's main campus sits adjacent to Gila River tribal lands and about 20 miles from the boundaries of Tohono O'odham tribal lands. Summarily, the students attending the college are diverse, with 43.9% identifying as white and 56.1% identifying as Hispanic (29.5%), Black (6.6%), Native American (5.1%), Asian (1.9%), Hawaiian-Pacific Islander (.5%), Not Identified (8.5%), and Other (3.9%) (Shepherd, 2020).

The workshop—titled "DEI in Action: Disrupting Traditional Pedagogy"—focused on curricular activities related to DEI efforts in my first-year composition classes. I used the phrase "Traditional Pedagogy" rather than "Supremacist Pedagogy" in the title to appeal to a broad audience that included non-academic staff, students, administrators, and faculty. I extended two learning outcomes for the workshop which aligned with efforts to break down barriers to student learning and make the community college classroom environment more diverse, equitable, and inclusive: (1) Apply decolonizing concepts to ourselves and (2) Apply culturally sustaining, culturally revitalizing, and anti-racist pedagogies to community college classes. I offered examples of what I did in my composition classes and asked attendees to share what they did in their work environments, whether as faculty, staff, or administration. The outcomes of the collaborative workshop aligned with CECR and PAR, as I wanted to involve the community of scholars where I work and empower liberatory change for our multicultural population.

All Conversations with Colleagues have open attendance for anyone at the college, but I also invited students, family, and friends to participate. Fifty people attended: thirty-seven were college employees; seven were students; one was my dissertation committee chair; two were family members; three were unidentifiable (no email given). Three additional faculty members who were not able to attend the live presentation watched the video. Upon completion of the workshop, I asked participants affiliated with the college to complete a brief survey regarding their experience with the presentation. I wanted to know if the presentation impacted or inspired

them or helped them learn new information. In total, thirty people—twenty-three college employees and seven students—did the exit survey.

Limitations

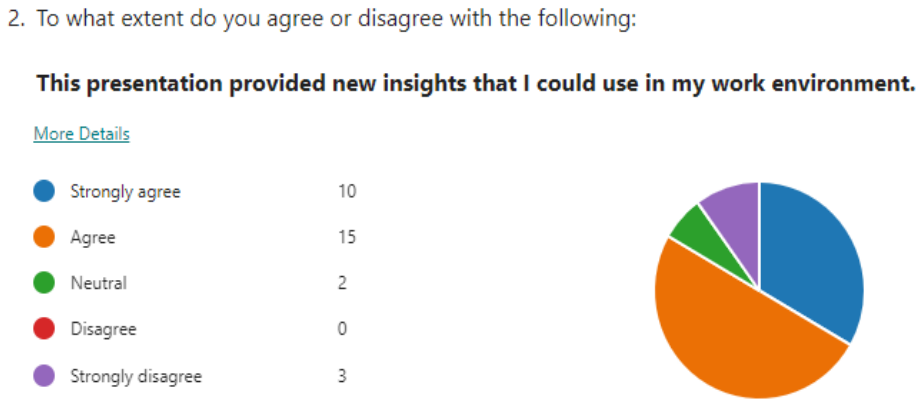
I had hoped many more faculty would join the workshop presentation. Furthermore, I had hoped all those who did attend would complete the post-workshop survey. Unfortunately, despite thirteen faculty members who attended or watched the recording, only six of them completed the survey. While DEI work is vital in all areas of the college, the target audience for the workshop was faculty across disciplines. Faculty is not mandated to participate in professional development, so one significant limitation of this study is lack of faculty participation. Moving forward, I will need to consider other ways to emphasize the benefits of participating in professional development opportunities, which, studies have shown, ensures faculty can provide "high-quality teaching and learning experiences for students" (Fernandes et al., 2023, p. 2).

Results & Discussion

High-level Results

Figure 5

Presentation Insights



I collected the data explored here using Microsoft Forms following the workshop, which resulted in thirty anonymous responses from staff and students associated with the college. The survey began with two questions which required Likert scale responses. Question one asked to what extent did the attendees agree or disagree with whether the workshop benefitted them. Twelve people chose "strongly agree" while eighteen chose "agree."

The third question was open-ended, asking "What (if any) information provided most impacted you?" The responses ranged from appreciating the practical examples to being affected by the topic to "I don't remember" and "I am still very confused by this topic." One participant explained, "I like the positionality statement in the syllabus. I don't do that and could easily add this. While I have a land acknowledgment statement on my email signature, I also don't on my syllabus. These will be great additions." Another stated, "The entire presentation was beneficial

and impactful. DEI work is critical to our efforts as educators. I appreciated Prof. Moulton's honesty and transparency as she discussed this critical work."

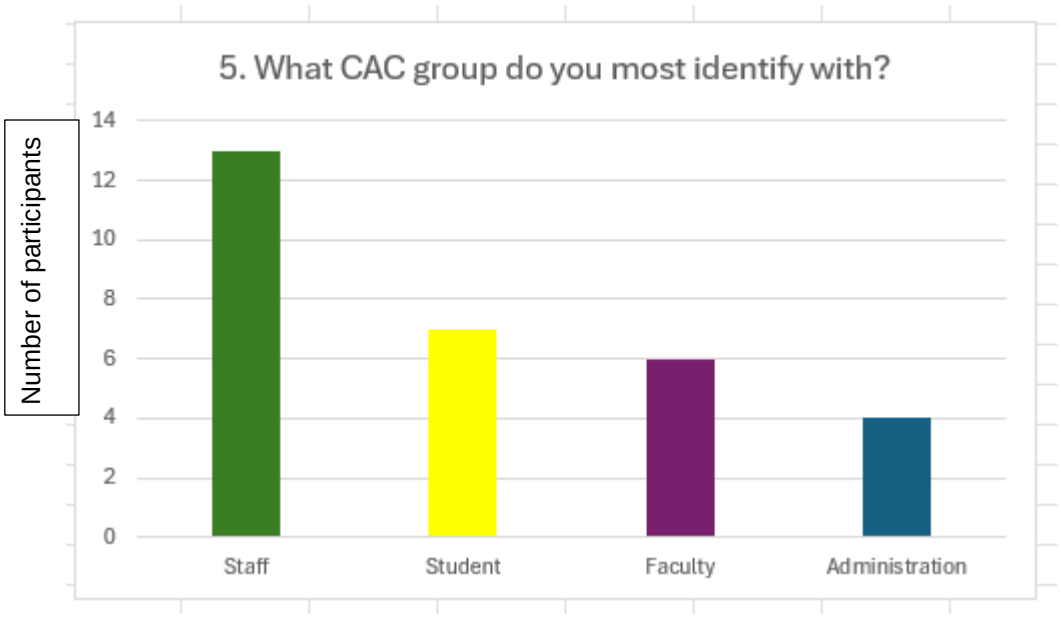
To gain additional insight as I work to refine the workshop, question four asked if there was anything else attendees wanted me to know. This question was optional, so only seventeen people completed it. All the responses were positive, and many offered encouraging feedback. One respondent appreciated that the workshop was interactive, which kept them engaged. Another said, "You presented difficult material with humility, passion, and intelligence, making a 'safe space 'to discuss." Likewise, one participant explained, "You modeled humanizing education by involving your audience and seeking their ideas and teaching to multiple learning styles: visuals, music, touch (QR codes)."

