School, University, and Community Collaboration to Promote Equity through Inclusive Cultural Competence

Tammy Ellis-Robinson
&
Jessica Wayde-Coles
University at Albany
United States

Abstract: In a series of action-research forums university researchers/faculty, school, family, and community stakeholders engaged collaboratively to explore and identify effective practices and ongoing needs related to the development of inclusive cultural competence for pre-service and in-service teachers, and the institutions that develop and employ them. Forum participants discussed plans for future collaborative projects focused on equity and social justice in local schools and community organizations. The collaborative relationships extended beyond the forums to include additional projects focused on equity. Researchers used a qualitative analysis of forum input and

researcher field notes, including deductive category application of codes derived from literature and modeling of intersections of theory and forum output to identify problem areas, analyze themes of best practice, and formulate ideas for future action.
Keywords: equity; intersectionality; collaboration; teacher education; cultural competence

Colaboración entre la escuela, la universidad y la comunidad para promover la equidad a través de la competencia cultural inclusiva

Resumen: En una serie de foros de investigación-acción, investigadores / profesores universitarios, escuelas, familias y partes interesadas de la comunidad participaron en colaboración para explorar e identificar prácticas efectivas y necesidades continuas relacionadas con el desarrollo de la competencia cultural inclusiva para profesores en formación y en servicio, y las instituciones que los desarrollan y emplean. Los participantes del foro discutieron los planes para futuros proyectos de colaboración centrados en la equidad y la justicia social en las escuelas locales y las organizaciones comunitarias. Las relaciones de colaboración se extendieron más allá de los foros para incluir proyectos adicionales enfocados en la equidad. Los investigadores utilizaron un análisis cualitativo de los aportes del foro y las notas de campo del investigador, incluida la aplicación de categorías deductivas de los códigos derivados de la literatura y el modelado de las intersecciones de la teoría y los resultados del foro para identificar áreas problemáticas, analizar temas de mejores prácticas y formular ideas para acciones futuras.
Palabras-clave: equidad; interseccionalidad; colaboración; formación del profesorado; competencia cultural

Colaboração escolar, universitária e comunitária para promover a equidade por meio da competência cultural inclusiva

Resumo: Em uma série de fóruns de pesquisa-ação, pesquisadores / professores universitários, escolas, famílias e partes interessadas da comunidade se engajaram de forma colaborativa para explorar e identificar práticas eficazes e necessidades contínuas relacionadas ao desenvolvimento de competência cultural inclusiva para professores em formação e em serviço, e as instituições que os desenvolvem e empregam. Os participantes do fórum discutiram planos para futuros projetos colaborativos com foco na equidade e justiça social em escolas locais e organizações comunitárias. As relações colaborativas se estenderam além dos fóruns para incluir projetos adicionais com foco em patrimônio. Os pesquisadores usaram uma análise qualitativa da entrada do fórum e notas de campo do pesquisador, incluindo a aplicação de categorias dedutivas de códigos derivados da literatura e modelagem de interseções de teoria e saída do fórum para identificar áreas problemáticas, analisar temas de melhores práticas e formular idéias para ações futuras.
Palavras-chave: equidade; interseccionalidade; colaboração; formação de professores; competência cultural

School, University, and Community Collaboration to Promote Equity through Inclusive Cultural Competence

Critical multicultural global citizenship is an essential outcome of education to promote individual rights and a peaceful and just society (Annamma et al., 2013; Castro, 2014). The proposed outcome is complex to attain, but essential to understand as a framework for social justice and equity in education, especially for students whose membership in multiple categories of marginalization can exacerbate the effect of negative social forces such as racism, xenophobia, ableism, and sexism (Annamma et al, 2013; Irvine, 2012). Inclusive practice can help lead to equitable outcomes for individuals historically underserved by schools. In a climate of varied political views and dissent among people, core values related to civic engagement and interpersonal respect for difference are required for harmony to endure. Educators' role in this development cannot be taken lightly (Castro, 2014). Therefore, the process of preparing pre-service teachers to take their place in the field requires intentional planning and curricula contextualized with authentic understanding of the diverse students and situations they will encounter (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). In the current study, and in alignment with the community, we sought to identify, collect, and refine an understanding of inclusive cultural competence in current practice for the purposes of developing curriculum for pre-service special education teachers. To anchor the process in authentic practice, we, along with key stakeholders in P-12 and teacher education (general and special education teachers, teacher educators, university professionals, administrators, related service providers, parents, community agencies and engaged community members) participated in the project. In a reciprocal process of discussion and reflection, stakeholders co-constructed understandings of culturally competent practice. Each forum centered on one of five topics: teacher development, family engagement, community engagement, practical literacy, and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education respectively. The forum series resulted in an agenda for action research as well as broad ideas for the essential components of cultural competence development that should be central to the education of preservice teachers.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the ability to attend responsively to students' needs within the context of a range of social identity factors such as race, religion, ethnicity, language, culture, and ability in cross-cultural settings (Bustamente et al., 2016). Cultural competence is constantly developing and based on a continuum of understanding across contexts depending on the individual's understanding of and experience with diverse groups (Cross et al., 1989). In the current study, the multifaceted and diverse terms and concepts that intersect to address cultural competence included a clear focus on equity and a redressing of sociopolitical marginalization based on multiple factors of identity (Gay, 2013; Gorski, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Several theoretical frameworks were explored and synthesized in the process of authenticating content for educators including multicultural education (Banks, 1993) culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013; Nieto, 2012), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), equity literacy (Gorski, 2013) and Dis/Crit (Annamma et al., 2013).

Multi-cultural education is an approach to teaching that addresses all cultures and creates space for all students to learn about social justice and equity (Banks, 1993). In that context, culturally relevant teaching focuses on how students and educators' perceptions of their culture and the majority culture can affect student success (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014). According to culturally relevant teaching, educators provide curriculum, and educational experiences that are relevant to the student's culture and identities (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Cultural responsiveness is a similar construct

and requires action on the part of the educator (Gay, 2000). Nieto (2012) shares a broader perspective and deems culturally responsive pedagogy as a mindset that honors students' cultures, experiences and histories. Cultural sustainability requires educators to create and foster educational environments where students can thrive, flourish and maintain their cultural identities (Paris, 2012). Gorski's (2013) Equity Literacy framework similarly requires focusing on the effects of poverty, and calling for the development of skills to respond to inequity. Within Gorski's framework, the idea of equity envelopes the various categories of marginalization, while poverty is addressed as a crosscutting concern. In the forums, participants explored intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) through Dis/Crit theory, which combines disability studies, and critical race theory (Annamma et al., 2013). Dis/Crit theorists share tenets to combat the exacerbating effects of ableism and racism in the lives of people whose identities place them in both or multiple categories (Annamma et al., 2016). Synthesis of these theoretical perspectives, helped frame how to develop contextualized cultural competence in our pre-service teachers and in-service educators throughout the project.

In an examination of definitions of culture and culturally responsive pedagogy in special education, Thorius et al. (2018) described a three-pronged interdisciplinary framework that provides a progressive view of the historical ways of viewing culture. These include an understanding that culture is dynamic and intersectional, that the status quo of racism and ableism should be confronted, and that disability as a culture should be considered. This approach aligns with recommendations and reflections evident in forum discussions. In order to best serve students and address the opportunity gap between marginalized populations and the dominant cultures of privilege, attention to the holistic strengths and needs of each child, including their race, ability, ethnicity, and other categories of identity, must be central to educational planning (Gorski, 2013; Paris, 2012). Embracing Yosso's (2005) framing of community cultural wealth, an asset focused view foregrounds the voices of communities of color and the funds of capital they provide. Through such a lens, the array of perspectives center on the potential of education to liberate through inclusive opportunity. An inclusive stance recognizes intersectional identities.

Intersectionality: Cross-Categorical Concerns

Shifts in education demographics, a larger percentage of minoritized individuals, have heightened the need to address the intersectional reality of many students with disabilities served in P-12 schools (U.S. Department of Education 2015). An intersectional focus of multiple socially marginalized groups allows for a more effective and comprehensive examination of educational practice including dissecting the relationship between oppression and privilege (Ferber et al., 2007; Hill Collins, 1990). To provide a concrete understanding of the levels and components of identity that comprise marginalized categories of identity, we must clarify terms and descriptions of oppressed and privileged groups, (Hill Collins, 1990). In our project, we examined a variety of theories juxtaposed with forum participants' experiences to synthesize a theory of best practices in schools and community settings. An initial focus in our effort required examining the markers of oppression in institutions, among these, manifestations of disproportionality, inaccuracies and confusion in assessment and service at the intersection of linguistic diversity and disability, and categories and understanding of a culture of disability.

