

Equity Speaks: Culturally Sustaining Stories in Education

Podcast 2: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Host Krystal Andrews: For our second episode, we will explore the culturally responsive pedagogy practices that community college faculty utilize while teaching their courses. For this episode, we will hear from Dr. Mara Lazda, associate professor in the Department of History at Bronx Community College in New York; Dr. Tiffany Gause, assistant professor of sociology and Honors Program co-coordinator at Santiago Canyon College in California; and lastly, Dr. Grisel Acosta, associate professor in English language and literature, also at Bronx Community College in New York.

I was also joined by my colleague Dr. AJ Welton, associate professor in education policy, organization, and leadership, and the assistant director of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, for an engaging and candid discussion about the intentionality and importance of utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy to reflect the demographics and needs of student populations on community college campuses.

Host AJ Welton: Well, thank you so much for joining us and sharing your knowledge and expertise today for this podcast episode. The first question that we have for you is share with us a bit about who you are, your role, and the work that you do as a community college educator.

Grisel Acosta: Hi everyone, it's a pleasure to be here. My name is Dr. Grisel Acosta. I am an associate professor at Bronx Community College, which is part of the City University of New York system, and I teach in the English Department, and I teach Latino literature, creative writing, and composition classes, sometimes developmental classes, sometimes ESL classes, so a wide range of classes. And at the college, I also organize a bunch of events that are basically Latino-oriented. So, I will bring in Latino playwrights, Latino poets, mainly a variety of Latino writers, often for Hispanic Heritage Month, Women's History Month.

And then with Professor Vincent Toro, we also have a Latinx writing series where we bring Latinos from all over the United States to talk to students, and I feel that the work that I do is consistently rooted in making sure that the students understand their history; they understand possible paths that they can take, not only as writers, which that's my primary discipline, being a writer and promoting Latino literature, but also just as community members, as young people who can take part in the democratic process and just different ways in which they can be connected to their community.

I try to do that by connecting them with other people who have gone through similar journeys, and I always make sure to have works in the class that connect to their experience, and I should mention that the population at Bronx Community College is primarily Latino students and often Afro-Latino students.

So, sometimes they choose to identify as Afro-Latino, but a lot of times they don't know their history, so they don't really know what Afro-Latinidad is. So I try to focus on that as well. So that's my role.

Mara Lazda:

Thank you for inviting me. I am Mara Lazda. I am an associate professor in the History Department, also at Bronx Community College, and here I teach world history, history of women and gender. I am also a faculty co-coordinator of the first-year seminar program, at least I have been for the last two years, and I teach first-year seminar section on human rights, past and present. And during my eight years here at BCC, one thing that I've also been interested in is something that Professor Acosta also emphasized is linking between what they learn in the classroom to the students' roles in their community and in the world more broadly.

So one of the initiatives that I've been part of is organizing a conversation series that we call the President's Conversation Series. And one of the main goals of this series is to create a forum where we have student-centered, individual-centered conversations on topics that are kind of deemed controversial such as racial profiling and social justice, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism. And so, I'm happy to talk about those more specifically later.

But the main point is just what I've been inspired to do during my time here at BCC is really think more creatively about how to help students connect what they learn in the classroom, their personal lives, like with their own experience with academics.

Tiffany Gause:

Thanks for having me. My name's Tiffany Gause, and I am in the Sociology Department at Santiago Canyon College. We're located in Southern California. I'm also the department chair of sociology, gender sexuality and women's studies, and ethnic studies, and I am faculty co-coordinator of our equity initiative with Professor Corinna Evett on our campus. Much of my work is centered around assisting our faculty members to become more culturally competent and more equity-minded in creating classrooms to support students.

So, it's developing teaching practices, best practices in the classroom; it's developing syllabi which are more supportive of students' learning; it's figuring out how to reach students of various backgrounds and various cultural experiences to make sure they're being supported in the classroom to reach whatever goal they may have, be it a degree situation, be it just taking a class and have that be their terminal experience at our community college.

I'm also a safe space trainer on our campus, and so I work with also my partner, Professor Corinna Evett, in training faculty, staff, and administration in supporting our queer students on campus and making sure that we are creating as many volunteer allies as possible to support students as they identify in various ways around gender and around sexuality, and trying to make our campus as supportive as possible.

And I'm also just now joined in assisting with our newly adopted emoji program to support the African American students on our campus. We don't have a large black population on our campus, which we hope that we can support and grow for the betterment of all of us, and we're starting with the development of an emoji program, which can support students toward their academic and social goals. So that's my role.

Host AJ Welton:

Well, thank you. Well, now, we would like to hear about your work and what you're doing. So, in a community college context, what does it mean to be culturally responsive in your pedagogical practices? If you could share some examples from your own work as faculty.