Demographic Results

Figure 6

Demographic Information

Questions five through eight asked for demographic information.



Question six inquired how participants identified their race(s) and/or ethnicities; they could choose as many categories as applied to them. Twenty-five chose "White [*sic*] (e.g. European, European American)"; three chose "Latina/o/x, Chicana/o/x, Hispanic"; two selected "Black, African, African American." "East Asian," "Southeast Asian," "Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous," and "Prefer Not to Share" all received one selection. Twenty-four respondents indicated they were women; five said they were men; one preferred not to share. Twenty-nine attendees specified they were not transgender; one preferred not to share.

The survey results demonstrated what I have anecdotally understood over my twenty years of employment at the college; most of the employees at the college identify as cisgender

white women (I am also a cisgender white woman). The IPEDS Data Collection System for 2023-2024 confirmed that a majority of employees at the college identified as white women (Institute of Education Sciences, 2023). The employment demographics of two of the largest community college districts in the United States—Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD in California) and Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD in Arizona)—reflected similar trends in their employee make-up. In 2017, LACCD employees identified as 51.26% women and 48.74% as men; 33.08% white ("Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) Workforce Analysis," 2017, table 1). MCCCD employees in 2022 identified as 58.28% women and 41.72% as men ("Maricopa Community Colleges," 2022, para. 4). According to Zippia.com "the most common ethnicity at Maricopa CC District is white (61%)" ("Maricopa CC District demographics and statistics," 2024, para. 2).

Implications & Discussion

Based on the demographic information presented and my own reflections on my positionality, I argue that white women in academia have a responsibility to facilitate DEI work. All white people should undertake diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work; however, "Given the gender socialization and sex discrimination that women face, White women's experience of racism and anti-racism may be distinct from that of White men" (Case, 2012, p. 81). Our voices matter and our experiences with race may be unique in contrast to white men's experiences, but the reality is white women maintain privileges minoritized people do not have. McIntosh (1988), described such privileges in her self-assessment in her seminal text "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies":

> I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.
>
> If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have. (p. 6)

In other words, I believe, like McIntosh, as a white woman, it is my responsibility to advocate for DEI to ensure the work, labor, and/or assumption of advocacy is not falling on ABILPOC folx. In a profession dominated by white women, the work should be done by us because there are so many of us, and we are here.

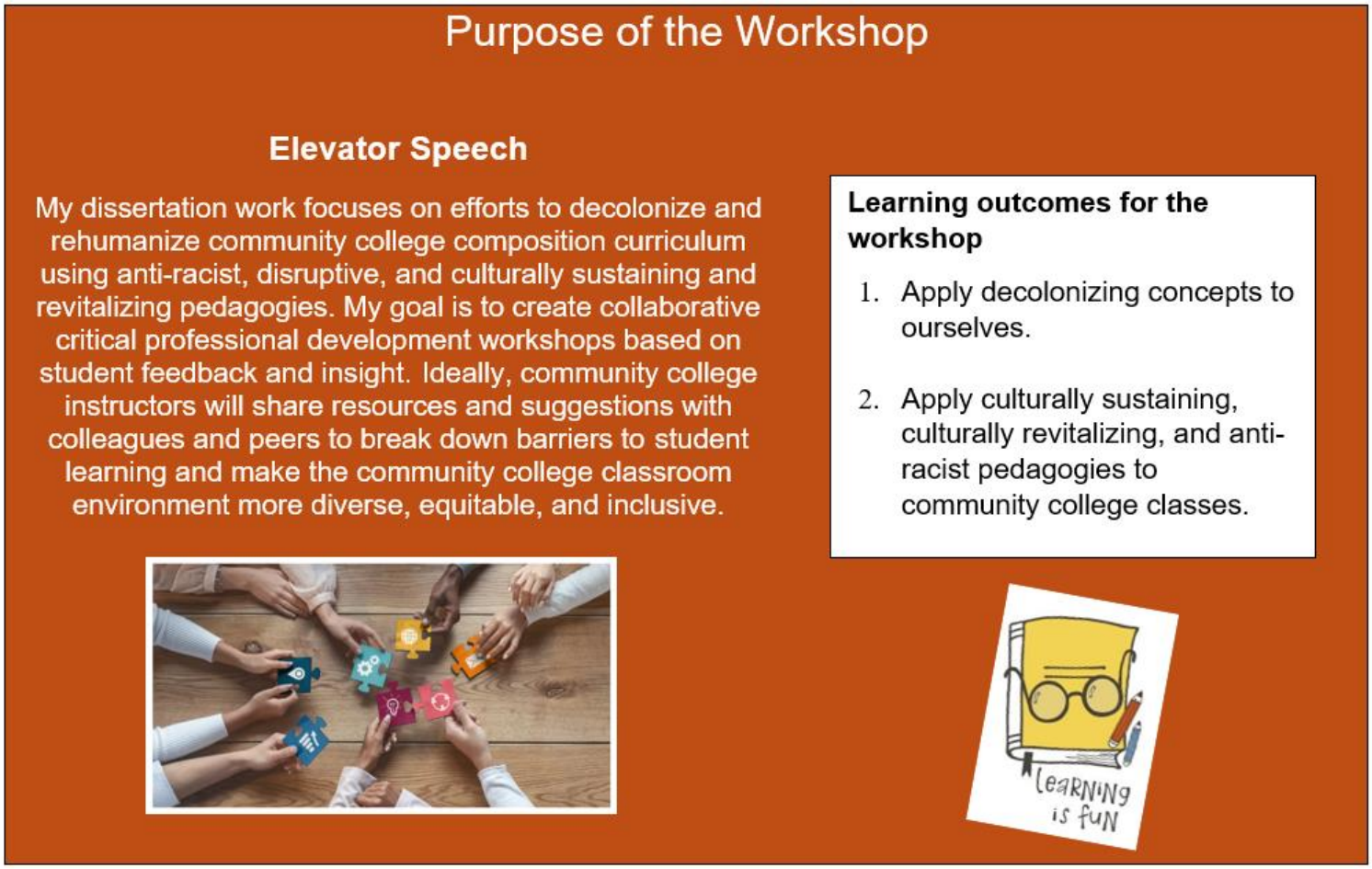
Teacher Education and Professional Development

