Celebrating Difference: Best Practices in Culturally Responsive Teaching Online

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Abstract Culturally responsive teaching and design practices flip the online classroom by creating an environment that acknowledges, celebrates, and builds upon the cultural capital that learners and teachers bring to the online classroom. Challenges exist in all phases of online course design, including the ability to create online courses that reflect the instructor's commitment to inclusive excellence, diversity, and social justice. Designing an online environment that supports all learners regardless of their backgrounds is important in their future success as professionals; thus, it is important for faculty to design courses with all students in mind. The purpose of this article is to share best practices in the design of culturally and linguistically responsive online courses that support the culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students we serve. Based on Gay's (2010) culturally responsive teaching practices, this article provides examples of online activities that are validating; comprehensive; multi-dimensional; empowering; transformative, and emancipatory.

Keywords Culturally and linguistically diverse students · Culturally responsive teaching online · Online course design · Online pedagogy · Social justice education

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Introduction

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences."
~Audre Lorde

Culturally responsive teaching and design practices flip the online classroom by creating an environment that acknowledges, celebrates, and builds upon the cultural capital that learners and teachers bring to the online classroom. By actively engaging learners in both the construction and teaching of the online classroom, culturally responsive teachers become guides for students as they create their own ways of learning within the online environment. Students move from being passive participants in their education to becoming co-constructors and responsible for developing self-directed learning paths as they navigate the educational system.

The faculty, who are the authors of this article, bring decades of post-secondary experience in online course construction, culturally responsive teaching practices, collaborative course design, student engagement, and innovative classroom practices. Two of the authors have experience teaching in K-12 classrooms including a focus on blended learning design. Within a Curriculum and Instruction Department at New Mexico State University (NMSU), an institution located near the borders of New Mexico, Texas and Mexico, we teach online, hybrid, blended and face-to-face courses that prepares educators for work in Pre-K - 20 classrooms, government organizations, and corporations. The students within our undergraduate, master's degree and doctoral program, represent the spectrum of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity as well as bring gender, age, sexuality, size and differing levels of ability into the classroom. Students of Color account for 60% of the

overall enrollment in our undergraduate and graduate programs while international students make up 5% of program enrollments (New Mexico State University 2016, p.64). Although not tracked by the institution, many students come to our classrooms as English Language Learners (ELLs). Thus, the students within our department represent the growing diversity that many institutions will face as growth continues in their online course offerings and enrollments.

As curriculum designers, we must have knowledge about our student population as we design and teach any given course. Teachers and instructional designers must consider how the influx of diverse student enrollments can provide new opportunities for designing online curriculum and learning technologies. (Heitner and Jennings 2016; Lee 2003; Morong and DesBiens 2016) After all, the lessons are meant to teach human beings who have vastly variant life experiences linguistically, traditionally, religiously, and culturally. These unique experiences are instrumental in informing the design of an online curriculum, which in turn influences in how well they will be received by any students in general and, more specifically, the online curriculum design. It is to these unique experiences that an online instructor must be attuned to.

Educators face many challenges, both in the design phase and teaching phases of their online courses. One such challenge is the ability to create online courses that reflect the instructor's commitment to inclusive excellence, diversity, and social justice. "Not only must teachers encourage academic success and cultural competence, they must help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequalities" (Ladson-Billings 1995, p. 476). The purpose of this article is to share best practices and strategies in the design of culturally responsive online courses that support the culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students we serve. As we share examples from our instructional design and classroom practices, we are mindful that we alone are not responsible for the best practices and activities we share today. Instead, we see ourselves as the voices of the many faculty members, instructional designers, and students that have contributed to the creation of dynamic online environments that lead to online student success.

What is Culturally Responsive Teaching?

Culturally responsive teaching is about designing dynamic environments and utilizing classroom practices that allow students to succeed academically. Culturally responsive teaching uses "the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay 2002, p. 106). It is this student-centeredness and value placed on diverse student experiences that provides access for students to maintain "cultural integrity while succeeding academically" (Ladson-Billings 1995, p.476). Within this environment, teachers become facilitators

for student engagement and assist students in achieving course success by redesigning curriculum to embrace the cultural capital students bring into the classroom.

