# Nurturing Cultural Humility and Responsiveness Through Restorative Pedagogy in Graduate Education

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In an increasingly diverse world that is characterized by significant social and educational inequities, the development of educators and leaders who embody cultural humility and culturally responsive practices is necessary and transformational. Moving beyond individual and deficit-centered models of student support systems towards ecological and relational paradigms of education are critical to the goals of equity and justice. In order to make progress on these goals, training programs must prioritize and embed the values of cultural humility and culturally responsive practice as foundational constructs for future educators. This multi-authored reflective paper describes the use of Restorative Pedagogy, an approach grounded in Restorative Justice and Practices, as a vehicle to facilitate the development of these important qualities. Key concepts and activities used within a graduate level course designed for students studying to be school counselors, school psychologists, and school leaders are described throughout. Limitations and implications for this pedagogical approach are also included.

As our school communities reflect the increasing cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, religious, sexual, and gender diversity of our society, the call for more robust training paradigms to adequately prepare future educators has become more pronounced (Lopez & Bursztyn, 2013). In addition to being prepared to work with diverse communities, future educators must embrace active roles as change agents who are committed to working towards dismantling systems of oppression and helping to build democratic, equitable schools. Terms like "cultural competence", "cultural proficiency", and "cultural responsiveness" have become catchphrases in our educational systems over the past several decades as the need to more effectively serve diverse populations and address educational inequities continues to grow. While the terminology is often used interchangeably across professionals and disciplines, traditional models of cultural competence are often characterized by progressive mastery and even training benchmarks that define an individual's knowledge and skill development (Hatcher et al., 2013). Different scales and tools have even been developed to provide methods to measure progress in these identified competencies (Rogers-Sirin & Sirin, 2009; Schwarz et al., 2015). The development of various definitions and tools have rightly highlighted the urgency for educators and helping professionals to be adequately prepared in supporting diverse populations. However, there are inherent limitations to finite conceptualizations *and language used to describe* these developmental processes (e.g., competency-based, sequencing, benchmarks; Hatcher et al., 2013). Thus, the reframing of these important concepts is warranted. The purpose of this multi-authored reflective paper is to illustrate a novel approach to graduate level preparation for culturally responsive practice in education using interwoven philosophies of cultural humility and restorative justice.

## Cultural Humility and Culturally Responsive Practice

The idea that anyone can achieve "competence" in culture or diversity is problematic because it can lead to the perception of a linear process with an endpoint, marking when a goal has been achieved. Though it is true that conceptualizations of cultural competence vary and often reflect fluid processes of skill and perspective development, there is typically a focus on accumulation of knowledge about particular groups and cultures that can often lead to overgeneralizations and stereotypes as a result (Bhui, 2013). Competency paradigms for working with diverse populations also tend to be focused in cognitive exploration of cultural concepts and skills without enough attention to the emotional, personal, and relational aspects of this important work. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) originally recognized the limitations of such "detached" approaches to physician education models and proposed an alternative perspective in the concept of "cultural humility".

Cultural humility is defined as a commitment to "continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique" (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; p.118) in a lifelong process. Cultural humility is thus characterized by a lifelong commitment to the inner work of understanding one's own sociocultural identities and surrounding contexts as well as the understanding and willingness to redress power imbalances in all systems (Fisher-Borne, Cain & Martin, 2015). This nuanced construct shifts the goal from achieving competency benchmarks towards developing a culturally humble mindset or lens through which educators and helping professionals can clearly see themselves, other people, and the interconnected systems within which we all develop. We argue that cultural humility is a critical attribute that lays the foundation and continues to inform the accumulation of knowledge and skills

needed for meaningful change. For greater equity and liberation from oppressive systems, educators and helping professionals must be prepared to recognize bias and injustice and skillfully act in ways that effectively improve opportunities and conditions for marginalized communities. For these reasons, we embrace the terms "cultural humility" and "culturally responsive practice" as distinct yet interrelated concepts that informed our pedagogical approach to prepare future educational leaders.   Extending from the development of cultural humility as an internal quality and lens, the term "culturally responsive practice" reflects the resulting knowledge, skills, and tangible actions that lead to more equitable educational outcomes and systems (Lopez & Bursztyn, 2013). In order to be responsive to the diverse needs of individuals and systems, educators must first be able to recognize those needs while also being aware of potential personal biases and systemic inequities that may be contributing factors. Culturally responsive practices in education include both individual service-delivery or practices, (i.e., counseling, assessment, teaching; Hass & Abdou, 2018), as well as systems level advocacy, (i.e., leadership skills, coalition-building, program development; Lopez & Bursztyn, 2013). The concepts of cultural humility and culturally responsive practice account for the fluidity, complexity, and evolving nature of human diversity and needs, while also challenging the systemic and institutionalized inequities that must be addressed (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015).