Grisel Acosta:

Well, for me, and this is Grisel Acosta speaking again, I feel like there are many, many different things that one has to consider when being culturally responsive in our teaching, in the way that we shape our curriculum, our pedagogy. The first is that we have to make sure that the faculty is comprised of people who are going to be culturally responsive. We have to train a bunch of faculty that is going to be culturally responsive. So, there are quite a few people writing about this. One book that I'm thinking about is *Diversifying the Teacher Workforce*, edited by Christine Sleeter and LaVonne I. Neal. They have different chapters on the recruitment, preparation, and retention of diverse teacher candidates, for example, things like that.

So, I think that that's really where you have to start, and one of the things that I have done for the past few years is I've been part of, first, it was called the Coach Task Force, and then it was called the Diversity Task Force, but these are two task forces created in response to the Coach Survey, which is a survey developed by Harvard that many different universities and colleges implement. CUNY implements it CUNY-wide, and it's basically to measure faculty satisfaction, faculty experience.

Unfortunately, it is not a survey that is given to adjunct faculty. It's only full-time tenure track and tenured faculty that are given the survey. But that said, we take the results of the survey, and we have tried to address issues of equity and representation within the faculty body, right off the bat. So that's really the main thing, and at BCC, it's what you would expect: It's female faculty and faculty of color who struggle with actually being able to do what they want to do, have the tools such as tenure, promotion, so forth to do what they need to do in the classroom in order to better serve the students.

So that's step one. The other things that I try to do just on a personal level, and I really wish that our scheduling allowed this, but I really try to have a syllabus that reflects the needs of each particular class. So I try to put together a general syllabus before the semester has started that is flexible enough that will allow me to see the population of students that I have, and if I need to, I change some of the things that we read in the classroom based on what I think the students

might want to learn about based on the questions that I've asked them at the beginning of the semester.

So I generally try to have many different kinds of representation in the text. So I have queer texts. I have texts that represent differently abled folks. I have obviously texts that are going to represent the different Latin American countries of origin that our students have. So I just want to make sure that they all know that our knowledge comes from a lot of different places. I think that the English Department allows that in a pretty easy fashion as I'm able to choose a lot of the texts that we read.

However, I know that this could be a little bit more challenging for people in the STEM disciplines, and that's something that I have through the task forces encouraged folks to have workshops where we see that there's actually a lot of science, math study that originate, for example, with different populations in Africa, in Central and South America. So there are ways of teaching that history in conjunction with the regular textbooks that people are using that might be required in the department.

A specific example that I want to share is what I teach about, Afro-Latino in my Latino classroom. So, as I mentioned before, many of my students are Afro-Latino, and they do not know that they are Afro-Latino. And in fact, they suffer from an erasure of their history because it was literally policy to do so. For example, in Mexico they took away black from the census. In the Dominican Republic, if you identify as a black Latino, you could be deported into Haiti. So, I try to include texts that specifically teach about that history in a way that is not oppressive; in a way that is liberating, that allows them to accept the full history that they have so that they can move forward and see, "Okay, how do I want to apply this knowledge?"

And other things that I do is I always ask my students at the beginning of class basically what their experience is. What kind of work they do and so forth, and oftentimes many of our students are *incredible* leaders in their own unique universes. So, I keep that in mind and try to give them roles in the classroom where they can utilize that leadership. It's incredibly important because as adult learners to talk to our students as if they are of a different age, it's not fair to them, it's not respecting their own competencies, their own *cultural* competencies that they bring to the class.

And the last thing I'll say is that I shape my assignments so that they can exhibit their own cultural competencies. Some students may not have learned to write an essay in either language, but they know very, very well how to have a well-structured presentation. So I try to have many assignments that acknowledge all that.

Host AJ Welton:

Thank you.

Mara Lazda:

This is Mara. I'll pick up on Professor Acosta's focus on the student and to say, you know, how I think about being culturally responsive in my pedagogical practice. I think of it as kind of student-oriented teaching in a way that recognizes, and this is something Professor Acosta pointed out, recognizes a student's experience and culture as a strength and a tool.

So, in other words, I think of it as the opposite of deficit-oriented teaching. That is, I think sometimes as professors, we come into the classroom thinking, "The students, what do they lack? What kind of skills do they lack? What kind of knowledge do they lack?" And that's something I'm trying to impart. I think we're missing an opportunity to capitalize or build on all the skills and the experience that our students bring.

So focus less on what the students don't know or can't do, but what they already know, and how can I help them learn more or sharpen the skills they need and also most likely learn from them. So what that means for me in the history classroom is first of all on the very first day, I tell them that my goal is for students to find a personal connection to the world history we are teaching. So it's starting with themselves and using *that* as kind of a launching point. So for example, I'm interested in oral history kind of interviews, so I have the students interview each other, interview someone in their lives, and then connect those personal experiences with some of the more standard, traditional textbooks. So that way, going from the first question, building this connection between what they learn in the classroom and what goes on when they leave the campus itself.