Per Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching practices should be:

1. **Validating**. Culturally responsive teaching utilizes "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students" (p. 31).
2. **Comprehensive**. Culturally responsive teaching is about educating the whole learner by "helping students of color maintain identity and connections with their ethnic groups and communities; develop a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility; and acquire an ethic of success. Expectations and skills are not taught as separate entities but are woven together into an integrated whole that permeates all curriculum content and the entire modus operandi of the classroom". (p.32).
3. **Multi-dimensional.** "Culturally responsive teaching encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student–teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments" (p. 33).
4. **Empowering.** "Because culturally responsive teaching is empowering, it enables students to be better human beings and more successful learners. Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act. In other words, students have to believe they can succeed in learning tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained" (p. 34).
5. **Transformative.** "Culturally responsive teaching defies conventions of traditional educational practices with respect to ethnic students of color. This is done in several ways. It is very explicit about respecting the cultures and experiences of African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian American students, and it uses these as worthwhile resources for teaching and learning. It recognizes the existing strengths and accomplishments of these students and then enhances them further in the instructional process" (p.36).
6. **Emancipatory**. Culturally responsive teaching "releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing. Central to this kind of teaching is making authentic knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students. The validation, information, and pride it generates are both psychologically and intellectually liberating. This freedom allows students to focus more closely and concentrate more thoroughly on academic learning tasks" (p.37).

Within higher education classrooms, both traditional and online, following these practices requires designing curriculum differently or, in many cases, redesigning existing curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners. To create this dynamic online environment, instructors must always be cognizant of the mosaic nature of the demographics of the student body. This cognizance will go a long way in effectively supporting the needs of students by using best practices and making thoughtful decisions when designing courses. Designing an online environment that supports all learners, regardless of the CLD backgrounds from which they hail, is important in their future success as professionals. Therefore, it is important for faculty to design online courses with all learners in mind, including CLD students.

Best Practices and Suggested Activities

With Gay's (2010) practices as a foundation, we, the authors of this article, critically reflected upon our own culturally responsive teaching activities, to identify the underlying best practices that inform our online curriculum design. The following are recommended best practices and activities that can assist in employing culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum in any online environments.

Best Practice 1: Validate Students' Pre-Existing Knowledge with Relevant Activities

Instructors and students are social creatures and creating a sense of instructor-student and student-student presence enhances relationships, engagement with the content, and thereby the learning that can occur in an online course (Conrad and Donaldson 2012; Lehman and Conceição 2010). There are a variety of ways by which curriculum designers can establish a presence, relationships, and rapport with their virtual students by creating activities that build on the students' existing knowledge bases. Some of the activities enumerated herein have dual purposes. On the one hand, as Gay (2010) asserts, the activities validate the knowledge students already bring into the online classroom by inviting them to engage in relevant activities; On the other hand, they serve as best practices because they are embedded as part of our overarching online course design. These subtle and not so subtle activities work because we are keenly aware, as Palloff and Pratt (2010) succinctly put it, "an effort to establish presence is always needed" (p. 8). And these are accomplished partly by their unobtrusive presence at the beginning of the online courses. The following are examples of culturally responsive activities and teaching practices that *validate* students by utilizing "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay 2010, p. 31).

Activity 1: Assessing Technology Comfort Level As an online instructor, it is important to understand the differences in student comfort levels with using technology. One way to do this is by including a preliminary course assessment that students complete at the beginning of the course. It can be as simple as a 3-item survey via the Learning Management System (LMS) quiz tool that asks:

- Tell me about your experience using (Blackboard, Canvas, D2L, Angel, etc.).
- Tell me about your background using technology in learning environment.
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how comfortable are you with using technology and software tools like Skype, Google Docs, MS Word, YouTube, Twitter, etc.? Please explain.

Choose questions that will help you gauge student comfort levels with online learning and with their ability to use technology or software to meet course objectives. Embedding this type of activity at the beginning of the course provides the instructor with important information about the knowledge and skill levels that students already possess. Instructors can then use this information to design relevant course activities that support diverse learners.