Training faculty must be intentional in preparing future educators to develop strong equity-oriented compasses that are fueled by self-awareness, respectful curiosity, strong skills, advocacy, and a commitment to democracy and social justice. Intentionality towards equity-oriented preparation may include broad programmatic commitments such as equity mission statements, required courses, and hiring faculty who are equipped to support these efforts. In addition, trainers must be thoughtful about *how* these values and skill sets are taught and take care to utilize reflective and evaluative strategies to monitor effectiveness. Throughout this paper, we describe a training process for future educators through which the foundational goals are to support the development of cultural humility and culturally responsive practices as distinct but interwoven constructs. We also describe a specific training approach that is rooted in restorative justice philosophies and circle practices, which theoretically embody the inherent qualities of cultural humility and culturally responsive practice through power sharing and storytelling (Pranis, 2015; Zehr, 2015). In "story circles", for example, participants with diverse cultural identities and lived experiences share power in a discussion circle structure and make sense of cultural

differences through storytelling (Deardorff, 2020). Similar to the approach we describe, story circles help participants engage in the emotional dimension of learning as a means of developing cultural humility and responsive practice. Overall, we argue that with authentic modeling of cultural humility and culturally responsive practice embedded within a pedagogical approach, the preparation of future educators for this important work may be more effective.

**Restorative Pedagogy**

As educators and scholars continue to emphasize the importance of developing theories and practices that advance equity in education, there has been less agreement about *how* to accomplish this multifaceted set of goals. One promising approach that has recently gained more traction is the adaptation of Restorative Justice (RJ), a philosophy derived from the wisdom and practices of Indigenous cultures across the globe into modern school systems (Zehr, 2015). RJ philosophies are "grounded in an ecological ethos of interrelatedness and collaboration" (Davis, 2019, p. 21) that is long believed to be inherent to our collective humanity.   RJ perspectives and practices reframe the concepts of harm or injustice as ruptures in relationships that need to be healed rather than rules that have been broken or delinquency that needs to be punished (Vaandering, 2014). In addition, an RJ approach is fueled by the democratic belief that each individual in a school community has an equal voice in decision-making and leadership. Our educational systems have long mirrored the top-down, punitive, and exclusionary nature of our criminal justice system, which has resulted in significant harm to vulnerable communities and children, especially Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students (Skiba, Arrendondo, & Williams, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). As more school leaders embrace the equity potential of RJ, often termed restorative practices, the higher likelihood that future educators will need relevant expertise in this paradigm.. In addition, as the qualities of restorative practitioners are congruent with the tenets of cultural humility and culturally responsive practice, individual educators who utilize such practices can make waves of change in their respective roles and communities.

As we learn more about the implementation of restorative practices in schools, it is becoming clearer that educators must not only use these approaches in reactive ways, but must integrate them into pedagogy, service-delivery, collaboration, and in approaches to leadership roles (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). As with other types of social-emotional support systems such a character education, school-based mindfulness, and social-emotional instruction, effective implementation of such efforts may largely depend on educator buy-in, embodiment, and modeling of these traits (McIntyre Miller & Abdou, 2018). As other scholars who have argued for the use of restorative and relational
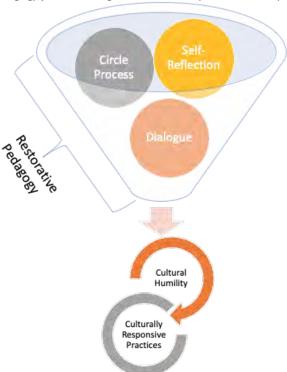
pedagogies in training, future educators must experience the very practices they are learning to use in the field (Hollweck, Reimer & Bouchard, 2019). Restorative pedagogy is defined as a relational approach to teaching that integrates circle practices, self-reflection, and dialogue to facilitate knowledge and skill building. Figure one provides a visual of our conceptualization of restorative pedagogy and how they relate to cultural humility and culturally responsive practice.