An ongoing and persistent concern at the intersection of disability and other social identity factors, including racial and ethnic identities, is disproportionality. First, there has been a tendency to over-identify Black and Brown students in stigmatizing categories of disability such as emotional and behaviorally disordered and intellectual disability (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). This identification may be somewhat attributable to environmental inequities that disproportionally affect these students. Second, there is a disproportional tendency to apply harsher school discipline to students who are African- American, Latino, and Native American (Kourea et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2011).

Third, there is a disproportional tendency to under-identify Black and Brown students in the gifted category (Grisom & Redding, 2016). Finally, there are disproportionately fewer teachers representing the same identities as many students in schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This phenomenon exists despite research that indicates positive outcomes when there is at least one culturally matched teacher in a child's career (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Egalite & Kisida, 2017). These various manifestations of disproportionality are persistent examples of inequity in the education of students at the intersection of race, ethnicity, poverty, and disability (Voulgarides et al., 2017). Linguistic diversity is a related intersection whereby institutionalized oppression can affect outcomes and experiences.

Students who are learning a new language, and identify with a disability present another intersectional concern. For some, the assessment of their needs for special education services as compared to language learning needs may be inappropriate or inadequate to identify appropriate placement and needed supports. There may be an inappropriate determination that a student is in need of special education services based on factors related to learning a new language. For others, it may mean making or confusing disabilities with language learning needs (Hamayan et al., 2013).

Finally, there is some debate regarding the identification of a culture of disability (Thorius et al., 2018). On the one hand, there are those who identify as disabled based on factors such as group identity, a shared history of oppression, a bond of resilience, and related artifacts (Brown, 2002). On the other hand, the idea of a shared history of oppression as a definer of culture has led to some identified with disabilities to reject that category as a cultural identity marker (Eddey & Robbey, 2005). Whether disability or subcategories of disability (deaf culture) identify as a cultural identity, there is no denying that disability as a category of social marginalization is salient in conversations regarding equity and inclusivity in the promotion of full participation in society (Thorius et al., 2018).

Each of these manifestations of intersectional concerns became topics of discussion and dissection in forum conversations of identity, cultural competence, and equity in schooling. In response, our action focus led to considering ways to address concerns within institutions and through teacher preparation.

Need for Cultural Responsiveness in Teacher Preparation

Regardless of how intersecting identities are self-identified, the effect of culture on educational processes is central to conversations regarding educational equity. Cultural understandings, biases, and blind spots affect learning, school progress, and classroom behavior. The understanding and response of educators is pivotal (Utley et al., 2011), and may affect teachers' effectiveness to work with students from a variety of diverse social groups and cultural and linguistic identities (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Redressing the oppressive normalization of White, middle, and high socioeconomic status as the central focus of educational culture, the curriculum offered to preservice teachers must address gaps in cultural repertoires. Integrating an understanding of community cultural wealth as a construct for study and interpretation of family and community participation will provide an equity paradigm for educators (Yosso, 2005). Teacher preparation programs must address cultural responsiveness in their curriculum and experiences provided to pre-service teachers to promote social justice in schools and through schooling. Research has indicated some effective approaches to this process.

After reviewing culturally responsive teaching practices, Aceves and Orosco (2014) examined studies of a number of evidence-based practices in work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Their findings reveal teaching practices that should be connected explicitly to the relevant experiences of students within culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Themes of culturally responsive teaching included instructional engagement, culture, language and racial

identity, multicultural awareness, high expectations, and critical thinking. Each of these corresponded with emerging practices such as collaborative teaching, responsive feedback, modeling, and instructional scaffolding. The goal, then, is to address academic success simultaneous with maintenance of cultural identity through culturally sustaining pedagogy and a process of enculturation whereby students become knowledgeable of their own cultural histories and identity in environments that attend to engagement and learning (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Paris, 2012).

Further, in a case study of preservice teachers, Castro (2014) identified the development of culturally relevant pedagogy through examination of the reflections of citizenship education for pre-service teachers in a series of interviews with four preservice teachers who identified as nonwhite. They found that preparation and education related to culturally responsive practice, affected preservice teachers' approach, but served to validate rather than change their beliefs. Their experiences prior to teacher education had shaped their tendency toward attitudes of social justice. Implying a need in teacher education to tap into pre-existing notions and attitudes in preparation programs in order to develop culturally responsive practice.

In a study of a process of reflection related to cultural competence and a scale of cultural intelligence, Kennedy (2016) examined the development in pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers used a reflective scale to assess their cultural intelligence and reflective writing in teacher preparation as a means to promote readiness to learning about the cultural components of teaching. Scales such as this provide a helpful context to consider a general view of cultural understanding, highlighting the need for self-assessment and reflection. In our examination, the contextualized nature of the relevance of culture within the educational process led us and other stakeholders to consider applications within the sites and settings where preservice teachers would experience their applied practice. An awareness of the applicability of the practices to classroom interactions was important for maximum benefit from more generalized training related to culture. In the current study we sought authentication of culturally competent practice within the context of organizations, schools, and communities where preservice teachers and in service teachers live and work to provide relevance in immediate practice.

Building Knowledge

In an examination of Common Core practices relating specifically to culturally responsive pedagogy, Sprott (2014) identified concrete recommendations for developing the predominantly White teacher workforce to meet the needs of a racially and ethnically diverse student body. In her examination of the Common Core standards, she highlighted that despite years of recommendations and evidence in support of culturally responsive practice to empower students to be college and career ready; the standards made no mention of this important pedagogy for equity in outcomes. To identify practices needed to prepare teachers, she completed a Delphi study to seek the consensus of experts and scholars in the area of culturally responsive practice to identify key practices for educators. Within the educational framework, Sprott (2014) suggested core culturally competent practices for educators: self-awareness, an exhibition of cultural skills, high expectations, cross-cultural knowledge, and a valuing of diversity. This manner of anchoring recommendations for practice in a collaborative effort to build knowledge by seeking the input and agreement of a number of experts served as a near model for the current study. We sought a wide range of stakeholders in practice to define our terms and authenticate recommendations for practice and action toward social justice in the preparation of our pre-service teachers and in the methods; they learn to employ in classrooms. Through our collaborative action research, we have integrated those experiences with a range of related theoretical perspectives to build consensus around best practice.

Project Overview

We initiated a series of interactive forums for discussion and exploration of key issues in the development of cultural competence and the evaluation of efforts to promote cultural competence in settings such as schools and community organizations. We focused the examination of equitable practice through a lens that was purposefully inclusive and simultaneously, specific, and descriptive. That is, in the effort to include everyone, we avoided catch phrases like "all" and "everyone". To see and honor the specificity of identities to include race, ethnicity, language, ability, religion, gender, and other categories, we explicitly named them. Together with community stakeholders, we worked to establish a core value set, identify problems for study, and discuss solutions in the context of practice and experience. This process aligns with an epidemiological shift in which practitioner theory and authentic problem identification are important sources of research questions (McNiff, 2013). The embodiment of a positive shift to collaborative approaches in education is evident in action research that begins with broad perspectives and a synergy to focus on actionable issues. In our study, though initial questions and motivations to participate varied, the collaborative discussion and application of theory to practice ensured that broad values and authentic needs engaged all stakeholders. The following research questions were central to the project.

(1) What is the role of special education teachers in the development of critical multicultural citizenship for their students (defining culture broadly to include multiple components of identity)?

(2) What information, skills, and understandings are necessary for preservice teachers to be prepared to provide effective educational experiences to students whose identities include intersections of disability and other marginalized social groups and those whose experiences represent dominant culture and social strata?

(3) How are schools addressing the needs of students and families as they relate to diversity and concerns for marginalizing factors of identity?

(4) How can we build toward broad goals working with and across fields and areas of expertise?

In a collaborative and interactive series of discussions, participant/stakeholders identified key themes and ideas to address each research question in the context of the five forum themes.