Activity 2: Student Introductions on Discussion Board As a prelude before an online course begins, creating a welcoming virtual environment by giving an assignment for students to introduce each other is one great way to establish a rapport. As part of introduction process, the instructor models the salient points that need to be included in that background as he/she shares with the students. For example, asking pointed questions that students can incorporate in their entries, such as whether English is their first language; whether they are fluent in other languages; whether they prefer to work in small group or large groups or solo, etc. The sharing of background information would have three distinct purposes:

(1) as a way for students to get to know one another;
(2) to gauge an idea of the students' writing capacity, the most important component of any online course. This background information is to be used to help tailor and/or accommodate to students for whom the language of instruction may not be their primary mode of communication;
(3) the last important component of this activity is to help remind the instructor of the "implicit bias" that all human beings are prone towards, and higher education institutions are no exception. Recent research shows that PhD level professors are prone to implicit bias against names

that bear resemblances to African American, Latino/a, Indian, Chinese names in favor of Caucasian sounding names. (Milkman et al. 2012). The activity serves as a way for students to inform the instructor of their preferred way of identification thus helping to reduce the implicit biases.

By learning more than just the names of students, there is the understanding that there is more to these students than meets the virtual eye.

Activity 3: We are Superheros! The use of introduction or ice breaker activities in online courses supports student-student interactions, develops students' social presence, and begins the process for developing a learning community (Conrad and Donaldson 2012; Lehman and Conceição 2010). Another introductory activity used at the beginning of an online courses is titled, *It's time to be a Superhero! If you were a Superhero, who would you be?* There are two parts to the activity. First, students are asked to create and share their superhero identity in the related discussion forum. They are prompted, but are not required, to use online tools such as those for video, avatars, comic strips, etc. to create a superhero avatar. As part of sharing their superhero identity, they are asked to provide a description that includes cultural as well as academic (their skills as teacher, learner, and researcher) characteristics and powers. Second, students are asked to read and reply to their classmates' posts. Over time, after feedback from students, regarding the importance of getting to know each other early in the course, the point (grade) value for this activity has been increased as well as the required replies.

This activity has also proven to be another example, much like the Activity 2 example above, when the instructor could identify inherent biases and adjust based on student input. Of note, during one online course, a female student from India struggled a little with this activity because she was not aware of the superhero concept. She ended up providing an amazing introduction wherein she assumed the identity of a legendary Indian character. The dialogues with the student about the cultural-context of the "superhero" model and the feedback given by the student, led to a redesign of this activity. The directions for the next iteration of this introduction activity will include a note validating, affirming, and providing further options for students to share the cultural wealth (Yosso 2005) that they bring to class.

Best Practice 2: Provide Comprehensive and Multi-Dimensional Learning Opportunities

Culturally responsive teaching is all about educating the whole person. By providing comprehensive and multi-dimensional learning opportunities, instructors create dynamic activities that foster student engagement. Fostering student engagement is evidenced in a variety of ways with the activities shared in this section. Some of the listed activities defy the erroneous assumption made about CLDs and ELLs - that being less fluent in the English language equates to a lack of high cognitive skills (Macedo 2006). Instead, students are better able to demonstrate their abilities with these types of online activities. The following are examples of culturally responsive activities and teaching practices that provide *comprehensive* and *multidimensional* learning opportunities for students (Gay 2010).

Activity 1: High Cognitive Demand Tasks Using a science and mathematics methods course as an example, the goal of the High Cognitive Demand (HCD) task project adapted from Stein et al. (2009) is to assisting teacher candidates in learning how to plan, implement, and assess math and science content using high levels of thinking activities. The candidates enrolled in the online course are required to select an ELL or bilingual secondary student in a science/mathematics middle/high school classroom and have him/her complete three successive tasks at varying levels of cognitive demand. The goal of each of these activities is to elicit high order thinking in the content area. The candidates enrolled in the online course can work on the activities during the weekly synchronous class meetings, and discuss them as a group. Prior to working on the activity with the middle/high school student, the candidates are required to predict and write about the type of thinking the task stimulates. Then they compare their prediction to the level of thinking their middle/high school student demonstrated while working on the activity along with the responses she/he provided. After each meeting with their middle/high school chosen student, the candidates enrolled in the online course can discuss, and analyze the tasks, the responses, and support each other in designing the next task. After each response, candidates are required to write a reflection on the task and how it helped them write the next one. After all the tasks and revisions are completed the teacher candidates submit a final reflection on the entire process at the end of the semester.