Two reasonable levers for change to incorporate DEI work into and support transformation for academia may be teacher education and collaborative professional development. Teacher education resources abound, including Geneva's Gay (2023) *Educating for Equity and Excellence*: *Enacting Culturally Responsive Teaching*, Felicia Rose Chavez's (2021) *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom*, and Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade's (2022) *Equality or Equity: Toward a Model of Community-Responsive Education*. Such activist authors (along with the countless professors I encountered during my master's and doctoral studies) inspired me to focus on and design a professional development workshop.

The workshop I presented in March 2024 was titled "DEI in Action: Disrupting Traditional Pedagogy." Early in the presentation, I established the purpose and learning outcomes (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Purpose of the Workshop



I also explained what it meant to work toward decolonization—as delineated from Freire (1970/1993), hooks (1994, 2003), Giroux (1997, 2020), Tuck and Yang (2012), McCarty and Brayboy (2021)—an important action to make working and learning environments more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. jules and Ford (2023) emphasized, "Decolonization is not a metaphor or some form of whitewashing, tokenism, or fetishization but rather is a concrete and structural process that should be undertaken to address and challenge colonial perspectives, biases, and power structures in education" (p. 8).

The work toward decolonization is twofold. **First**, acknowledge Eurocentric domination in all areas of Western modern life—in the United States, specifically. **Second**, dismantle

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Eurocentric colonial practices, many of which are so ingrained in our society—including in education—that many people may not even notice them. To ensure that the workshop was truly collaborative, before I offered my pedagogical practices with the attendees, I asked them what they already did related to DEI work and encouraged them to share on Padlet, which is an online bulletin board that allows users to create and share visual boards for organizing and digitizing content.

I received fifteen responses. One faculty member proposed, "Overcommunicate, ideally—so they [students] feel like they understand resources/opportunities and the general landscape without any hidden curricula." One student responded, "I think if my professors asked us to introduce ourselves using our name and pronouns, I would feel more welcomed even as a cisgender person. I would know the professor is open minded, understanding, and cares about their students." All the responses indicated that creating personal connections was important. hooks (2003) confirmed that "nurturance, both emotional and academic, is the context where love flourishes" (p. 130), and her text *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003) encouraged the creation of a culture of love between teacher and pupil. She stated, "When these basic principles of love form the basis of teacher-pupil interaction the mutual pursuit of knowledge creates the conditions for optimal learning" (p. 131). Both *Teaching Community* and *Teaching to Transgress* (hooks, 1994), as well as hooks 'work as an education professor, promoted the ideas that excitement, passion, and love may break down the supremacist notions of education by serving "as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning" (*Teaching to Transgress,* p. 11). Likewise, the goal of my presentation was to engage my peers and inspire them to make changes toward DEI in their work areas, following in the footsteps of Affolter and Yost (2024) to "invite other educators to reflect on their own experiences as opportunities for accountability, growth, or reform" (p. 2).

I then shared examples of what I did in my classes to dismantle supremacist pedagogy. I began by displaying my syllabus (used for all my classes). The syllabus is often the first document students view in a class, and its content may make a significant first and lasting impression. Specific language use in class materials, such as syllabi, may be open and inviting or uphold Eurocentric colonial perspectives and biases (jules & Ford, 2023, p. 8). Ahadi and Guerrero (2020) illustrated the need for faculty to start their decolonization *somewhere* and advocated that the syllabus was a good place to do that: "Faculty need to reflect, rethink, and reconstruct course syllabi so that they support BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] engagement, validation, and sense of belonging in education" (p. 42). Helping all students feel welcomed and included at the beginning would hopefully set a positive tone for the entire semester.

In my syllabus (see Figure 8), I included land and colonization acknowledgments; I also included motivational quotes. I introduced my positionality as a white, middle-class woman to help students understand that I know the privileged place I hold in society. I made myself vulnerable, which is a part of what Berry (2010) called "engaged pedagogy" (p. 20). Williams (2016) called it "radical honesty" (p. 71), and Harbin et al. (2019) named it as "a practice of truth-telling that challenges racist and patriarchal cultures in the academy" (p. 25). I disclosed in hopes that students would feel comfortable opening up and participating in class discussions, especially when we talked about controversial or uncomfortable topics.

Figure 8

Syllabus, page 1

English 101: College Composition I

Professor Heather Moulton, MA

I acknowledge that Central Arizona College and Pinal County reside on the ancestral lands of the O'odham Jewed, Akimel O'odham (Upper Pima), Sobaipuri, and Hohokam people.

Not sure about the tribal lands on which you reside? Check this link: https://native-land.ca/

I acknowledge that the state of Arizona was originally part of Mexico, and, before Spanish colonization, Mexican lands were and are occupied by Indigenous people.

I acknowledge that the United States was colonized by European nations and succeeded because of the forced labor of enslaved peoples, and I, as a white middle-class woman, benefit from the colonial model.

What is important is to keep learning, to enjoy challenge, and to tolerate ambiguity. In the end there are no certain answers. -Martina Horner, Former President of Radcliffe College

If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead, either write something worth reading or do things worth writing. -Ben Franklin, American Renaissance Man

CRN*: SU241895** ***Class Meetings: Tue (T), Wed (W), Thu (Th) 12:00-1:40 Blackboard Collaborate	***TERM: SUMMER 2024***	***DATES*: 5/28-7/18** *Last day to withdraw:* **Sun, July 7**

Additionally, I described how I begin the semester by getting to know the students. In each class, I asked the name by which students wish to be called, the pronouns they used, and a fun fact. I shared my details as well. Sharing in this way transitions us from vulnerability to respect. I wanted them to know I respected them and their autonomy, and I hoped they would do the same for me. The activity also humanized all of us and made us more than names on screens or paper. I next revealed that before the start of each class, I displayed (whether in a physical classroom or virtually) a "Welcome to Class" document relevant to various months or activities (see Figure 9).