Method

The action research model included stakeholder voices and community knowledge building (Freire, 2003). Action research includes socially developed knowledge (Wenger, 1998), positioning research in a practical realm with input from stakeholders and learning as an outcome for practitioner and partner (McNiff, 2013).

Researchers' Positionality

The first author is also a faculty member in the pre-service special education and literacy masters' program at the local university. She identifies as Black, English-speaking without a disability and worked at a local urban high school as a special education teacher prior to working at the university. Motivated by a desire to improve her work with pre-service teachers, she initiated the project. The second author is a graduate student and identifies as Black, English-speaking without a disability. She worked in a local suburban elementary school as a special education teacher for a self-contained classroom. She sought to bring a focus on cultural competence to her own teaching and to the current students.

Participants/ Stakeholders

Participants, stakeholders in the educational process, included professionals, teachers, administrators from public and charter schools, community agencies for individuals with disabilities, business owners, university professors and students, and parents. We circulated invitations to attend forums and participate in an action research project throughout the university, and to schools and organizations that serve diverse individuals with and without disabilities in the communities in and around the university. Many of the participating school districts host student teaching and internships for pre-service special education teachers trained by the university faculty. These included rural, suburban, and urban schools and community agencies serving people with disabilities, and individuals representing other categories of social marginalization. Participants self-selected as stakeholders in the education of pre-service special education teachers. The university Institutional Review Board approved the collaborative data-gathering plan within the forums. We removed identifying information from written data and used generalized role descriptions in notes to discuss individual contributions to the conversations. The evolutionary nature of the project in progress resulted in some shift in forum participants in both number and configuration, however the range of represented organizations and types of organizations were comparable each time. Table 1 shows the number of participants, in addition to the researchers, at each forum and their affiliations.

Table 1

Forum Participants and Affiliations

FORUM	*N*=number of participants	Educational affiliations
One	15	Special Education Administrator, Asst. Supt. For Curriculum, Principal, ENL Dept. Chair, Literacy Professor, Student Services, Teachers Urban, suburban, private and Charter schools. , Academic Administrator, Community Disability Council member
Two	13	Teachers, University graduate students, Community member, School teacher self-contained classroom, family member of person with severe disability, Disability Council
Three	13	Public school teachers, administrator, community member, university faculty, Graduate students
Four	7	Teacher, paraprofessional, Community agency professional, family engagement officer, university faculty, graduate students
Five	8	Teacher (urban and suburban districts), business owner, community agency professional, paraprofessional, community activist, administrator (suburban district), university faculty, family engagement officer

Note. This table lists the number and affiliations of participants at each forum.

Design

Stakeholders gathered for five 2.5-hour interactive forums. We led discussions of a variety of theories to define cultural competence and the focus of each subsequent forum, and engaged stakeholders in discussions, shared writing, and individual reflections. Together we identified success stories and needs in the areas of cross-categorical or inclusive cultural competence in schools and classrooms, addressing theoretical ideas, while highlighting professional and personal applied experiences. The dialogic and participatory nature of the forums led to conversations that ranged from explanation of theory on the part of the researchers, to sharing of policy and practice by the school officials. Participants shared anecdotes of experience and examples of how schools and teachers honor and support their students representing marginalized groups, including minoritized racial and ethnic identities, ability, and sexual orientation. Together we discussed ongoing needs for the development of equity-focused teaching and practice (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017) and teacher preparation in the context of each of the forum topics. The design represented in figure one included an iterative development of action projects and comprehensive stakeholder theories to answer research questions.

Figure 1

Project Design
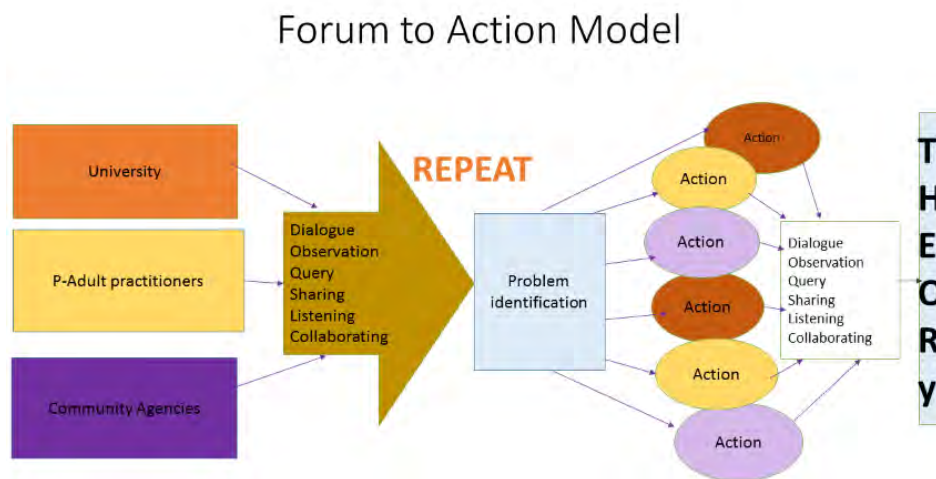
Note. The forum to action model shows the design for action research throughout the forums. Identified are the stakeholders who together, built knowledge and identified problem spaces for action in relation to the research questions.

Data

The residual artifacts for analysis of each forum included written group/joint responses to questions about practice and needs in schools, individual focus question responses within the forum context (see Appendix A for questions), and researcher field notes. The presentations of theory were included among the artifacts. The rich and varied perspectives in the data set provide a comprehensive view of the forum discussions.

Analysis

A qualitative analysis of forum findings, including content analysis of participant input and theoretical and practical frameworks (Mayring, 2014), resulted in useful models highlighting pathways for action, from initiation of equitable practice to institutionalization of ideals for equity in the educational process (Fullan, 1985). Ongoing plans for school, university, and community collaborations included a wide range of ideas from future focused meetings for collaboration to school program plans, to adjustments to curriculum for pre-service teachers. Content Analysis of forum conversations and reflections included the examination of prearranged questions and content including theory, research, and experiences, and the newly created stakeholder observations and brainstorms developed collaboratively at each forum (Krippendorf, 1980; McNiff, 2013). We analyzed field notes and participant responses for themes and built interpretive models of forum content. To identify areas for development and focus in the curriculum for preservice teachers, we calculated frequencies of identified practices based on written responses created at each forum. Units of analysis were words and phrases encompassing each idea.

Code Development

Using deductive category application of forum topics and related research, we derived initial codes (Mayring, 2014). After applying codes to stakeholder input and field notes, we revised codes and categories through a process of comparative analysis and interpretive modeling. With coder consensus reached through the discussion process and a final code modeling completed while reconsidering earlier code assignments. We created visual models of the relationship between the codes and stakeholder outputs to represent an authentic integration of theory and practice in conceptual models. Analysis models for each forum are included in appendices B-E. Using the individual artifacts, frequencies were calculated to identify first priority areas and consensus of exemplary or approximations of practice and most important concerns (McNiff, 2013). At each forum, we shared previous input with participants/stakeholders to continually revisit and define knowledge.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the data examined addresses the validity of qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) including credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. The participatory nature of action research usually means that those involved see the credibility and even the transferability of the research. Rigor was addressed in the study design which included the use of multiple sources of information and a close connection and comparison of theory to practice (Creswell, 2013; Dick, 1999), along with triangulation of findings based on consensus in discussions with stakeholders from different settings (Creswell, 2013). Subsequent development of actions allowed for member checking of forum conclusions to address the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Findings

Findings show the core values of the collaborative project and problems for examination as identified by stakeholders. These core values centered on equity literacy (Gorski, 2014) and culturally responsive/sustaining practices (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012) in schools with a focus on institutionalizing change to oppressive policy and practice. We integrated identifying problems of focus with contextualized supports throughout the project. Answers to the four research questions

are evident in the findings from each forum with research questions one and two, centered on pre-service teacher development, addressed across all five.