The second example is that I often have a news assignment or a media assignment and ask them to find a news story, a media story and connect it to something in history, something that we're learning in class. And here I emphasize that it doesn't have to be in English. Their source can be in whatever language that they're more comfortable in or perhaps a new source that's from their country of origin. That way, they don't need to fit it into a certain frame that I set up, but rather focus on your own skills, your own culture, your own strengths and bring that and share that with the others in the classroom, which also I think enriches everyone else's experience.

Tiffany Gause:

This is Tiffany. I do want to echo what Dr. Acosta said, as well as Dr. Lazda, that being culturally responsive is really the opposite of that deficit mindset, which we maybe experienced in our education. It's really important for me to have students see themselves as being academics, and I really try to deconstruct that term from being in this kind of ivory tower and something that's really not obtainable to have them see themselves in what we read.

So, I also try to find a wide range of scholars who come from various backgrounds. I highlight that the field of sociology itself was born out of really a large pool of people who were fighting against oppressive states, who were calling out mainstream cultural practices that were maintaining oppression. And

once we're able to deconstruct that and see that it's not what's told to you maybe throughout grade school or K through 12 of "Look at these old white dudes and say thanks." It's truly a diversity of people coming together with unique and *really* important lenses based off their own socioeconomic status, their own religious background, their own gender identities, who've allowed us to see experiences in different ways; that that's built our field.

And what they bring to the table is *just* as important, and so I refer to my students throughout the semester as scholars and academics because they truly are, and I think that that helps them to understand their role in owning the classroom. So this is something that's really important for me is to have the students see the classroom as their own, that we work together to develop assignments. We work together to develop due dates. We work together to develop community guidelines that we're all going to abide by, including myself, through the duration of the semester, and we set the classroom up in a way that's going to support students to be as successful as they possibly can be, and that's on a personal level.

On the other end of being an equity co-coordinator, I think just helping our faculty understand that they've likely come out of a field be it STEM, be it humanities, be it the social causes, in which we don't see wide representation of folks of diverse backgrounds. We really see, again, older white males. Sometimes we have women sprinkled in there who are scholars, and that's kind of the end of the story as to how fields got developed.

And when we really peel back layers of academic fields, we see that there's a lot of folks who aren't getting credit, who look like our students, who had experiences similar to our students, and I feel that that's really *powerful* in just getting students engaged in the work. And so, one of the things that we try to do within our equity training is have our faculty members reflect on the sources they're using within the classroom. And starting from that point, then asking themselves what story's being told, and who is it being told to, and that seems to be a point of success for us.

I think it was Dr. Acosta who said at her community college, they have a little bit of difficulty with some of the STEM inclusion as a field, and we've struggled with that as well, but we've tried really hard, and we use folks like Dr. Dorothy Roberts who talks about race-based medicine, and this can absolutely be implied into many of our STEM fields to rethink what we use as standard operating equipment, terminology, and ideas where those came from and how those can be reimagined, and even include a critique for students to use of the fields that they're studying as being exclusionary at times.

So, that's sort of what it's meant for us sort of on the professional level at SCC and what it's meant for me personally to have it be student-centered and student-supported and students having that ownership of classroom.

Host Krystal Andrews: Those are great responses. Did anybody have anything else you would like to add?

Mara Lazda: This is Mara. I'll just briefly comment that I really appreciate this last recognition of the significance of language, and I think that's also a fundamental shift that we, as faculty, need to deliberately think about: How we're phrasing what we teach and this idea of the classroom as collaborative, that we're doing what we can to not replicate a kind of hierarchy that I think has been so characteristic of academia; that that's the responsibility that we have as culturally responsive educators.

Host Krystal Andrews: That really leads us into our next question, which is from the context of fostering racial equity. So how do you use culturally responsive pedagogy to foster racial equity for the students that you serve both in and outside of the classroom formal spaces?

Grisel Acosta: Well, there are a few different ways in which I try to promote racial equity through these pedagogical practices. The first is to demonstrate the excellence of all the different writers of color that I bring to the classroom, especially writers of color who are not necessarily canonized, because sometimes we keep going back to the same writers, and it makes it seem as if, well, only a few of us get to a certain level of success, a level of prominence. And I want the students to see that there are plenty of leaders out there, or not even necessarily leaders, but folks who are successful in their field who come from a variety of different backgrounds.

So, for example, in one of my classes, I teach Gabby Rivera's *Juliet Takes a Breath*, which is a novel about a young woman in the Bronx, an Afro-Latina in the Bronx, who travels to Portland for an internship and starts to discover that everything that she was studying in college about feminism was incredibly whitewashed, and that that actually affects how she is seeing herself and her possibilities as a feminist in the world.

So, for example, one of the passages in the text has to do with a conversation between Juliet, the main character, and her girlfriend, and they have a conversation about Banana Republic, the store. And Juliet has learned the actual meaning of the term "banana republic" through her internship, and she talks to her girlfriend about this because her girlfriend regularly stops at Banana Republic, and the girlfriend expresses, "Well, I already knew that, so what? I'm still going to keep shopping there."