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Figure 9

Samples of Some Welcome to Class" Documents

The next part of the presentation advanced to the second learning outcome for the workshop: Apply culturally sustaining, culturally revitalizing, and anti-racist pedagogies to community college classes. In English Composition 101 (first semester first-year writing), I use the Poetry Journal activity; in English Composition 102 (second semester first-year writing), I include the Race & Racism Survey.

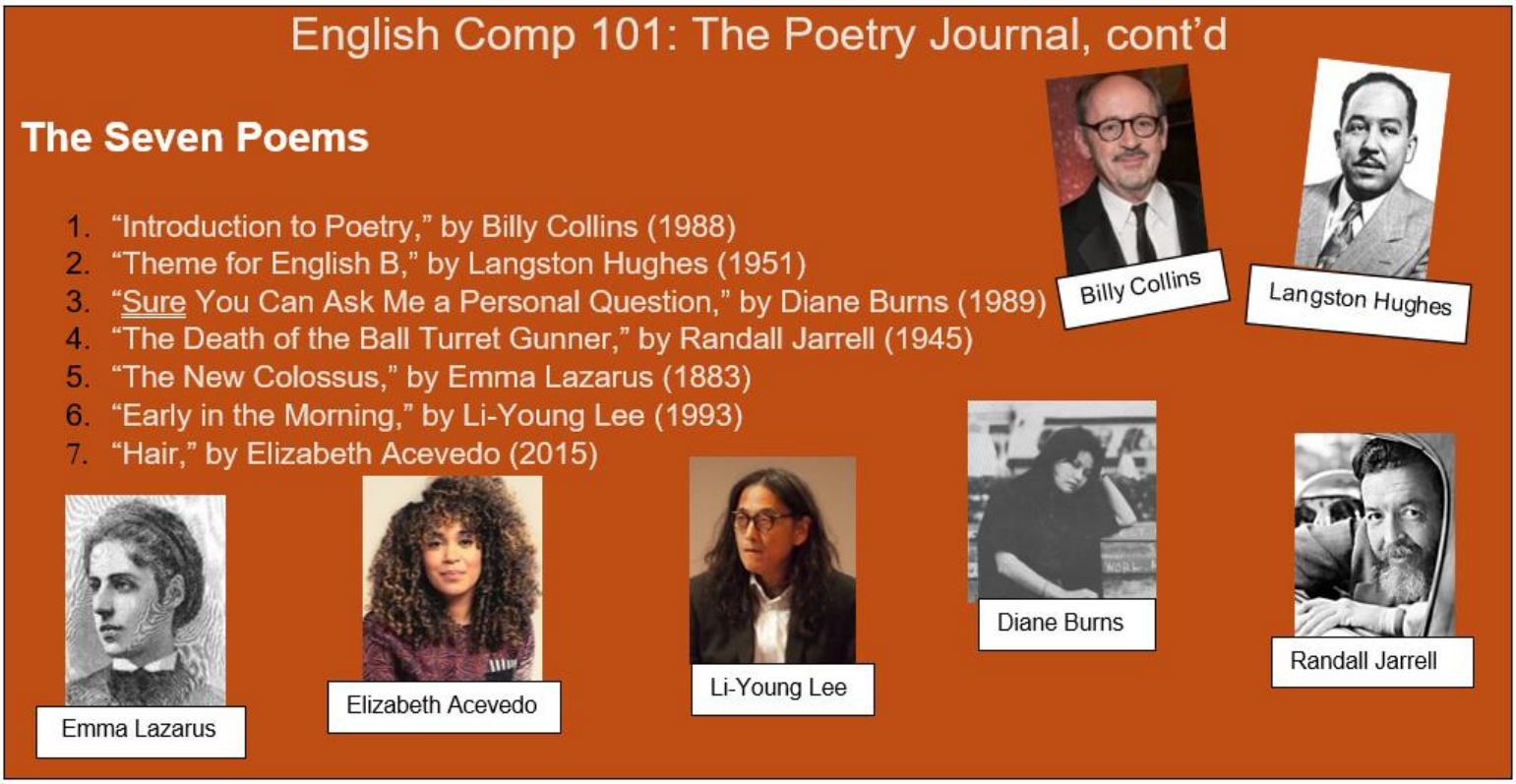
English 101

The Poetry Journal was developed by implementing a curriculum based on culturally sustaining and disruptive pedagogies. It offered students a low-stakes assignment and an opportunity to engage in various perspectives; it also encouraged them to examine texts by participating in what Freire considered humanist dialogue and critical thinking (p. 65). As I built the assignment, I made intentional (disruptive) choices for the seven poems offered throughout the semester, explicitly including diverse voices while creating a safe space for students to share their thoughts on the concepts the poems presented (see Figure 10). The space is safe but not

necessarily comfortable, as opportunities for change happen when people feel uncomfortable (MacGlone, 2023, p. 6)

Figure 10

The Poetry Journal Poems and Poets



Because of the poets/poems chosen and the receptive environment, ideally, every student in the class felt heard and seen thereby rehumanizing writing and critical thinking. It was a bonus that the assignment also met three English 101 learning outcomes. The assignment itself asked students to read or listen to the poem and then respond to it in any way they wanted. For example, did they love or hate it? How do they interpret it? They received five points no matter how they responded, and I assured them they would not be graded on grammar or the length of the response. I explained the activity with the metaphor of exercise. If they wanted to gain muscle, they would go to a gym and work out; if they wanted to be better critical thinkers, they practiced, and the Poetry Journal allowed for that practice.