Forum One: Teacher Development

At Forum One, we framed the motivation for the forum series. We presented our focus of seeking contextualized information to prepare pre-service teachers to work in schools and districts in our community. We discussed the idea of flexible preparation to prepare pre-service teachers to engage in social justice in a range of classroom settings in diverse communities. The initial effort brought together stakeholders to identify the questions, examine social and personal identity, and consider definitions of culture and culturally responsive practices within their respective organizations and settings. The time spent exploring personal social identities lent opportunity for forum participants to examine their own complexity and holistic aspects of their identity, while considering how they might connect their experiences and understanding of culture with those of a variety of students they serve. Stakeholders discussed the steps needed and already in practice for initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of practices to promote inclusive cultural competence between and among stakeholders at their respective institutions (Fullan, 1985). The group engaged in self-exploration of identity and considered how particular identity markers may be more and less privileged in work with students (Hill Collins, 1990). Themes for Forum One included definitions of culture, oppression, definitions of cultural competence, and ideas for transformation and empowerment at individual and institutional levels. Forum participants highlighted the urgency to build social justice and advocacy in to the educational system and into work with students. This frame would require action, a deep examination of the nature and manifestation in intersectional identities in schooling, and an understanding of oppression as initial stages of both institutional and individual development of cultural competence. Participants recognized that even as they considered the plans for pre-service teacher curriculum, they were still in the process of working toward the ideals and values of inclusivity that they desired within their organizations. The urgency of the prescription for change characterized discussions of socio-political context and global perspectives among stakeholders as the driving force for action plans.

Many practitioners shared stories of the cultural differences between them and their students including race, ethnicity, and religion. As practitioners examined and shared their own cultural identities, the relevance of personal identities to work with students entered the conversation. Empowerment as a process to engage and address oppression by finding points of similarity with students and defining a frame of social identity emerged as a theme among participants. For example, one principal of an urban elementary school talked about using a common interest in sports to connect with a student. The principal felt points of similarity were the first way to build relationships with students, but he expressed a need to see cultural differences as assets as well. In his school, he encouraged staff and students to highlight and celebrate scholars and authors from a variety of racial, ethnic, and social groups and cultures throughout the school year and throughout the school following a culturally sustaining approach (Paris, 2012). The group identified understanding cultural identity and bridging through relationship building as effective practice to meet the role of guiding the development of multicultural understanding among students.

Other stakeholders referred to district policies to engage teaching professionals in equitable practice in which they honor and build awareness of diverse cultures. One administrator spoke about the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of equitable practice (Fullan, 1985). She identified the difficulty of going from initiation to implementation and examining what it really takes to institutionalize the ideal. She shared efforts made in her district to embed the valuing of culturally responsive pedagogy in the process of hiring teachers. Within the district process, they included an interview question asking about the professionals' approach to working with students who represent

diverse cultures. This she shared as an example of initiating and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. "Institutionalizing these things is harder," she said. Institutionalization of the subsequent practice in the newly hired and past hired teachers would remain an ongoing process. The collective identified the importance of embedding values of equity literacy and cultural responsiveness in the policies and practices at the institutional level, with hiring practices as an example.

Forum Two: Family Engagement

The second forum focused on family engagement and empowerment addressing research question three, how are schools addressing the needs of students and families as they relate to diversity and concerns for marginalizing factors of identity? Based on theory and themes presented in the forums, we collaborated to represent the relationship among the important enriching aspects evident in families and their understanding of how schools and parents can work together. Themes from Forum two data included components of culture and family insights with a focus on storytelling to share cultural knowledge. Participants identified engagement with families as both a chief concern and a best practice. Through a consideration of multiple facets of culture, the funds of knowledge and cultural capital within families was unpacked. Stakeholders identified the need to shift focus and view these as assets and supports within a reframed educational process (Yosso & García, 2007). Within the forums, we introduced the cultural iceberg (Hall, 1976) as an analogy for the levels of culture and the insights of details of lived experience. We shared several You Tube videos of family members including parents, siblings, and caregivers, sharing information about their goals hopes, and concerns for their loved one who identified with a particular social grouping including, a student with a severe disability, African-American parents, and Muslim parents. These representations were helpful forays to start the conversation about practice and experience working with diverse families. Through perspective-taking stakeholders recognized the importance of getting it right. Every child represented a family's treasure.

Stakeholders identified and discussed the importance of understanding and respecting aspects of deep culture (Hammond, 2015) when working with families. They and future teachers should incorporate the insights and community cultural wealth of families to work with students, respecting and embracing the enculturation process to empower, and engage students and families (Yosso, 2005). Based on experiences, stakeholders identified tools, including reflective listening, respecting teachings from a variety of cultures, and perspective taking as best practice in collaborating with families. Stakeholders acknowledged and emphasized that schools should be accountable to respectful and meaningful communication with families. The forum participants concluded that there is a need to clearly define and decide what parents can expect from schools, acknowledging the responsibility that schools have to communicate and engage parent perspectives. Educators highlighted the dynamic nature of culture and enculturation whereby community cultural traditions, networks and values are resources. Family members among stakeholders reminded the group that in communication with parents, stereotypes cannot define the conclusions drawn about families. Rather a spirit of collaboration should pervade.

One teacher remarked that smaller class sizes would be an important way to give teachers more time to get to know family members. Another teacher shared that on the individual level teachers must reflect on implicit bias, or unconscious beliefs and attitudes toward others, where at the institutional level there should be a shared vision of bringing all stakeholders together to create practical approaches to cultural competence. Stakeholders shared concrete practices for working with families that they have found to be effective including sharing stories, letters, calls, building meaningful relationships, theme nights with food, family celebrations and specialized tutoring and programming to address academic concerns. Extending on family funds of knowledge and support, our next forum focused on community connections.

Forum Three. Community Collaboration

Forum Three focused on interaction between schools and community agencies and intersectional cross-categorical cultural competence, addressing research question four, how can we build toward broad goals working with and across fields and areas of expertise? Data themes included the components of collaboration and interprofessional collaboration specifically. In this context, inter-professional collaboration is a process of group formation and communication to address problems, make plans, and share information for the purpose of service delivery and optimum outcomes for students (Bryson et al., 2015; Mamlin, 2012). Components of collaboration discussed: respectful communication, responding to difficult situations, shared problem solving, and proactive planning. Forum stakeholders shared details of the groups they were working with throughout the community and the purposes for those collaborations. These included a list of community agencies that schools, individuals, and university researchers worked with and a sharing of ideas for the stakeholders to pursue in serving students. Stakeholders identified overlapping supports and considered means for addressing concerns for intersectionality across the lifespan in a discussion of equity mindedness (Bensimon, 2007) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) as applied to schools and community agencies simultaneously. Stakeholders reiterated the broad themes presented as theory, as practically important in their work with individuals representing a broad range of social identities in addition to being important in the preparation of preservice special education teachers. Stakeholders assessed the possible interconnected network of collaborations by identifying specific community programs as well as a process of building awareness of wrap around supports for the education process. The greatest consensus of key needs in the process of serving students, whose identities represent intersectional social groups, was in the understanding and integration of contextualized solutions and supports, in other words, knowledge of resources and the means for accessing them. For example, one stakeholder shared an online resource, the Multiple Systems Navigator, which identified and demystified a wider range of wrap around services that can serve individuals who may have difficulty finding resources such as health, education, human services, and disability service throughout the state, in one user-friendly space. The forum participants brainstormed and shared many agencies and organizations to support individuals at the intersections of disability and socially marginalized identities including race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The group identified awareness of resources within and around the community and the means to access supports, set shared goals to pre-service teachers' work with students as best practice. After the broad consideration of family and community collaboration, the next forums focused on specific content areas.

Forum Four: Practical Literacy

The focus of Forum Four was practical literacy and defining equity in the pursuit of literacy proficiency. In the discussion of practical literacy, the group examined a range of definitions for practical literacy. After much discussion, Forum Four stakeholders decided practical literacy is the attainment of the skills in reading and writing necessary for engagement in day- to-day pursuits. Participants emphasized three overarching ideas, the need for practical focus of literacy, the need to use a variety of methods, and the need to leave space for self-determination of literacy outcomes (Nichols et al., 2000). Our discussion emphasized the need for literacy skills to achieve self-determination and outcomes like financial independence, in addition to the general view of literacy as instruction in reading and writing. Stakeholders discussed the power to participate meaningfully in society represented by skill in literacy and the current practice of segregating students from marginalized groups in ways that limit their opportunities for full participation.