So when the students in our classroom read about that, and they learned, because this is the first time *they* were learning about the term "banana republic." They were absolutely devastated for Juliet and actually for themselves as well, because they didn't understand how there could be a store named after one of the hideous ways that U.S. policy has affected people in their countries of origins.

So, I think that bringing in these texts allows them to understand their historical context, racially, ethnically, and allowed them to look at the world with new eyes, and then we're able to have a conversation: "Well, are there other spaces that have similar names or similar taglines that people just kind of take for granted?" And now they have the capacity to read the world with a racial lens that they did not have before. So I think that that promotes their own empowerment in terms of how they see themselves and how they see their relationship with the world.

Like I mentioned, I also teach creative writing, and there are amazing creative writers at Bronx Community College. And Melissa, I'm going to say, but I'm forgetting her last name right now, she's the editor of *Thesis* at BCC, and she publishes our students, which is amazing in and of itself. So that encourages their empowerment because it's a very diverse journal that BCC has. But I had a particularly strong writer, who was passionate about writing, realize how her writing could affect the world, this student that I had a few semesters ago. I won't mention her name, but this student is an Afro-Latina. She's differently abled, and there have been many, many assumptions made about her because of that. So she wrote this *incredible* creative nonfiction piece about being differently abled and how people would often treat her as if she couldn't do anything.

Now this is a student who was salutatorian, 4.0 GPA, pick of schools that she wants to go to. She's an amazing, amazing student. And at the time I was editing a volume that recently got published by Routledge called *Latina Outsiders Remaking Latina Identity*, and her work was so strong, I asked her, "Do you want to be published?" And of course she said yes, but I don't think that she understood what that really meant until the volume came out that she is a published author on par with scholars all over the country.

The anthology has over 30 contributors from all over the U.S. So, I feel that as educators we need to really look at our students as equals, and we need to recognize the life-changing possibilities that our students' work has. And we need to make sure that *they* understand that and give them those opportunities. And in that way, I feel that I'm promoting racial equity, class equity. The majority of our students are either at or below the poverty level, so we need to consider that in conjunction with racial equity as well.

Mara Lazda:

So this is Mara again. I have to say that I'm honored and I'm happy to be a part of BCC, but I'll talk a little bit more to give specific examples about picking up on this theme, too, that's evolving about "you're putting the student at the center," right? Putting the student at the center of the classroom. Putting the student at the center of how we're thinking about structuring the material that we teach. Another space for this is, as you said in your question, outside the classroom.

As I mentioned earlier, I've been trying to organize these conversation series, and one of the goals of it is a couple of times in the semester is to address any

controversial questions that are appearing in politics or in the media, and have it student-centered and have a space where people are comfortable being uncomfortable in some ways, and in the interest of racial equity, talking about why there isn't racial equity. What are the barriers to it?

And, I mean, just to give you maybe a little bit more of a specific example and what happens at these conversations is we had a conversation about Islamophobia, where we had the Muslim students from the Muslim Students' Association who wanted to participate, they wanted to share what their experiences were with fellow students. And what emerges from these conversations is it's an opportunity for people to open these conversations and examine their own preconception, kind of reflect on themselves and how they themselves might be both contributing to these questions of inequity and equity.

So, to wrap this up, think about how we can carry over our goal of being culturally responsive and have our students take the lead in this, take the lead and become a part of fostering racial equity and seeing themselves as having a role in making more racially equitable policies or attitudes and kind of breaking down some of these barriers by first kind of reflecting on their own relationships and going from there.

Tiffany Gause:

This is Tiffany. I think, again, in thinking about fostering racial equity within the classroom, I've got to make sure that my students can see themselves in the material that they're reading that we are completing and doing together in the research I have them conduct. That if they can see *themselves* reflected within the text, themselves reflected within being valued as perhaps a community that needs a voice to be lifted via research or scholarship, that that is really powerful for students.

My students and I always talk about this. It's hard to be it if you can't see it. And so, in getting students to a place where they, on the regular, be members of their community reflected within, again, that world of academia, which is attempted to be taken from poor folks' hands from the hands of people of color, from queer folks' hands. If they can see it actually being a part of their everyday lives, and this is one thing that I try to do with my specific field of sociology, which isn't just an intro course you're taking and then you're moving on to whatever maybe your next step is. This is something that can and does change your life, and once you start to use your sociological imagination—which is a term we use in my field where we understand larger context that create an event we're witnessing or a movement that we're witnessing or a behavioral occurrence that we're witnessing—that it's not just that occurrence that's happening; that there are a lot of steps that transpire to lead us to what we're observing currently.

This field can be transformative for you in thinking holistically about how we can make it significant change, even if it's just in your home with your family; even if

it's just within your community. And so, one of the things that I try to highlight is the importance of community organizers and community members who have stepped up to call out situations of injustice, and one of the biggest, I think, prime examples we're seeing now is the crisis in Flint. The inhumane violation of human rights, just ignoring an entire community of people, and they're being literally poisoned to death by the water in their community.