The Poetry Journal Results

I offered conversational feedback to each student's response. We also discussed the poems during later class sessions. The responses were usually positive or negative; very rarely

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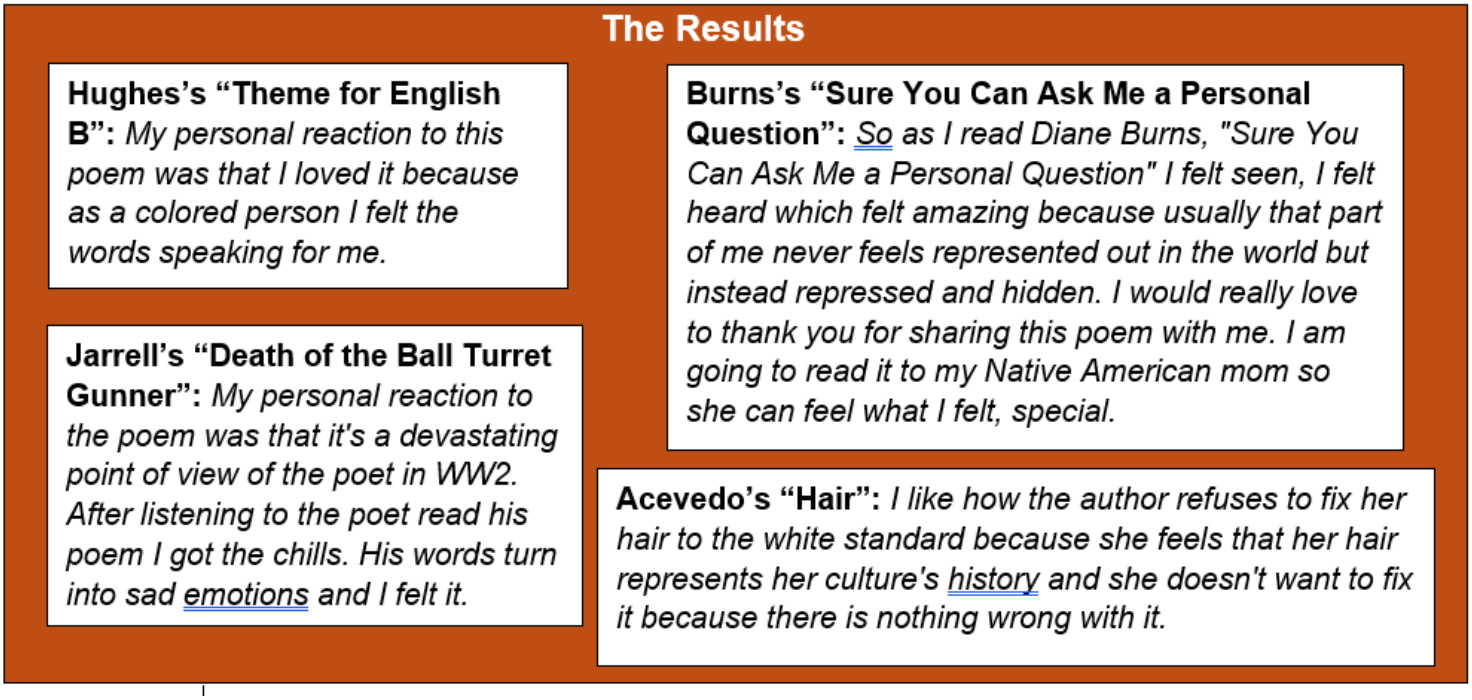
did a student respond apathetically, demonstrating to me that the poems impacted them in various ways (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Sample Poetry Journal Responses



The above slide (Figure 11)—shared during the presentation—offered only four of *hundreds* of responses I have received from students since I have done this activity every semester since 2017. At the end of the semester, I also invited students to complete a follow-up survey to gauge overall responses and to see if the Poetry Journal was an effective form of curriculum. The feedback I received from the survey was overwhelmingly positive.

One student offered, "I've read about African Americans, Native Americans, Asian [Americans], and [people] of European [descent]. Each poem felt like they represented a voice and I was just happy to read them." Another contended, "It's a good assignment that hits those 3 learning objectives. I thought about the poems, I evaluated how effective I found the ideas, points, and details, and wrote a reflection about each poem's perspective on their main idea."

I considered the activity a gentle exercise in acknowledging cultural pluralism and practicing critical thinking, and the students responded in positive and inspiring ways. Even when they disliked the poems (or poetry in general), they often recognized the poems 'meanings and reacted with empathy. One student affirmed, "Most of them [the poems] talk about racism, but each of them describes a different suffering from one person to another, and this makes us feel for everyone." Feshbach and Feshbach (2011) explained the importance of empathy in education, specifically related to the reduction of social prejudice when students were able to understand and share the feelings of "the other" (p. 87). The authors also emphasized, "Where

possible and appropriate, activities should be implemented that foster empathy, particularly toward individuals and groups that differ in race and ethnicity" (p. 93). Empathy may result in increased tolerance in a person's academic, professional, or personal life thus benefiting individuals and the larger society.

English 102

The Race & Racism Survey is introduced in week five of a 16-week semester. It is a pre-activity as the class transitions into the second of four sections: Part I: Rhetoric, Writing, and Critical Thinking; Part II: Race and Racism; Part III: The Body and Identity; Part IV: National Identity. Parts two, three, and four were all thematically interconnected, which often led to intersectional discussion and demonstrations of critical analysis related to on-going political and social concerns in the United States. The activity was no-credit, but I informed the students it would directly relate to and drive our conversation at the next class session.

During the presentation, I disclosed that the survey I presented to the students was an anecdotal survey for dialogue only. It did not follow the strict guidelines that are often presented in an ethics or statistics course; the relaxed style for the survey feasibly helped the students also feel relaxed and not judged for or by their responses. Whether in a physical or virtual classroom, the activity was presented in an open-ended quiz format using the learning management system (Blackboard) at my college. The survey consisted of six categories for which I requested the students to fill in names: Media Celebrities, Authors, Directors, Inventors, Artists (photographers, sculptors, painters, etc.), and Athletes. I made deliberate choices with the categories, selecting subjects students would be familiar with, either through their educational experiences or participation in/awareness of popular culture.

I intentionally offered the students no context and gave the following 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 U.S. Citizens when possible. After the students responded, I collated the data into an easy-to-decipher form and shared it with them at the next class session.

To engage the attendees of my workshop, I asked them to predict how the students would respond before I showed them the results. Who might the students name? (See Figures 12 and 13.) Workshop participants guessed correctly: Most of the responses in certain categories primarily included white men.