One community engagement specialist for an urban elementary school spoke of her view of grade level literacy. "I believe literacy has more to do with people having exposure to text in all forms and building a positive connection." A teacher said, "I believe that it is the student/adult and adult who define their literacy." Each of these emphasize the engagement, and empowerment that self-determinations of literacy learning ought to have. This conversation addressed research questions one and two, highlighting teacher responsibility and information important for teacher cultural competence. Literacy and building proficiency in multiple literacies are two responsibilities that teachers have and that lead to the promotion of multicultural civic participation. This awareness and broad perspective on the import of practical literacy were values to embed in teacher education. At the final forum, we turned the content area discussion to STEM.

Forum Five. Inclusive Cultural Competence and STEM

In Forum Five participants discussed STEM education and students with disabilities and those who are learning English or representative of racially and ethnically diverse social groups, including misconceptions and practices that might be important specific to that curricular focus. Examining the narrow view of methods for achieving the standards for math and science led to participant declarations about practice. Much of the discussion during Forum Five was related to providing creative opportunities for people with varying abilities and from all communities and social groupings to have access to opportunities to build skill and participate more fully in innovative STEM. Ideas ranged from exploring new ways of working with data to equitable access and training with adaptive technologies. The opportunity to engage in post-secondary education and workforce opportunities led stakeholders to share opportunities in the community. They suggested a more flexible credentialing of skill as a possible method to promote more opportunities. Stakeholders identified a tendency to exclude students representing a variety of identities including women, minoritized racial and ethnic identities, and people with disabilities from opportunities in STEM. We discussed preconceptions and stereotypes about a lack of proficiency among these underrepresented groups. In that vein, the discussion highlighted innovation for work with people with disabilities as an obvious fund of knowledge and social capital to promote the importance of STEM. The information and best practices for teachers would include a shared community responsibility to promote and encourage STEM pursuits among those previously underrepresented in a field that offers career opportunities. One participant who teaches on the university faculty said, "Tech gives you a way to diversify teaching perspectives. You can freely access good talks on a variety of topics. We live in a world of distributed knowledge; it's time we teach like it." This quote summarized the sentiment that equity-mindedness requires promoting access and opportunity across content areas and supporting successful outcomes.

Data from each forum resulted in a number of recommendations for pre-service and in-service teacher development as well as for institutional approaches to promote cultural competence. Derived from stakeholder examples and stories, and consideration of theory to reflect on practice, these practices represent contextualized solutions. Table 2 includes a summary from all five forums of best practices recommended by forum participants for pre-service teachers and areas of consideration for policy for represented institutions.

Table 2

Contextualized Solutions from Practice and Experience

Forum Focus	Best Practices/information for Pre-service teachers	Ongoing Policy Focus in Educational Settings
1. Cultural Competence in practical context	-Onboarding with a focus on equity literacy and culturally responsive practice -Understanding identity (self and other) -Relationship building (bridging) -Celebrating diverse racial and ethnic cultures throughout the school year -see assets in cultural differences -Promoting agency and self-regulations among students	-Embedding values of equity literacy and cultural responsiveness -Adjusting professional development -Adjusting hiring policies
2. Family Engagement	-Consider family insights and funds of knowledge/cultural capital -Engage in storytelling -Perspective taking -Reflective listening -Theme Nights -Multiple communication methods -Building relationships with families -Confront implicit biases	-Clarity of accountability to parents -Clarity of expectations of parents -Communicate and engage parent perspectives -Smaller class sizes
3. Community Collaboration	-Respectful communication -Responding to difficult situations -Shared problem solving and goal setting -Proactive planning -Build awareness of wrap around supports	-Shared problem solving -Proactive planning -Shared details of wrap around supports
4. Practical Literacy	-Practical focus of literacy, -Use a variety of methods, -Leave space for self-determination of literacy outcomes -Appreciate the power of literacy to promote agency	-Flexible curricula -Practical focus connected to civic participation
5. STEM	-Understand adaptive technologies -Encourage innovation and STEM exploration -Promoting diversity in STEM participation	-Create more creative opportunities for diverse STEM participation -Flexible credentialing -Embrace innovation in STEM -Knowledge distribution

Discussion

From forum to forum, momentum built as stakeholders reflected on theory, returned to their respective settings and reflected on conversations and collaborative thought from forums. In general, both researchers and stakeholders shifted toward a broader discussion of equity and ways to address each group with an emphasis on asset-based ideology (Paris, 2012; Yosso, 2005) and institutional change (Fullan 1985). The research questions applied across forum discussions frame our discussion. Question (1), what is the role of special education teachers in the development of critical multicultural citizenship for their students (defining culture broadly to include multiple components of identity)? In accordance with the model of action research, stakeholders emphasized the importance of dynamic and contextualized understandings of individual's cultures and identity, and their impact at the intersections between them. Stakeholders felt that the development of critical global multicultural citizens (Castro, 2014) was within the purview of teachers and other education professionals. This responsibility is of utmost importance for students from socially marginalized groups as well as those whose identities represent dominant culture.

Question (2), what information, skills, and understandings are necessary for preservice teachers to be prepared to provide effective educational experiences to students whose identities include intersections of disability and other marginalized social groups, and those whose experiences represent dominant culture and social strata? Stakeholders made plans for ongoing integration and working with coworkers and other professionals in addition to preservice teachers, to extend discussions of effective practice for equitable outcomes. They shared best practices and then self-assessed the need to hone those practices suggested for pre-service teacher education within their institutions with existing personnel and to inform policy as well. Stakeholders embraced the creation of environments where students could thrive while maintaining their cultural identities(Paris, 2012) through educator attention to self-awareness, cultural skills and knowledge, and valuing of diversity (Sprott, 2014). Emphasis on high expectations and effective teaching (Aceves & Orocos, 2014; Sprott, 2014) as well as centering diverse identities for culturally responsive practice (Ladson-Billings, 2014) characterized recommendations.

Question three, how are schools addressing the needs of students and families as they relate to diversity and concerns for marginalizing factors of identity? Stakeholders from schools and organizations in the community surrounding the university shared details of methods they used to address needs related to family engagement. Several of the urban districts employed family engagement professionals who reach out to interact with parents and provide programs. They advised the building of relationships with families through respectful communication and meaningful interaction preferring an asset-focused lens.

Taken together, practices recommended at each forum represented many collaborative efforts that included respect for students and families and honoring and valuing of strengths (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & García, 2007; Paris, 2012). The need to recognize differences in experience and the effects that discrimination and historical inequities have had on students' success and families' perspectives. Professionals in the field talked about differences in settings, but a universal need for students across social groupings to understand their own identities and culture, and appreciate and see the value in others. There is a need across settings to share knowledge of culturally responsive practice and promote institutionalized values that represent a desire for equity and social justice

Finally, question four, how can we build toward broad goals working with and across fields and areas of expertise? Collaborative work across institutions and agencies is a complex prospect. The forums provided a natural space and mechanism for this kind of work. The momentum and expanding frame to contextualize practice served as a means for continual knowledge building

(Freire, 2003) among stakeholders through the exploration of varied focus topics. The work undoubtedly shaped questions and follow-up projects among us as researchers, schools, and community organizations, resulting in ongoing extensions of the work. As a direct result of the Cultural Competence Forum Series, several projects and ongoing collaborations have continued, including projects with the pre-service teacher education programs and partner schools, within participating schools, and through collaboration with the university, k-12 schools, community organizations, parents, and educators. The process of seeking community and stakeholder input from applied practice sites used by preservice teacher candidates enrolled in the university has extended the connection and engagement in authentic preparation of university students. The process and knowledge provides a context for firmly grounding pre-service teachers in current practice. The partnership between and among educators, community service providers, university faculty, and community members represents an authentic knowledge building context to develop theory and practice. Comparative analysis of theoretical constructs to define work in light of the intersectional needs and development of cultural competence among teachers highlights not only the connection of theory to practice, but also some of the contradictions between authentic and ideal practices. Navigating and maintaining our goal of guiding students to embrace the ideals of culturally responsive and equitable practice through understanding, sharing, and addressing real world application and possible problems or approximations of ideals. Much as Sprott (2014) sought to authenticate recommendations for practice, the forums provided an opportunity to build knowledge to develop culturally responsive pedagogy anchored in real communities and schools that could be shared with pre-service teachers throughout their preparation.