And so we read a book by a journalist from the Detroit Free Press; her name's Anna Clark. And she does a *wonderful* sociological job highlighting those community members who decided to step up, to figure out how they could make their voices heard, to make demands, to in some case have those demands be made to unify an entire community, to have them come together and create political change. It's a heartbreaking story, of course, because we still see folks be poisoned by the water in Flint. We still see the community and the city of Flint be ignored.

My background is not a position of inhibited; it's not a barrier. In fact, it's a *springboard* to give me greater insight into how I can make those cultural changes, and so approaching my material with that mindset of "This is an *asset* that you have. This is an *asset* that we, collectively, can all pull from to make significant change." When thinking about social justice, the larger campus macro kind of perspective, I'll say, again, trying to highlight those things for our faculty and saying, "What is it that you're providing for students in terms of reflecting on their own experiences? What is it that you're doing to allow students to see themselves within your field?"

It's not just a mastery of the material, right? We have to make sure that students are seen as a part of your field and welcomed into your field, and in what ways, as we move into the classroom as faculty members, are we making that happen? So that's really kind of my approach on the personal level and then looking at the approach in the more macro, working with faculty on my campus to try to foster racial equity for our students.

Host Krystal Andrews: This has been a very *rich* conversation to hear about the language choices and using asset-based pedagogy practices and just looking at the way that you all are infusing racial equity into the work that you're doing is phenomenal. And because you all are already doing the work, our next question is what professional development and supports are needed for educators who aim to be more culturally responsive in their pedagogical practices?

Grisel Acosta: That's a question that's very difficult for me personally, because I feel like there are so many supports that are needed that people have been asking for, for a very long time. But for some reason those questions go unanswered. Those requests go unanswered. The image that comes to me is that of life in certain parts of Brooklyn. If you go to certain parts of Brooklyn, it is abundantly *clear* that whatever cultural background you have, it is an asset. *Everyone knows* that.

They *know* that about themselves, and they walk in the world with high heads, confidently using the tools that their families, their ancestors, the intellectuals, and their communities have given them. However, despite the fact that that is one existence on the planet, there are other spaces where folks have not caught up. And even though in their *mind* they might feel that they *want* to be receptive to the needs of their students, and they want to respect cultural competencies in the classroom, they still fall back on traditional practices.

And what I feel is that there has to be *overwhelming* support from administrations where the language that we have circulating right here in this discussion is *common* language, *constant*, and that folks are *always* asked, "How are you using the assets that the students bring to the class in order to further their success?" That has to be a question that is constantly asked. So, I feel that that support is needed in a *radical* way.

Administrations and educational leadership on every campus needs to have that language *constantly* spoken. I feel that we also need to re-envision what we teach in terms of the textbooks. So, for example, there's an anthology called *Reclaiming the Multicultural Roots of U.S. Curriculum*. And the subheading is Communities of Color and Official Knowledge in Education. This is edited by Wayne Au, Anthony L. Brown, and Dolores Calderón.

So the concept here is that education in the U.S. has *always* pulled from different communities of color, and we have just been erasing that knowledge. So, I think that there has to be constant education of our faculty members, letting them know, "Hey, that theory that you're studying, it actually has its roots in Egypt, or that concept in astronomy, it actually has its roots within the Aztec community." And that language has to permeate our pedagogy, constantly connecting it, not letting it be Eurocentric, not promoting white supremacy.

I think that it's scary for a lot of people to see that white supremacy is a myth, and that is what we are working against. I think that most of us know, "Oh, the Greek stole this from X, Y, and Z countries." We know that. But to actually implement those ideas in the classroom is *terribly frightening* for people, and we as a community, as a culture, as a nation have to decide we're finally going to embrace the multicultural roots of our collective knowledge. We need that support from our administration and our faculty members.

Mara Lazda:

Yeah, I can only agree very strongly with what Professor Acosta said, and I think also again, in returning to this question of language: *How* we talk about our students and education and, in particular, assessment, and this is something that I think administration can help with is how do you structure the language of assessment, that it's not, again, deficit-oriented? And I think we're not assessing deficits. I mean, again, recognizing, yes, we're teaching skills and teaching some things. Students are learning something new, but it's not always looking at what they lack, but rather, you know, what we're adding to perhaps their knowledge,

or how can we build on what the skills and the rich culture and knowledge that they already have.

So I think some of it is really thinking about how and what kinds of questions are we asking? How we are framing the assessment would also make us individual professors think about what we're doing in the classroom and in our approaches. Thinking about possible, specific ways that faculty can be supportive. Also, introducing some of these campus-wide programs that help faculty introduce some of these texts that recognize, as Professor Acosta says, multicultural roots you need to integrate into our classrooms.