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Figure 12

Race & Racism Survey Responses

Media Celebrities Drake, Bryan Cranston, Dwanye Johnson, Kevin Hart, Marcus Stapleton aka SSundee, Matthew West, Matt Maher, Ryan Seacrest, Perez Hilton, The Weeknd, Lil Wayne, Kylie Jenner, Rihanna, Anne Wilson, Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, Oprah Winfrey, SZA, Doja Cat	**Authors** Stephen King, James Patterson, Devin Jordan, D. I. Telbat, Adam Blumer, Joel Rosenburg, Edgar Allan Poe, John Grisham J.K. Rowling, Stephanie Meyers, Anne Rice
Directors Quentin Tarantino, Michael Bay, Steven Spielberg, Alfonso Cuarón, Emile Ardolino Taylor Swift, Catherine Hardwick	**Inventors** Thomas Edison, Elon Musk, Nikola Tesla, Alexander Graham Bell, Samuel Colt
Artists Beksiński, Van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci, Bob Ross, Norman Rockwell, Ansel Adams, Grant Wood, Basquiat, Banksy	**Athletes** Kobe Bryant, Shaquille O'Neal, Patrick Mahomes, Miles Sanders, Lebron James, Michael Jordan, Larry Fitzgerald, Aaron Rodgers, Tiger Woods, Rob Gronkowski, Steph Curry, Troy Polamalu Serena Williams

The Race & Racism Survey Results

Figure 13

Raw Data Sorted (Spring 2023)

Raw Data Sorted (Spring 2023)

Results[1]					
Category	**Total responses**	**# of Women**	**# of Men**	**# of BIPOC**	**# of non-BIPOC (white)**
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%)

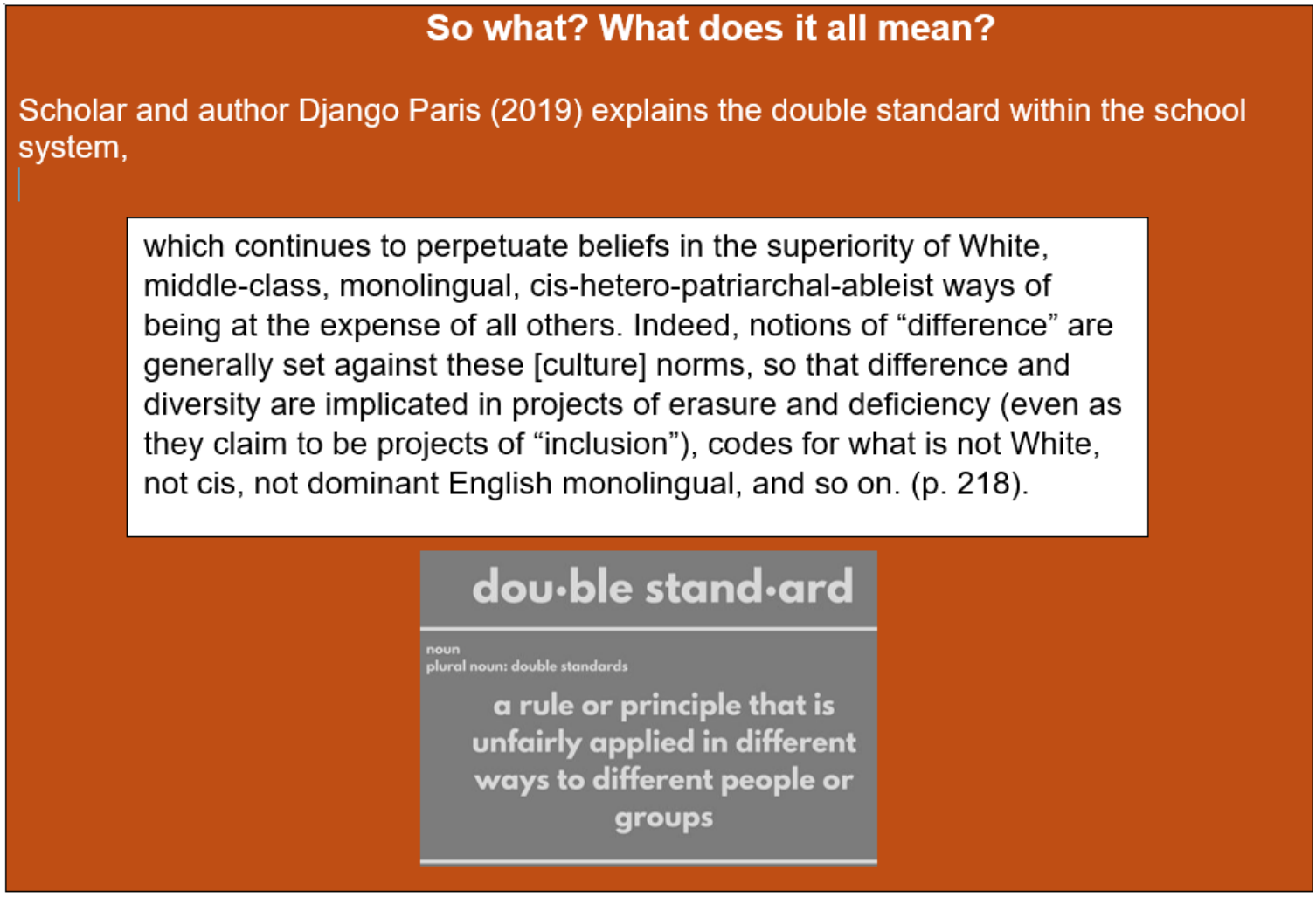
1 Gender assigned as self-identified by the named figure; only rarely and recently have students named non-gender binary folx.

I began the discussion of the results with the students by asking them two critical thinking questions: 1. What do we value as a society? 2. Who do we value as a society? I also asked them if they noticed any patterns in the results. The students immediately noticed that there were no women or BIPOC (ABILPOC) folx in the inventors 'category; they also recognized the limited number of women's and BIPOC (ABILPOC) names under authors, directors, and artists.

We did not spend much time discussing who they did name; instead, we focused on who was glaringly missing. I then asked the students what I considered to be the big question: Why do the results look this way? Sometimes, a student would identify that the findings reflected what the U.S. education system values (dominant, heteronormative, Eurocentric assimilation), but often, there was silence. I also asked workshop attendees, "So what? What does it all mean?" (See Figure 14.)

Figure 14

So What? What Does It All Mean?



The Race & Racism Survey was developed and facilitated using culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP). Lee and McCarty (2017) detailed CSRP:

> 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. . . .Finally, CSRP recognizes the need for community-based accountability. (p. 62)

The activity attempted to amend the asymmetrical power relation (first CSRP point) in the class because the students 'responses enabled the discussion. I did not coach the students on what to write or how to respond (they did not have to respond at all since the assignment was no-credit). While the conversations over the years have been similar, they have never been identical because

the students ’answers—at least in the media celebrities ’and athletes ’categories—have fluctuated each semester, just as what is *popular* in popular culture consistently varies.