Limitations

Limitations in this project have included a relatively small number of active stakeholders at each forum and some attrition of attendees between forums, requiring revisiting of major themes and re-examinations of conclusions from forum to forum. However, this process was beneficial for our reflective examination of the effective practices at play. Additionally, the co-constructed knowledge between researchers and other stakeholders meant that distinctions between new knowledge and the acquiring of new theoretical understandings were not always clear. In action research, however, knowledge building is reciprocal between and among actors. This process means that ongoing projects were developed in light of the forums. P-12 students did not participate in the forum discussions. Further gatherings to engage those stakeholder voices is an important future focus. Additionally, more people with disabilities should be included in the discussion for full representation in the project.

Conclusion

The forums have led to an ongoing collaboration and conversation among and between the stakeholders at each forum, and a growing network of colleagues and additional stakeholders. This has led to the development of several actions derived from the initial set of forums. Actions include an annual Equity in Transition Summit for many more stakeholders in the process as well as the establishment of a Facebook page and Listserv to encourage ongoing collaboration in the provision of equitable practice. Other ongoing actions include professional development for supervisors of preservice teachers, professional development in action research and cultural competence, an online book discussion, a middle school case study and action research project, collaborative planning, a survey of special educators perceptions of self-efficacy for intersectional issues, revisions of pre-

service teacher curricular focus, and additional forums. The forums have provided an opportunity to build momentum in a collaborative community across institutions and anchored in the local community. Follow up forums have included brainstorming of new initiatives and ideas for further development with innovations for inclusive equitable practice in mind. Several of the participating districts initiated policies to enact explorations and conversations like those in the forums within their institutions. Through collaboration, action, and with an eye toward social justice collaborative efforts can promote equity in practice among teachers and within institutional policy.

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Appendix A

Forum 2-5 Focus Questions

Forum 2

Identify key methods for supporting families from a variety of cultural backgrounds effectively as natural supports for students with and without disabilities.

Identify ongoing needs for development of communication and collaborative practices with families of students with consideration of culture and diverse needs.

Identify practical goals for continued development of cultural competence at the individual and institutional level.

What does your school do to engage families	What has the response been from families, teachers, administration, and community?	What more is needed to make sure our focus aligns?

Forum 3

Identify community supports/collaborations to promote desired student outcomes including consideration of cultural and diverse needs.

Explore and examine features of collaborative relationships with community agencies, organizations, and families in contextualized and theoretical examples.

Identify role identities and necessary networks of stakeholder responsibility and overlapping task/activities.

Forum 4

How can culturally responsive pedagogy for literacy instruction promote equity in outcomes for diverse groups of students including student who are English Language learners, students with disabilities and students representing a range of cultural backgrounds and marginalized groups?

What is practical literacy and who defines expectations?

How is literacy addressed for students cross-categorically?

Apply contemporary theoretical frameworks rooted in culture and disability to the modern structure of the 21st century classroom.

Forum 5

How can and do we promote learning science, math and technology for students whose cross-categorical identities include intersections of identity such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, ableness, etc.?

How can/should we use science and technology as equity making tools in the pursuit of educational and life opportunities for marginalized students?

What are the next steps and possibilities for future collaborations?

Appendix B

Figure 2

Forum One Teacher Development Data Analysis Model
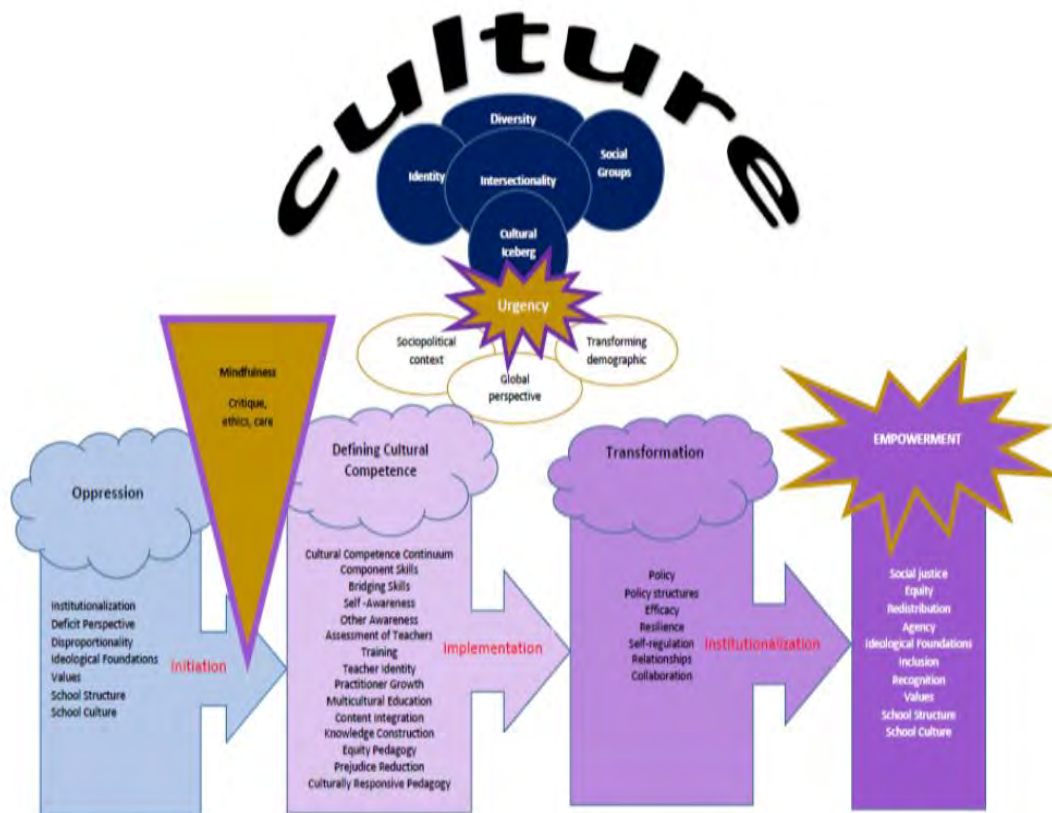
Figure 2 is an interpretive graphic representation of the themes derived from the literature in the process of deductive category application and forum discussions, used to categorize stakeholder identification of practices and problem spaces in their respective settings. We modeled the interconnections of themes from the literature and stakeholder input through a process of constant collaborative configuration using notes and participants brainstorm regarding practice as guidance. (Annamma et al., 2013; Banks, 2000; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Fullan, 1985; Freire, 2003; Gay, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2014 Souto-Manning & Winn, 2017)

Appendix C

Figure 3

Forum Two: Family Engagement Data Analysis Model
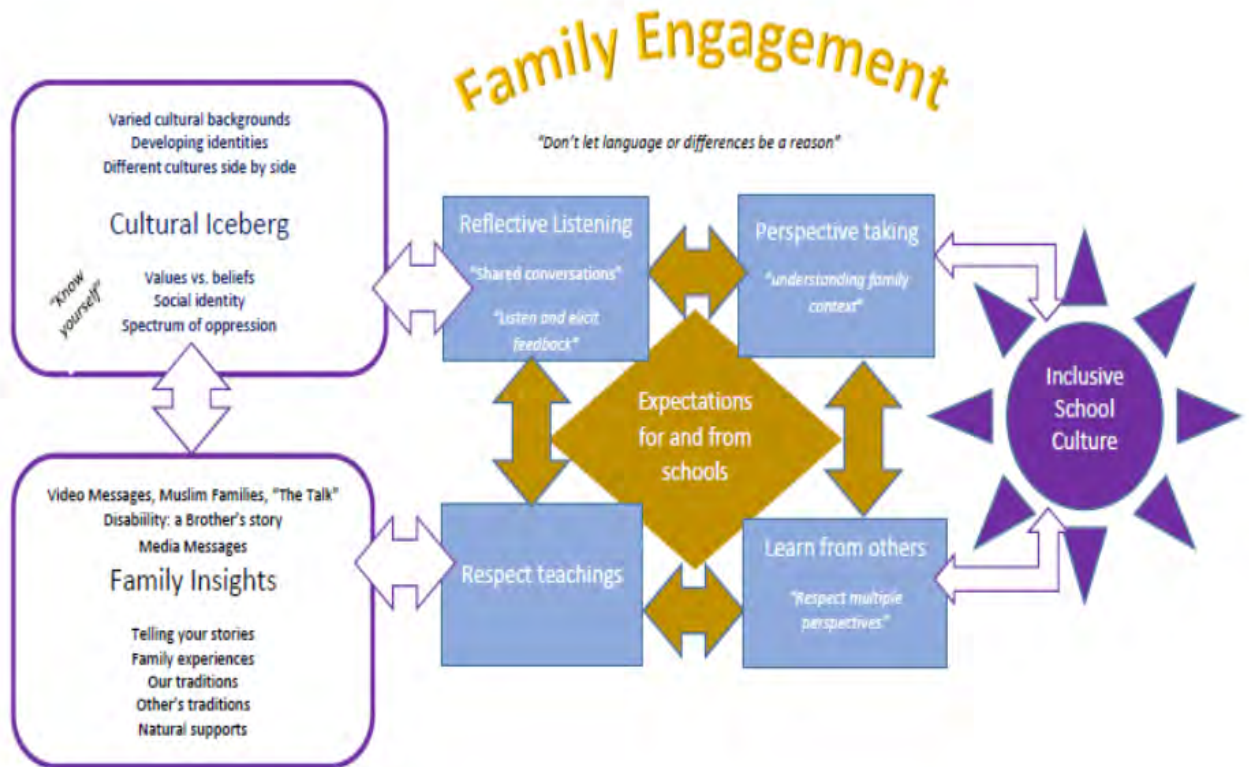
Figure 3 represents the themes derived from the literature in the process of deductive category application, integrated, and applied to stakeholder responses. Forum discussion of cultural competence and intersectional concerns when working with families and caregivers in schools and communities are included. (Frederico & Whiteside, 2015; Hall, 1976; Hill Collins, 1990).