So, for example, many campuses across the country have these common read programs, a one-book program, where campus reads one book and then it's also incorporated into various courses. And so, we've just started this at BCC, and I say the three books that we've chosen thus far: The first was *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. The second was *Why the Cocks Fight*. The first is by Rebecca Skloot. *Why the Cocks Fight* is by Michele Wucker. And the book we've chosen for this year is Michelle Obama's *Becoming*. I mean, all of those explicitly address the question of race and explicitly look at the ways in which there's been institutionalized racism, and what the results of that has been and what have the efforts been to counter that. But my point is, as far as the support that can be offered by faculty, now this is, by having this kind of structure, you're also inviting faculty who may not have considered these conversations, may not have thought that they were able to integrate these culturally responsive pedagogies.

You're offering them a bridge into those conversations. And so they may also not feel they as individual faculty can do that in their classroom but then they're part of a larger conversation, part of a larger movement. So, thinking about ways in which these kinds of campus-wide initiatives or campus-wide collections, you know, we have a center for teaching and learning with technology, and many of these campuses have centers that can coordinate this kind of information, coordinate these kinds of texts, so that faculty who are interested, you know, have a place to go to access these resources.

And then the final thing I'll say, I think, you know, sometimes I've had conversations with faculty who say they're uncomfortable addressing these questions of race, or they don't know how to address these questions of race. And I think it's our responsibility to be uncomfortable. And, you know, working through that, I think that's, I guess, supporting faculty and being uncomfortable or recognizing that that is a concern, and, but that's kind of our responsibility, I think, as educators and our responsibility to our students.

Tiffany Gause:

I'm going to take it in a slightly different direction, although I agree completely with Dr. Acosta and Dr. Lazda that one of the things that's very *frustrating* for us on our campus is, you know, we have the great state of California legislators, as they typically do, passing legislation around education and figuring out what's

going to be best for us to do on all of our campuses, within our classrooms, and we had the big equity initiative in the state of California where we're now going to close those achievement gaps. We recognize there are achievement gaps, we're going to close them, and educators have been, of course, not all, but many educators have been shouting about this for years. But what's, I think, so *very frustrating* is that there's really not much genuine support for doing that. So, we haven't had professional development funds in *years*, a *travesty* for us. So, we're trying to, with, again, my partner, Corrina Evett, and I who received a *small* amount of relief time to be the equity co-coordinators on our campus for our faculty to provide us as much as we can in terms of training.

We have to pull from the small amount of equity funds that we were allocated the past few years to bring on folks to help, not only further train us, but help to train our faculty and other interested members of our campus community. But it really is mind-boggling, it's baffling, it's dumbfounding how we pass legislation and we expect educators to move forward in closing achievement gaps, but we're not giving them the tools to do so. We're not giving them an opportunity to learn how to do that. What are they even doing to *maintain* achievement gaps right now?

And there are many faculty members on our campus who are very well meaning, who are truly ignorant, but they are willing to learn, and we want to be there to help and support that. But if we don't have the financial capability to bring trainers on on a regular basis to support Corrina and I to furthering our education to make sure that we can bring that information back to our faculty, if we're not providing faculty with opportunities to go to conferences and other trainings to learn about teaching mathematics, religion, social justice. This is something that exists, but our campus-faculty aren't aware of it because we don't have the capabilities to send them to those conferences, so that they can learn.

So it really becomes politically frustrating that we have these needs, and we have a very willing faculty. We had Dr. Luke Wood and Dr. Frank Harris from San Diego State come out, and they run a lab at San Diego State, which helps community colleges figure out, number one, where do they stand in terms of looking at issues of equity specifically around men of color on campus, and where can they move forward with supporting those students, so that we can think about closing achievement gaps?

Our president is very supportive and so at our last convocation, he invited Dr. Frank Harris to come and present the data that he had gathered from our campus. We did a campus-wide survey of right at a thousand students, and he shared just a *snippet* of the information. And our faculty were *enthralled*. They were taken aback. They were interested in change. But when it comes time for the institution to support that change, they're absent.

So, for all this talk we have about institutional change and making sure that it's going to be institutionalized on our campus, and we're relying on our coordinators, we're relying on what we call the "choir" of folks who are engaged and dedicated to equitable practices. We don't see that being institutionalized within our district. We don't see that being institutionalized in other places.

And so, the need is great. I don't mean to go on some soapbox political rant here, but we've got to start with having the resources available to support the folks who are coming to the table saying, "I didn't even realize that this was something I was doing which maintained achievement gaps." It didn't break them down, it maintain them, so how can I move forward? And we're doing the best we can, and I think we're making some good headway, but the state and our district and the regions that we have within our state have to put their money where their mouth is for us to *truly* move forward in institutionalizing equitable practices, and having faculty who are given *ample* opportunity to be trained to make the difference in the lives of students who so desperately need it. That's what we're here for, so we need to make sure that happens.