What rarely varied were the results under inventors, authors (as related to those authors assigned in school), and artists. For example, Edison and Bell nearly always appeared under inventors; Poe (*The Raven*), Fitzgerald (*The Great Gatsby*), and Shakespeare were almost always named for authors; and Van Gogh, Picasso, and da Vinci continually emerged as artists. Such answers—all white men—demonstrated the damage done by colonization and the influence of colonization on our understandings of popular culture (second CSRP point). Students, regardless of race or gender, were unable to name ABILPOC historical figures who made a lasting impact on United States ’society. Historically excluded people continue to be underrepresented in much primary and secondary education because such “systems in the United States are deeply rooted in settler-colonial frameworks that eradicate cultures, identities, and histories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and assert nationalistic narratives steeped in white supremacy” (Greeson et al., 2022, p. 39).

Lastly, regarding community-based accountability (third CSRP point), during discussion and in a post-activity survey, students—who are also community members—recognized and articulated problems within education and society. They were given a chance to reflect on and share their K-12 experiences and consider what was lacking in education (BIPOC/ABILPOC folx and women, primarily). When asked in an anonymous post-activity survey, all the students who responded—20 of 30 students (67% response rate) in two separate semesters—to the survey agreed that the activity “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.” The students also posed applicable solutions that may benefit the larger population. One student suggested, “We could educate others about . . . how much people have contributed to society, and how lots of important icons are minorities.” Another proposed, “Speak and represent other cultures on a daily [basis] not just on a specific month of the year.”

This activity, like the Poetry Journal (though slightly more in depth as 102 is a more advanced class), included the two steps toward decolonization: acknowledgment of a problem and, hopefully, a move toward the dismantling of said problem. I offered this survey to have a real and ideally safe (not comfortable) discussion about race and racism in the U.S. Yes, there were the happy bonuses that it met at least one English 102 learning outcome, and, hopefully, enhanced critical thinking skills, which are the foundations the class—and arguably college—were built upon. I followed up this activity with a few weeks of readings and assignments related to race and racism with an aim toward racial justice that met several more learning outcomes.

After I shared my English Composition 101 and 102 activities, I asked workshop participants, “What do you do in your area to advance DEI?” (See Figure 15.)

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Figure 15

What Do You Do?

Once again, my colleagues professed enlightening suggestions. One professor stated: "When teaching about 'this day in history, 'I try to include all races and ethnicities to highlight the contributions of everyone." While being all inclusive may not be feasible, I admired my colleague for seeking to center ABILPOC representation. A fellow composition instructor explained, "I've done away with evaluative grading in my ENG101/102 classes. Instead, I use a labor-based grading contract." Labor-based contract grading gained popularity in 2020 when scholar-teacher Asao Inoue published the first edition of his influential text *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom* in late 2019 (Carillo, 2021, p. 4).

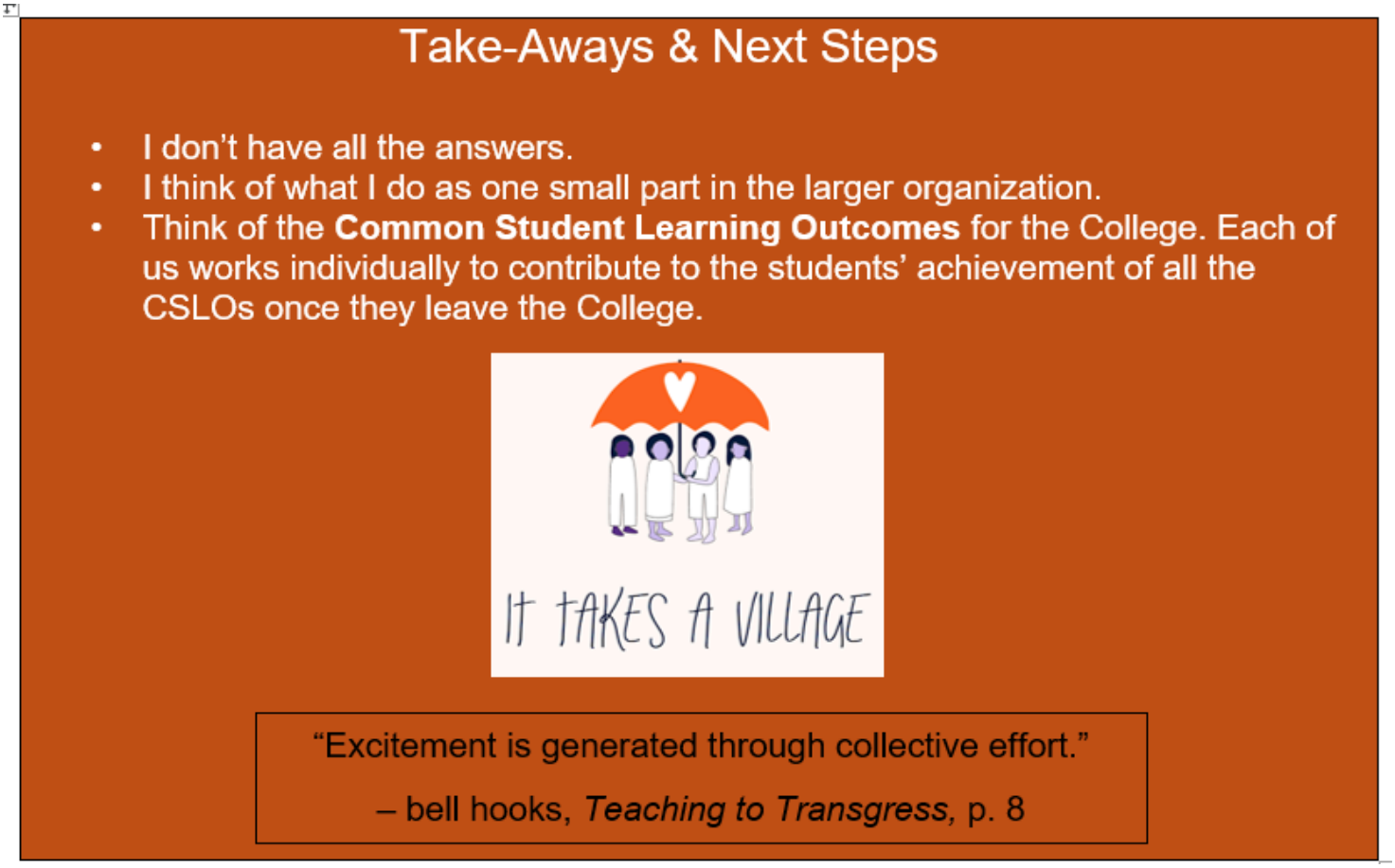
Inoue (2022) came to embrace labor-based contract grading after he reflected on his assessment practices, which were based on long-standing (supremacist) measurements: measurements established within white cultural norms (pp. 23-24). He asserted, "One way to think about the role of assessment in classrooms is to see it as an environment that makes people do what the teacher wants them to do for the teacher's purposes" (p. 25). In other words, grading relied upon the ability of students to regurgitate information given to them by the teacher—what Freire (1970/1993) called the banking model of education. To move away from such a model, Inoue began using labor-based contract grading, which, in short, meant calculating final grades by the labor students completed rather than "by any judgments of the quality of their writing" (p. 3). Inoue insisted that "a grading contract based only on labor is better for all students and undermines the racist and white supremacist grading systems we all live with at all levels of education" (p. 3). Inoue's approach may not be perfect and has received some criticism, including that students with disabilities or who are twice or more marginalized remain at a