Appendix D

Figure 5

Forum Three: Community Collaboration Data Analysis Model
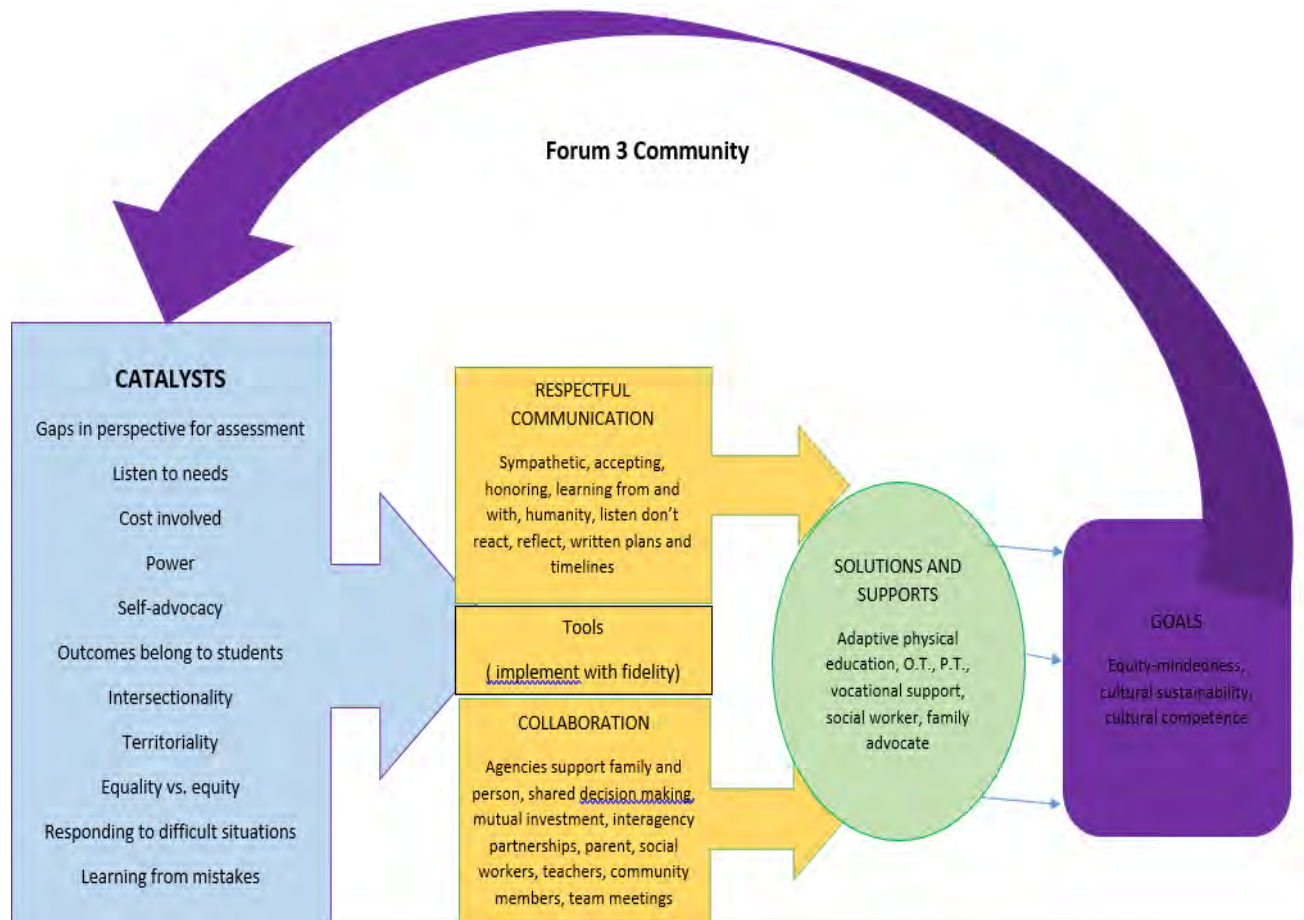
Figure 5 represents an integration of stakeholder reflections and comments and codes evident in theory and practice to create a conceptual model of the findings within this forum. (Annamma et al., 2013; Bensimon, 2007, Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Appendix E

Figure 7

Forum Four: Practical Literacy Data Analysis Model
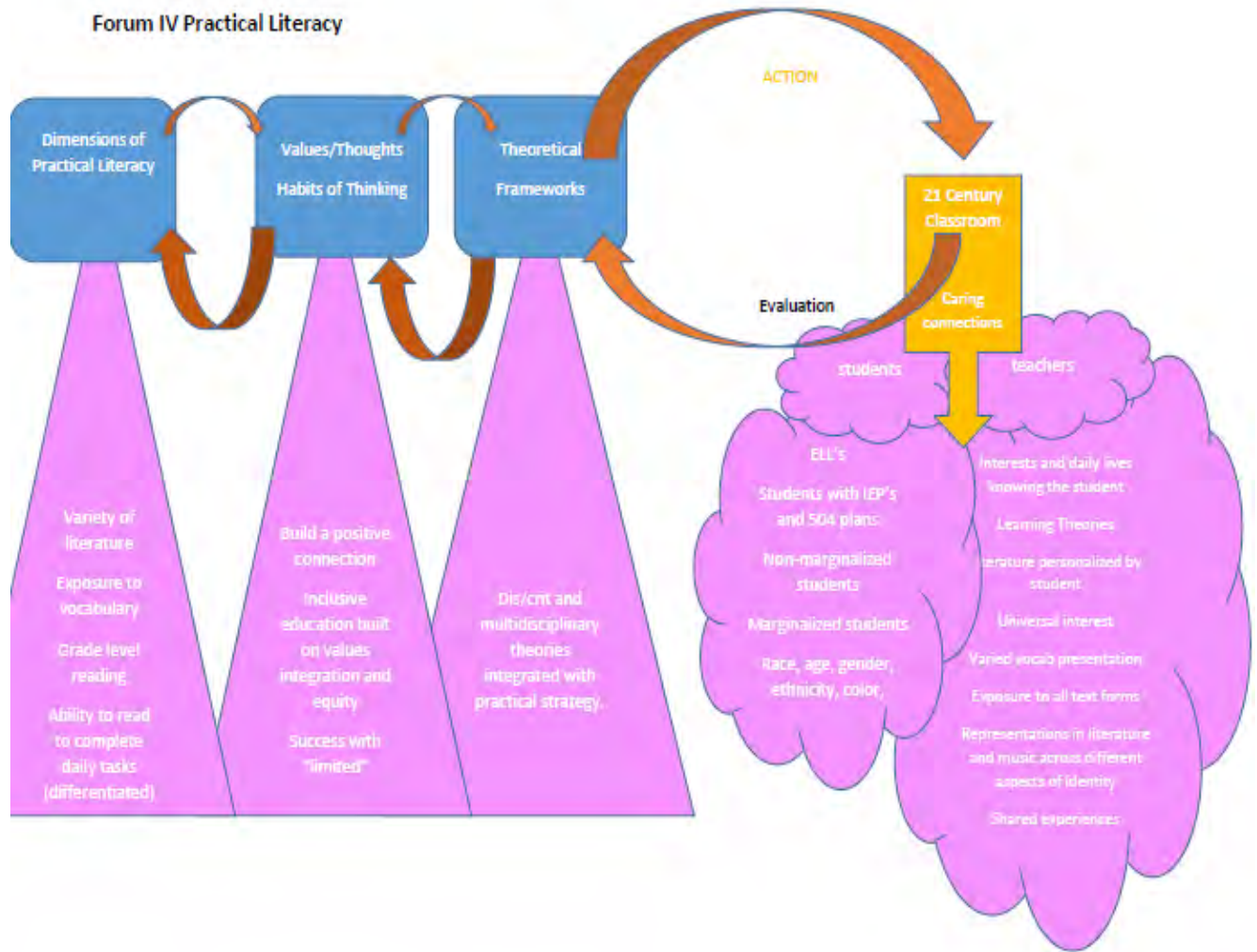
Figure 7 represents the connection between codes derived from theories related to equity and literacy practices field notes, and the input of stakeholders throughout the discussion of practical literacy (Annamma et al., 2013).