Mara Lazda:

And, if I could add; this is Mara—I absolutely agree. You do need this kind of financial support because that also communicates with administration and structure more broadly values that faculty are interested and take the time to do those kind of professional development. So what I would want to add and go one step further, it also means rethinking how faculty are evaluated, as they say, for tenure, for reappointment, and recognize that developing cultural responsive curriculum, that taking the time for this kind of rethinking of pedagogy should also be valued.

Recognizing that is a form of publication, of scholarship, of advancing one's profession, and that needs to be recognized more broadly as contributing to the college, contributing to one's profession.

Tiffany Gause:

I couldn't agree more, and I just want to jump in and say that if we're thinking about equity at the institutional level, then we *absolutely* have to be thinking about the ways in which faculty are being treated equitably and seen equitably, as well, by administration, by legislators; that if we're only thinking about closing achievement gaps for students within higher education, then we're going to maintain and keep seeing a gap in who is hired within academia, and why those folks maintain those positions and we don't see the diversity of hiring that needs to happen. And this is an integral, *super*-important piece of the puzzle of closing achievement gaps and promoting equity for our students, specifically racial equity in the state of California. Specifically at my institution, this is where we see those achievement gaps the largest.

Grisel Acosta:

Yeah, I have to jump in here because I completely agree with Dr. Lazda, Dr. Gause. A colleague, Dr. Monique Guishard, said it best. How can folks who say that they care about our students who are primarily students of color actually mean it when they don't want to hire faculty of color? You have to have it from

the top down. So if you only see fully tenured, full professors who are entirely white, and then all assistant professors who eventually leave to go to other places are the faculty of color, or the majority of faculty are only adjunct faculty who can't even afford what one needs to live in New York, then you certainly cannot promote racial equity in the classroom when you're not already practicing yourself. So, I really appreciate everything that Mara and Tiffany have already said.

Host AJ Welton:

Thank you. I was going to ask a follow-up question about how you do systemic change, and you've already referenced some samples beyond just *you* going alone and doing this work in terms of culturally responsive practices in the classroom, but how do you encourage others throughout the institution? Is there any other thoughts or recommendations that you'd like to add in terms of thinking about racial equity and culturally responsive practices more systemically in institutionalizing this work?

Grisel Acosta:

Yeah. One of the things that we did with the task forces at BCC that I was mentioning earlier in the podcast is that we did create a permanent committee under the senate that runs BCC in terms of what gets funding and so forth. We created a permanent diversity committee. It's still had to go through a couple of other steps, but someone from every faculty department is going to be on there. There's going to be student representation there and there's going to be the administrative representation, so basically every area of the college is going to be represented on this diversity committee, and they are going to actually be responsible for reporting on different diversity initiatives and *promoting* different diversity initiatives. So I'm hoping that that is one way to institutionalize these changes.

Tiffany Gause:

We have a student success and equity committee. I've been able to make some significant changes to our charge so that we do have more teeth, if you will, on campus that we have ourselves spread out across the campus so that we're involved in more areas, especially in thinking about it seems like a nationwide initiative with guided pathways. We're stepping *very* cautiously in making sure that we're doing this with equity in mind and making sure the decisions we make are going to be beneficial to students.

And doing this also in conjunction with having the professional development committee and trying to think about it with everything that we do with every step that we make, how is this going to *positively* impact students? How is this potentially going to harm students? What are the benefits going to be for student success? And, you know, we're proud to do that work, and we've made, I think, some positive and needed, important changes on our campus. But again, until we have the money to back us up, we aren't going to be able to do and make the changes that we need to make to really close these achievement gaps and give these students the opportunities that they so deserve.

Mara Lazda:

I had one more idea. Something that BCC has done. When we talk about culturally responsive pedagogy, there's often talk about a need to change culture, right, you need to change the culture among the faculty. And about five years ago, BCC revamped its new faculty seminar. That is a seminar that all-new faculty who are hired take all year long, but that also requires resources. It requires money. These faculty receive release time to do it.

But I think that's a space where new faculty are coming to BCC are asked to think very deliberately about their pedagogy and also think about their role in the community and also offer support for their own professional development. So I think the faculty who have gone through that program have more quickly think about integrating all these various aspects and all these great components of professional development, scholarship, and teaching, and really in a more student-centered way than perhaps has been the case before having this kind of opportunity and forum.

Host AJ Welton:

Thank you. Well, our last question relates to college and career pathways. Here in the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, we've been trying to embed racial equity discussions about racial equity and cultural responsiveness into the guided pathways framework. And so our last question for you is why and how are culturally response pedagogical practices important to promoting racial equity, especially in terms of fostering and guiding student college and career pathways?

Grisel Acosta:

I feel like culturally responsive pedagogical practices take shape in so many different ways in each of our students that we often don't even see because we don't see them after they graduate. However, what I can say, what I have seen with some students is that if they feel that they are represented on their campus, and if they feel that they had seen possible options for them in the work that they're studying; if they can see themselves in that world, the world of ecology, the world of psychology, whatever it is that they are studying, then they feel more confident to move on after college and do whatever internship they need to do.