disadvantage (Carillo, 2021, p. 6). However, scholars like Carillo and others have begun to look at additional ways to make their courses more equitable and inclusive.

The workshop ended with "Take-Aways & Next Steps" as well as a list of resources (see Figure 16).

Figure 16

Take-Aways & Next Steps



Conclusion

I was pleased I could present this community engaged critical research and work in a collaborative, interactive format, for "only through such an exchange of ideas can we hope to work towards transformative change" (Wagner, 2005, p. 267). Teaching about DEI, race and racism, and social justice "is necessarily a discomforting process" but acknowledging and normalizing difficult topics and encouraging dialogue over lecture are some ways to help

students and educators progress toward critical thinking and disruptive models of teaching, respectively (Harbin et al., 2019, p. 15).

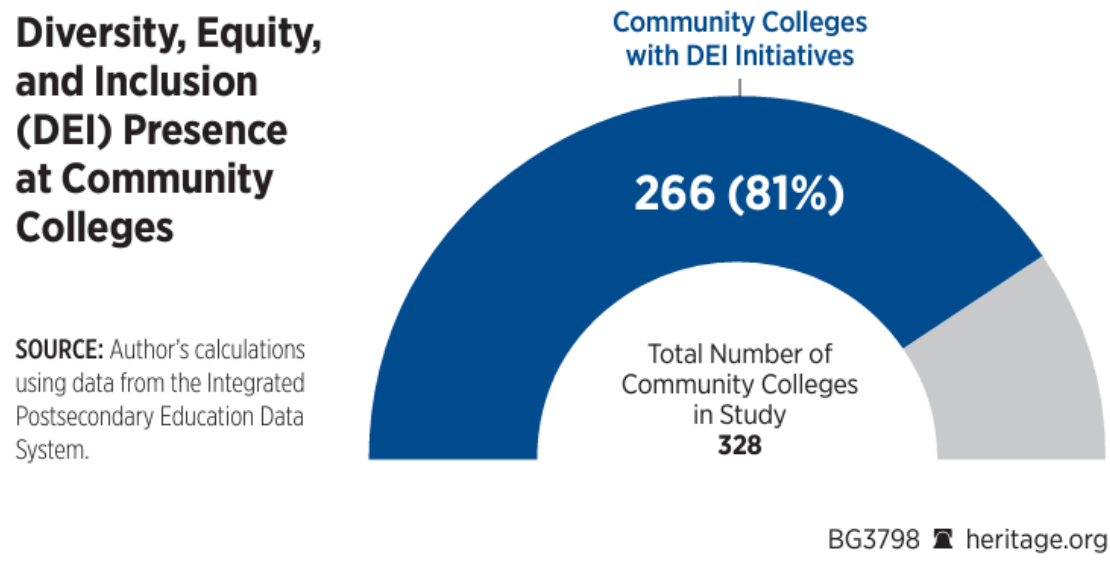
It is also important to remember that openly acknowledging and discussing race and racism, teaching critical race theory, and using other methods that engage and work toward DEI, does not mean non-ABILPOC students will be disregarded or forgotten. The joy of improving and evolving education with a critical acknowledgment of power and privilege imbalances is that it is structured such that *every* student benefits. Tuitt (2016) indicated that "identifying the best pedagogical practices could improve the educational experiences of *all* students" (p. 205). He further emphasized that "by viewing students as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences, inclusive pedagogy offers some insight into how college educators can create classrooms in which diversity is valued as a central component of the learning process" (p. 243). In a country founded on the ethics of *in*dependence and *in*dividuality, *in*clusion may be an apt addition to U.S. ideology.

Celebrate the Wins

Despite efforts by lawmakers in many states, DEI conversations continue to permeate political and educational landscapes. In 2023, Butcher—writing an anti-DEI article—calculated that 81% of community colleges in the U.S. had at least one DEI initiative of some kind. Of the 266 schools that had any DEI programs or materials, 168 schools (63%) specifically listed DEI staff on their websites, had assembled a task force, or had dedicated individuals to carry out the school's DEI measures. (See Figure 17, Butcher, 2023, p. 4.)

Figure 17

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Presence at Community Colleges



Even in what may seem like regressive and dark times, hope must not be lost. hooks ' (1994) words still ring true thirty years later: "The classroom remains the most radical space of

possibility in the academy" (p. 12). In recent years, the community college where I work in semi-rural central Arizona (a traditionally conservative area (Pinal County, 2024)) added an equity plan to their webpage and there has been much talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially working to reduce barriers to students and increasing diversity in hiring practices. Within individual divisions and departments, significant efforts have been made to replace textbooks and materials with open educational resources (OERs), which would be free to students. But resistance to DEI endeavors persists, from the governing board to administration and among faculty and staff. To assist in sustaining the discussion, I continue to engage in CECR efforts in my classes and among conversations with colleagues; the DEI workshop presentation was one such tool offered to counteract continuing attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in higher education.

Education, the academy, and society are emergent. brown (2017) insisted it was "time to close the gap between vision and practice. Time for those of us who seek justice and liberation to BE just and liberated, to be of this place fully" (p. 168). We have work to do.

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Appendix

Link to Conversations with Colleagues presentation, March 21, 2024.

Link to supplementary material for CwC presentation, March 21, 2024.

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