Activity 2: American Library Association Readout Project It is important to include online activities that meet course objectives. At NMSU, one of the core courses for the Masters in Education degree program is EDUC 518 - Technology and Pedagogy. One of the course objectives is to have students participate in a social justice project using technology. That proved to be a difficult task especially with students enrolling and participating online from all over the world. To meet the objective, the American Library Association's Virtual Read Out project is included as one of the course requirements. The project allows individuals to record themselves reading from banned or challenged books and then submit the recording to the Virtual Read Out project

in the fall semester of each year. This virtual social justice project allows students the opportunity to engage with technologies all while activity participating in a social justice movement online.

Activity 3: The Great Debate: An Interactive Discussion
Like role-play or fishbowl, debate is an interactive discussion-based activity that can be used effectively in an online course using the discussion forum tool (Douglas and Johnson 2010; Lehman and Conceição 2010; Sautter 2007). Debate is a strategy that acknowledges when a topic has more than one perspective that should be explored. The Great Debate is a discussion activity that has been used for 10 years in a course about fostering online learning community. The Great Debate is designed to help students consider the problems and barriers related to the fostering, developing, and participating in online learning (and knowledge building) communities. But more importantly, by identifying the problems and barriers, there is also the opportunity to identify solutions and design. Of note, this format can be used for any key topic that can be debated through a problem and solution strategy. The Great Debate occurs in three parts:

1. In Part 1, students are provided with relevant resources and asked to create a post where they problematize the concept of fostering online learning community in an online course. They are prompted to do this by identifying and elaborating on problematic issues related to online learning communities, considering how the problem issues can affect learners both long term and short term, and/or putting themselves into the shoes of a person encountering the identified problem. They are further prompted to consider having fun being in this role and putting on their best debate "voice."
2. In Part 2, students read through their classmates' posts and choose two for "debate." They are prompted to do this by replying and addressing the problems and negatives in the Part 1 posts with solutions and positive aspects.
3. Finally, they learn about the importance of reflection and summarization (concepts further discussed in the next activity description). Students are prompted to review the original posts and responses and then to create a reflection that includes a summary of what they learned about both the problems and solutions and to consider the questions - Is there still anything unclear or that you have questions about? How has your thinking about online learning community changed since you started this class or since your last reflection?

Activity 4: Multiple Ways to Reflect or Summarize
Reflection is valuable for both teachers and students (Boud et al. 2013; Conrad 2004; Lin et al. 2014) and is a vital

component for transformative learning (Palloff and Pratt 2007). Brookfield and Preskill (2005) note that summarizing or synthesizing is considered one of the most valuable types of activities for helping students solidify learning and recall information. When assigning reflection and/or summarization activities, it's important to provide some guidance to students on this process and equally important to recognize that this can also be a very individual process (Palloff and Pratt 2010). When asking students to do a reflection or summarization activity, often at the end of a learning module or at the end of a course, multiple ways can be provided that address student levels of comfort with technology and how each student prefers to reflect and/or summarize. Students can choose from the following methods:

1. Create a text-based or multimedia response using the built-in LMS video tool and use the discussion option provided.
2. Create an audio/video response with an external audio/video tool (such as Soundcloud or YouTube) and use the discussion option provided.
3. Start or use an existing blog (such as Blogger or WordPress), either private or public, and post it there. Use the discussion option provided and provide the link to your blog reflection/summary.
4. Create a reflection using one of the previous options and send privately to the instructor via the messaging system. Some people need to dig deep in reflection and sometimes baring one's soul needs this 1–1 option.