If we have culturally responsive practices that, for example, connect them with organizations that *want* people of color to contribute and participate and grow the institutions. We have many students who participate in a variety of different environmental internships. We have, one section of CC is ecologically minded. They have a garden and they connect students with different community gardens throughout the city and so forth. And a lot of the leaders that do these works are people of color. So the students can actually see this path. They can talk to other leaders of color and see what steps they have to take. It's doable. If they can see it, they can do it.

But I think another thing is not only understanding your own role in the world, but it's also respecting the roles that other people from other racial groups and ethnicities have around you in the classroom, as well. So I think that it's not only

seeing their own path but also seeing the path of other racial groups, the possible paths, possible histories and so forth.

Mara Lazda:

Yeah, I mean, I love this point that Dr. Acosta's making about not just seeing themselves but seeing others. And I think one of the struggles I have with this culturally responsive pedagogy is that, in some ways, you know, that might promote racial equity, but we recognize that the professional and academic world that they're entering still has many, many challenges. I think what culturally responsible pedagogy can do, though, is help navigate in understanding. So, you know, it's both understanding yourself, seeing yourself, and seeing others as a way to be able to navigate the next step. And I think that's how we may help them in advising them and trying to guide them in their academic and career pathways.

Tiffany Gause:

I think it really is at square one for me in terms of students being successful that if we aren't creating classroom opportunities, if we aren't developing classes in general, in which students are given the tools they need to succeed, in which we're meeting students where they are to help them move forward, wherever it is they want to go—be it a transfer degree, be it, again, just a couple of classes or a terminal associate's degree—that we're there to meet them where they are and help them get where they want to go.

But until we're *truly* supporting this institutionally, then this movement toward guided pathways, or whatever it is that we're going to be engaging in as campuses in the state, is really going to be challenging because we haven't given the students that opportunity to be successful on the initial level. And I agree with what's been said by our comrades previously that we've got to create these situations where students are able to be *themselves* culturally responsive and see themselves and see others in various walks of life in terms of professional work, in terms of community work, in terms of personal development work; that they've got to be given that skillset and be given those opportunities to have that diverse reflection become now a part of their own toolkit.

So until we are fostering and institutionally supporting at that base level when they walk in our classroom in August, and starting developing these classes and myself and my colleagues having that toolset to make sure they're successful at just that initial level of each class they're taking, that moving toward their career path is really something that we can't say we're genuinely supporting unless we're doing this. So I feel like it's that critical work that we need to be doing to then say, "Well, now we're creating an opportunity to help students get where they want to go professionally."

Mara Lazda:

And I also, this has also been mentioned earlier, but I think it also underscores the need for integrating experiential learning and internships. So we're helping also bridge, helping students practice the culturally responsive techniques and approaches, you know, not just smiling or creating those opportunities on campus but also helping them bridge and practice that outside the campus.

Host AJ Welton: Your specific examples have given me some ideas of how I can take it back to my own area that I coordinate and think of some ways where I can be more collaborative and not feel like I'm alone doing this work. So I truly, truly, truly do appreciate the great, powerful examples that you've shared. It's really meant a lot.

Grisel Acosta: Definitely.

Tiffany Gause: Most definitely. Most definitely.

Host Krystal Andrews: We would like to thank the panelists for telling their stories and engaging us in such a rich discussion about culturally responsive pedagogical practices in racial equity. The panelists shared how their work as faculty is rooted in helping racially minoritized students understand and reclaim their history through curriculum and pedagogy inside and outside the classroom that connects to their students' lives and to the roles they play in the community.

The panelists also highlighted the work they are doing in supporting their colleagues, especially faculty, in learning how to be culturally responsive both in the classroom and in their engagement with students. However, professional development is not just one aspect of improving culturally responsive practices amongst faculty. The panelists also emphasized that there must also be a diverse representation of faculty, and community colleges must be committed to hiring and fostering the success of faculty of color.

Also, the panelists shared several pedagogical resources in terms of recommended texts, instructional techniques, assignments, tools, and approaches to their teaching. Even with all the resources the panelists shared, they made a point to emphasize that students should engage with classroom text in any other pedagogical medium—with a critical lens—by questioning whose voice, history, and experience is represented, how it's represented, and whose experience is not. After listening to this episode, we encourage you to explore some of the resources the panelists shared.

Finally, the panelists called on community college leadership across the nation to systemically shift their institutions' norms, practices, as well as investing in promoting racial equity, culturally responsiveness, and asset-based practices so that community college campuses are places where racially minoritized students are able to reclaim their identity.

Thanks for joining us on another episode of Equity Speaks: Culturally Sustaining Stories in Education. Stay tuned for future episodes about culturally sustaining practices in P-20 education.