## Methods

From the perspectives of co-instructors and graduate students from the relevant course, this reflective article describes a series of activities aimed at nurturing cultural humility and culturally responsive practices through the use of restorative pedagogy, as illustrated in Figure 1. The course consisted of a mixture of graduate students in school psychology, school counseling, and educational leadership programs, who were required to take this course as part of their sequence. The class met once a week for approximately three hours with breaks for sixteen weeks. The course was taught by two instructors (first two authors) from different programs within the same college of education. The first author is an assistant professor in a school psychology and counseling graduate program while the second author is an associate professor in a master's in educational leadership program. Both professors identify as people of color and over the course of the semester, they joined students in sharing other facets of their identities and positionalities during relevant activities and discussions. The course was co-taught as a result of an internal university pedagogy grant aimed at restructuring this important course within the school psychology and counseling program and to increase opportunities for cross program collaboration. The sections below describe the various cornerstones of the restorative pedagogical approach as they were adapted to the course goals. While there is considerable overlap in the targeted systems and goals as they relate to the various activities described below, we separate activities by primary purpose for organizational clarity. Student co-authors were included in the development of this paper to emphasize the relevance of power sharing, as they were asked to share experiences from the course and had opportunities to review the paper and offer suggested edits prior to submission. Narratives about their experiences in the class are included as well.

Figure 1
*Restorative pedagogy for nurturing cultural humility and culturally responsive practices*



*Note.* Restorative Pedagogy is conceptualized as a "container" through which course facilitation strategies are intended to lead to future educators who embody cultural humility (internal quality) and culturally responsive practices (knowledge and skills). These interconnected and cyclical qualities are rooted in a commitment to lifelong self-reflection and learning.

Table 1
*Core Social Justice Concepts Covered in the Course*

| Concept | Brief description | References |
|---|---|---|
| Ecological Systems Theory | An understanding of how an individual's characteristics interact with environmental contexts or systems. | Espelage, 2014 |
| Cycle of Socialization | Each person is socialized to fit the social identities and roles they are born into (e.g., gender, ethnicity, skin color, first language, age, ability status, religion, sexual orientation, and economic class). This cycle is pervasive, invisible, circular, consistent, and self-perpetuating. | Adams et al., 2000 |
| Identity/ power | Social group memberships, some of which are considered dominant, superior, and privileged. | Adams et al., 2000 |
| Privilege/ Oppression Spectrum | A system of advantage and disadvantage based on group membership and at both the individual and systemic levels. Specific systems of oppression and privilege were covered over the course of semester. | Goodman, 2015; McIntosh, 2007 |
| Intersectionality | Intersectionality describes individual experiences, identities, and forms of oppression as not mutually exclusive, but rather interconnected and building on each other. | Goodman, 2015 |
| Implicit bias | The unconscious thoughts and beliefs that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions. | Staats, 2016 |
| Microaggressions | Verbal or nonverbal messages, intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to people of marginalized groups. | Allen, 2013 Sue, 2010 |
| Cultural humility | A process of lifelong learning and reflection for both individuals and institutions to gain a deeper understanding of the self and surrounding communities. | Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015 |
| Culturally Responsive Practice | A process that begins with cultural humility and focuses on the respect and ambiguity of individual experiences and identities. Specific counseling and advocacy skills were discussed. | Hass & Abdou, 2018 |
| Cultural wealth | A collection of knowledge and skills possessed and utilized by people of color to overcome and survive systems of oppression. | Yosso, 2005 |
| Cycle of liberation | A never-ending and cyclical effort leading to liberation from oppression at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic levels. | Harro, 2000 |

**Course Development**

The course was developed by the first two authors prior to the beginning of the semester. While the course content (i.e., general structure, sequencing, readings, and assignments) was created prior to the class, the instructors adopted a facilitation process that was fluid by nature in that both the course content and process would be shaped by a democratic and restorative classroom. During the first class of the semester, students had the opportunity to review the syllabus and offer any suggested edits or changes for instructors to review. This opportunity was revisited several times over the course of the semester. In addition, an anonymous mid-semester evaluation was conducted where students had the opportunity to share feedback about what instructors should stop, start, and continue doing in relation to course facilitation. Feedback was reviewed and any subsequent adjustments were made after reaching consensus with the class. Generally, the class sequence was structured to begin with a focus on increasing cultural self-awareness (i.e., social identities,

implicit biases, and lived experiences), expanding to increasing cultural awareness of systems surrounding self (i.e., systems of oppression and ecological context), and culminating in the exploration of culturally responsive practices and advocacy skills. This sequencing was designed to plant seeds for the cultivation of cultural humility as a foundational perspective to inform the more tangible skills related to culturally responsive practices and systems advocacy.