Activity 5: Collaborative Group Work Setup Collaborative group work in an online course provides students with opportunities for social learning and co-creation of learning artifacts (Conrad and Donaldson 2012; Palloff and Pratt 2010). It also brings challenges such as different levels of student skills with online technology, student scheduling issues, the cultural differences that students bring to the group, and lack of instructor organization, just to name a few (Cohen and Lotan 2014; Popov et al. 2012). Scaffolding collaborative group work with a set of resources and activities like the following, minimizes these challenges and provides increased opportunities for success:

1. For every unit that is designed using the module tool in the Learning Management System (LMS), there is an overview. The Collaborative Group Work Overview is provided to students and discussed during a relevant live class meeting. See the resource for this at http://bit.ly/CGWO2017. This resource also includes the below discussed *Group Work and Roles Guide*, *Group Contract* template, and *Fun Group Activity*,

2. Student groups are developed. LMS tools often provide group tools so students are notified if this is an option.

3. Students are provided a *Group Work and Roles Guide* explaining the benefits and challenges of group work; guidance for establishing group policies and procedures; and relevant online collaborative tools are provided.

4. A *Group Contract* template is provided and groups work together, copy/paste the template to a collaborative document and each student uses a different color to help complete the contract. The use of voice conferencing is promoted but not required. This is an opportunity to practice the technology and collaboration skills needed to complete a collaborative group project.

5. The groups are provided a low risk (low points) *Fun Group Activity* to complete. Again, voice conferencing is promoted but not required and a template activity can be used to scaffold collaborative group work success.

6. Finally, students can reflect on these activities regarding their Collaborative Group Work Set Up and they are now prepared for the higher risk/higher points group project later in the course. See the previous activity for strategies that support reflection.

Best Practice 3: Transform Student Learning with Synchronous Online Meetings.

Critics of the online teaching and learning environment feel that the quality of the online experience is not supportive of group work and does allow students and instructors to communicate well (McDaniels et al. 2016, p. 2). However, technology has advanced to the point that it is now possible for instructors to provide the students enrolled in online courses with opportunities to interact with each other and to be seen and heard in real-time. Hosting synchronous online meetings provides opportunities for instructors to empower students by checking in with them to make sure expectations are clear, and to help with any problems they may be having with assignments (Gay 2010, p. 224). The following are examples of culturally responsive activities and teaching practices that create ***transformative*** (Gay 2010) learning environments for students.

Activity 1: Program and Course Orientations Providing an initial meeting with online students, referred to here as an orientation, provides an opportunity for building community; reviewing goals, objectives, outcomes, activities, etc., demonstrating course navigation; and setting the tone (Cooper 1999; Vai and Sosulski 2015). For the Online Teaching and Learning Graduate Certificate (OTLGC), a 100% online program, a program orientation and individual course orientations are provided. A web conferencing system is used to provide these orientations. A program orientation is offered at the official start of

the program every year. It is recognized that students who choose to take an online course or program, may do so because they need flexibility as they face constraints such as family and job responsibilities, time zone differences, sudden illness, etc. Thus, attending a live synchronous event such as program or course orientations is highly recommended but not mandatory for students to attend. All orientations are recorded for students who are unable to attend but want or need to access the content. The goals for the program orientation include:

- Building community including time for instructor and learner introductions,
- Providing an overview of the program and addressing any existing questions,
- Preparing learners to use the common online tools used in the program, and
- Preparing learners with some of the common content and pedagogical approaches in the program.

Course orientations are provided during the first week of class with goals similar to program orientation but specific to the courses. These orientations are required in that there are points assigned for either a) attending live, or b) viewing the recording. Further, an instructor may choose to run multiple orientations if needed. The goals for online course orientations include:

- Building community starting with introductions;
- Providing an overview of the course including goals, objectives, modular breakdown of the course activities;
- Providing a course navigation tour and specific instructions about getting started, communications, and pedagogical approaches; and
- Providing an opportunity to address any questions.