Appendix F

Figure 9

Forum Five: Inclusive Cultural Competence and STEM Data Analysis Model
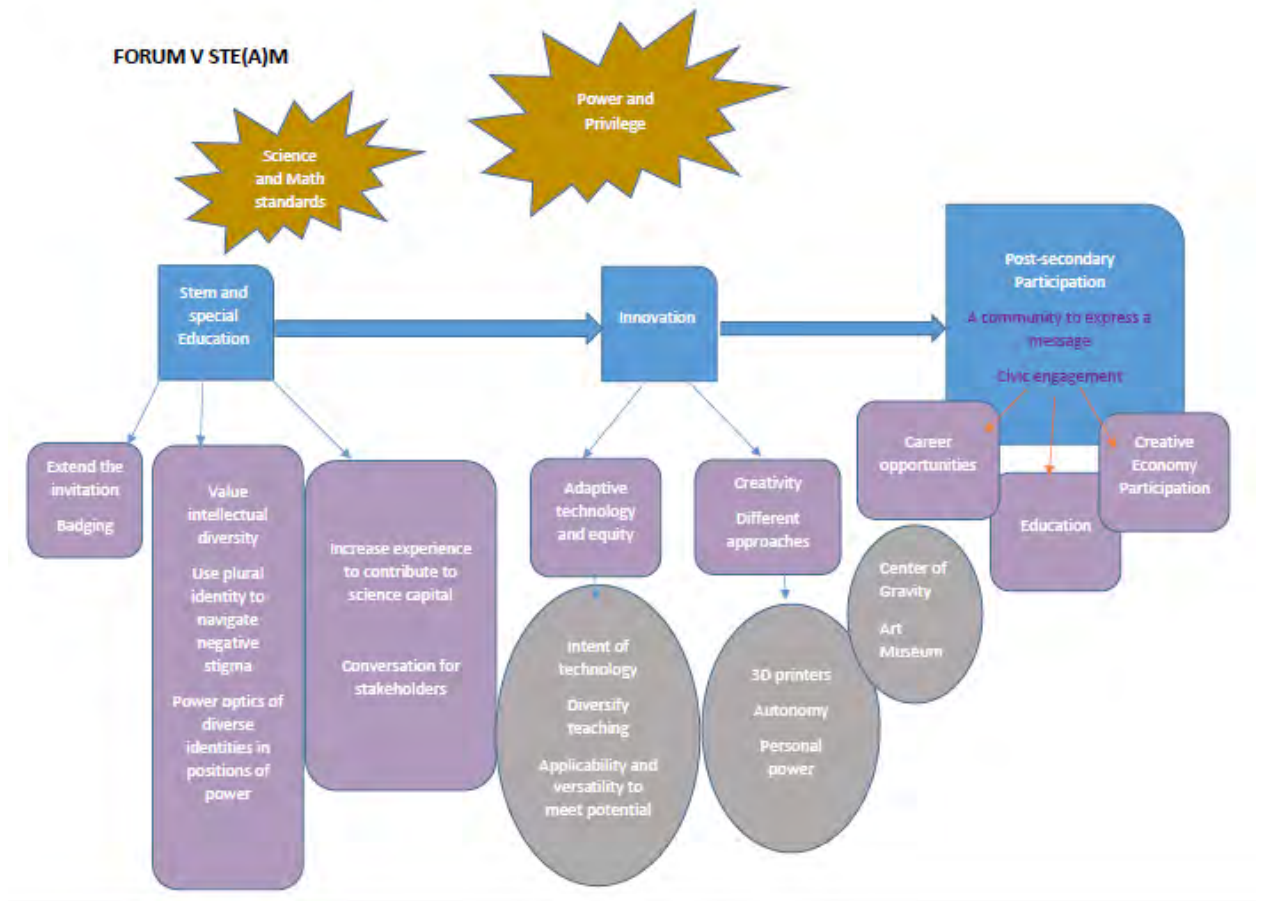
Figure 9 represents a model of codes created based on theory related to culturally responsive pedagogy and stakeholder input about inclusive cultural competence in STEM teaching and learning.

About the Authors

Tammy Ellis-Robinson
University at Albany
Email address: tellis-robinson@albany.edu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1857-008X
Tammy is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology at the University at Albany, USA. She teaches pre-service teachers in the division of special education. Her research focuses on equity, reflexive practice, writing to learn, and mentorship.

Jessica Wayde Coles
University at Albany
Email address: jcoles@albany.edu
Jessica is a doctoral research fellow in educational psychology and methodology with a concentration in special education in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology at the University at Albany, USA, a culturally responsive specialist at Measurement Incorporated, an education lecturer at Siena College. Her research and education land at the intersection of race, ability, and preparing future and current educators to foster inclusive, empowering, and equitable environments.

About the Guest Editors

Irina S. Okhremtchouk
San Francisco State University
Email address: irinao@sfsu.edu
Irina S. Okhremtchouk is an associate professor of educational administration in the Department of Equity, Leadership Studies, and Instructional Technologies at San Francisco State University's Graduate College of Education. She also coordinates SFSU's educational administration certification and educational administration MA programs. In her capacity as educational administration program coordinator, Okhremtchouk is charged with preparing well-rounded and well-informed social justice leaders and school administrators who are ready to build and maintain inclusive school communities, as well as work persistently to eliminate racism, inequalities, and injustices. Okhremtchouk's expertise is in the area of school organization, policy, and school finance. Specifically, her scholarly work stems from a deep interest in how to translate research into better-informed public policy yielding a long-lasting impact on educational leadership, policy, and administration. Irina received her Ph.D. in School Organization and Educational Policy from the U.C. Davis School of Education.

Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner
California State University, Sacramento
Email address: csturner@csus.edu
An internationally recognized and award-winning scholar, Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner is professor emerita of educational leadership at California State University, Sacramento, and Lincoln Professor Emerita of Higher Education and Ethics at Arizona State University. She served as president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and as interim dean for the College of Education at California State University, Sacramento. She is the author of Women of Color in Academe: Living with Multiple Marginality and coauthor with Samuel L. Myers Jr. of Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success. Her numerous recognitions include the

University of California, Davis (UCD) School of Education Distinguished Alumna Award and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Scholars of Color in Education Career Contribution Award. She received her Ph.D. in Administration and Policy Analysis from the Stanford University School of Education.

Patrick Newell

California State University, Chico
Email address: pnewell@csuchico.edu

Patrick Newell serves as Dean of Meriam Library at California State University, Chico. His research efforts focus on policy implications for access to educational and informational resources and how education policy translates into institutional change. He received his Ph.D. in School Organization and Educational Policy from the U.C. Davis School of Education and his MLIS from the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.

Please send errata notes to Audrey Amrein-Beardsley at audrey.beardsley@asu.edu

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