Activity 2: Weekly Course Discussions The course focuses on methods of teaching that enable students to successfully integrate varied uses of technology into their learning environments using partnering pedagogy to increase student learning in Mathematics and Science at the secondary school level. The candidates enrolled in this online course meet one time face-to-face to solidify expectations and to assist in forming a cohesive cohort of colleagues. They then meet synchronously online for two hours once a week throughout the semester. The purpose of the weekly meetings is to assist the teacher candidates in understanding a variety of teaching methods, how to integrate technology, and how to best deliver content to support diverse student needs. The teacher candidates are assigned readings that are then discussed during the weekly meeting that is facilitated through the university's course management system using Adobe Connect™. In this way, the teacher candidates have the opportunity to clarify

misunderstandings and to give their colleagues timely advice on how to implement a variety of teaching methods, technology tool, and ideas.

Activity 3: Student and/or Team presentations: Sharing Practices The purpose of the sharing practices assignment is to assist all students in acquiring knowledge and skills that they could then use in their own classrooms. The students in the online course are required to share an activity or lesson that they had implemented in their science or math classroom. The assignment provides an opportunity to learn different activities from each other and to discuss accommodations from different classrooms perspectives. Each presentation is meant to be no longer than 15 min and is presented as a video they recorded while performing the lesson in their classroom. Classmates then give constructive feedback about how to improve the lesson and offer suggestions regarding classroom management techniques to help make the lesson more student centered and engaging.

Activity 4: Students Facilitating Discussions Assigning group work to online students at the start of a course rests in making erroneous assumptions that all students have had exposure to a virtual learning environment and that all students prefer group work. The transition from individual work to group work can be made seamless if the instructor is aware of his/her student needs in any given course. Per Boettcher and Conrad (2010), "some students work and learn best on their own" (p. 41). Nonetheless, studies continually bolster the idea that small group activities as one of the most effective learning environment "…when students participate in lessons that require them to construct and organize knowledge, consider alternatives, engage in detailed research, inquiry, writing, and analysis, and to communicate effectively to audiences" (Darling-Hammond and Hammerness 2002; Newmann 1996). How does one thus transpose this face-to-face study to a culturally responsive online course design is a legitimate question to ask. Activity 3 can fill in that void by letting students lead a discussion thereby addressing all the important areas quoted above. For example, to lead a discussion a student must *construct and organize knowledge* and would naturally have to engage the participants in the discussion. Additionally, facilitating requires due diligence to details through the written word continuously throughout the allotted time-frame in which the student is a leading discussant. Behind the scenes, the online instructor should be there for each student when scaffolding is needed while the discussion is ongoing. Essentially, the instructor is not only gauging the lead discussants' zone of proximal development (ZPD), but also making sure that ZPD is occurring within the larger group discussions as well. So, while the lead discussant is in the foreground engaging and interacting the instructor is in the background engaging the discussion leader via e-mail, thereby facilitating in that process of knowledge production. This one-on-one email exchange with a discussion leader is effectively hands-on mentorship that can serve as conduit for a rich virtual content based discourse.

Best Practice 4: Empower Students through Liberatory Leadership Opportunities

Mentoring and modeling behavior are key practices when preparing students to become teachers, corporate trainers, and instructional designer in virtual environments. Because students bring differing levels of teaching and technology expertise to our online courses, it is important to provide a variety of activities that speak to the differing levels of preparedness. One of the most empowering and transformative ways to mentor and coach students is by creating opportunities for them to become co-creators in course design and even assume classroom leadership**.** The following are examples of culturally responsive activities and teaching practices that create liberatory opportunities as well as *empowering* and *emancipatory* (Gay 2010) virtual learning environments for students.

The activities that follow are examples of how these liberatory opportunities can be created in virtual classrooms.

Activity 1: Session Facilitation Geneva Gay (2010) stated that she believes in "cooperative learning, learning by doing, and learning in ways similar to how they should teach their own students…" (p. 221). In a similar way, this assignment provides the students in the online course with the opportunity to lead the weekly discussion using the instructor assigned readings in an effort to "share teaching tasks and trade student-teacher roles" (p. 221). Students are responsible for preparing questions and/or any other materials they feel are necessary to facilitate a quality class discussion based on the required session readings. The facilitator for the week is also allowed to construct a separate exercise/activity of their own design or implement a process for participation by their classmates at session facilitator's discretion. Students are not limited in how to facilitate the discussion throughout the week and during the synchronous online meeting. The goal is to find multiple and creative ways for engaging the material based on their development in the context of the course.

Activity 2: Group-led Discussion Inherent in an online course is the fact that it is a moving target in that as technological innovations continue to enhance the quality of life in general and they will also keep on changing the efficacy of learning. Therefore, online curriculum designers and educators must keep on evolving with new innovations. Group-led discussions are no exception. Per Mehlenbacher (2010), "Design is by nature multidisciplinary and invites an inevitable tension between

general advice and specific design problems: design is at its core both constructive and argumentative" (p. 95).

Therefore, incorporating state of the art designs can be made to enhance the scaffolding process. For example, at the initial stage of group-led discussions the online course instructor could make efficient use of the various media innovations to bring group-led discussants together and encouraging them to make use of these innovations when they lead discussions. Being open to embracing technology is a first step to "accept[ing] openness as including forms of peer production, peer property, and peer distribution as the very heart of digital social media and culture" (Peters and Roberts 2012, p. 6). Though Peters and Roberts (2012) question the notion of open society as they wonder of its limits, for the purposes of group-led discussions, it is a safe bet, however, that group-led discussions merit no such perturbation. This kind of engagement with each group-led discussion is an activity-prior-to-activity that would assist in helping sooth the potential rough edges that any group-led discussions are prone to fall prey towards.

Activity 3: Co-Design this Course At the beginning of a course, students can be invited to be co-creators of their learning and co-design their course by helping develop the learning outcomes, activities, and assessment (Bovill et al. 2011; Brubaker 2012). The process is as follows:

1. Students are provided a rationale for co-designing their course with an overarching view of the course including key course concepts, additional related concepts, activities done by other classes, and the encouragement to do online research about the course concepts.
2. Upon engaging with the course information, students are prompted to identify their own personal goals for the course and post to the related discussion forum. They are prompted to reply to each other.
3. A live synchronous meeting is provided. As previously noted, live meetings are not always an option for students who choose to take an online course, thus attendance is required in that there are points assigned for either a) attending live, or b) viewing the recording. The instructor facilitates brainstorming in small groups wherein students draw upon the knowledge they previously built regarding personal goals to identify five class outcomes for the class. Each team posts their five outcomes to a collaborative document. Students who cannot attend will view the recording and post their ideas to a discussion forum for the instructor to review. Providing options such as this aligns with culturally responsive teaching practices by honoring students' lives and conditions.
4. The instructor provides a 10-min break and synthesizes the students' ideas to create a co-designed list of class outcomes.

5. The instructor gives this list back to the teams prompting the teams to now identify activities and assessments that will help the class achieve the co-designed outcomes.
6. The instructor has an assignment such as Collaborative Group Work Setup, previously discussed, ready for the class to do while the co-designed activities and assessments are developed and added to the online course.
7. Students are notified when the completed activities and assessments are ready and facilitates any negotiations needed at that time and throughout the duration of the course.

Conclusion

The educational landscape from pre-Kindergarten through graduate school programs have changed markedly over the past 30 plus years. In addition to this shift in demographics, the change in how students are taught has been profound and far-reaching, given the advances in technology with online technology being particularly impactful. "Beyond cultural awareness, teachers must identify cultural implications and modify instructional approaches to address both the students' academic and cultural needs" (Martins-Shannon and White 2012, p. 4). As educators and instructors of culturally and linguistically diverse students it is our responsibility to meet the needs of our students by using the best possible methods in curriculum and course design. This article allowed us to share how we address this with best practices in designing and teaching in culturally responsive ways online.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest   Dr. X. Woodley declares that she has no conflict of interest. Dr. C. Hernandez declares that she has no conflict of interest. Dr. J. Parra is an advisory council member for the National Geographic Network of Alliances and is a member of the board of directors for Online Learning Consortium. Mr. B. Negash declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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