## Core Social justice Concepts

Developing a firm knowledge base around socio-cultural and historical contexts relevant to education is foundational for developing a lens that can recognize systemic inequities and the skills to effectively respond. Table 1 describes the core social justice concepts that students were exposed to in multi-modal formats including readings, brief lectures, video clips, and documentaries throughout the course. The table provides brief definitions of each concept in addition to relevant readings that were assigned for the class. While dialogue was prioritized during class time, students were provided multiple outlets to gain important knowledge and theoretical perspectives on each important concept. Students were required to complete a reflective journal for each set of weekly readings. They were encouraged to use a free writing approach for these journals to process their reactions and insights about the reading rather than summarizing the information read. Over the course of the semester, these core concepts were integrated with specific systems of privilege and oppression through self-reflection, class activities, structure dialogues (e.g. using prompts, in partners, small groups, and whole groups), and the culminating group project.

## Creating a Restorative Classroom

Central to our pedagogical approach was the use of restorative circles as the primary physical and relational structure of the class. Often referred to as the "social technology of circles" (Hollweck et al., 2019), this physical structuring of the class creates a democratic space that shifts hierarchies, increases attention and presence with one another, and increases opportunities for connection, understanding, and dialogue. Students and instructors sat in a circle formation for every class, with no tables or physical structures in the circle. Laptops and devices were discouraged and any notes or materials for the class were provided to students. Whole group discussions were often facilitated using talking pieces. Restorative practitioners typically use talking pieces to facilitate dialogue among participants. The talking piece is passed from person to person around the rim of the circle, and the person who holds the

talking piece may speak without interruption (Pranis, 2015) Participants are also allowed to pass on sharing if they so choose. This element emphasizes the importance of honoring and being present for each person during their turn to share (Pranis, 2015). Students were encouraged to bring their own talking pieces to share with the class. As doing full group circle rounds was not always time feasible, facilitators also integrated opportunities to suspend the talking peice for open dialogue. Most class meetings followed a similar structure and sequence, that mirrored common circle processes developed by various RJ experts (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015; Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Pranis, 2015; Zehr, 2015). Table 2 provides a general summary of the circle practices used within the course.

While community building and connection were prioritized in every class meeting, there was extra time and emphasis dedicated to developing an inclusive and relational context during the first few classes. During the first class, students and instructors engaged in a democratic process of defining community values and shared agreements with the purpose of developing a brave space, where students feel included and empowered to share, learn, grow, and make mistakes (Ali, 2017). These values and agreements were often reviewed over the course of the semester, displayed in the classroom for references, and students were provided with regular opportunities for any necessary revisions. Sharing and listening to personal values, perspectives, and experiences were also a distinct focus of the first few class meetings as students and instructors prepared to collectively explore complex and often emotional topics. Throughout the rest of the semester, community building activities continued through the various circle practices described in Table 2. Consistent with the RJ tenet of "power sharing" in circle processes in which authority roles are minimized and all voices are more equalized (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Pranis, 2014; Zehr, 2015), instructors equally participated in discussions and modeled vulnerability and brave participation. This positional stance was also an acknowledgment and modeling of cultural humility in that instructors entered this space to join students in learning from and honoring the collective wisdom in the room.

## Structured Activities That Cultivate Awareness of Self

Opportunities for self-reflection were plentiful throughout the semester and typically embedded into most activities; however, there was a heavier focus on this self-awareness work at the beginning of the semester to lay the groundwork for subsequent goals. In this section, we describe two activities that helped support both instructors and students in reflecting upon and sharing their lived experiences of privilege and oppression.

Table 2
*Sample Circle Structure Used in the Course*

| Circle activity | Purpose | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Opening | Introductory ritual to begin circle, set the tone for the class, orient the group to each other and the space | Guided meditation; Poem, Music, quote |
| Check-in round | Allows for facilitator and participants to gauge how group is doing mentally, physically, and emotionally | Ice-breakers, feeling questions, sharing experiences, interests, or memories |
| Talking piece and guidelines | Collectively establish community norms and guidelines for how to ensure that all voices are heard | Respect the talking piece, speak/listen from the heart, speak/listen with respect, honor confidentiality |
| Values | Identify shared and individual values for participants to be aware of; what participants need to feel comfortable sharing in space and discussions | Writing values on note cards and sharing significance to the group |
| Overview of topic and open to questions | Review topic of discussion and relevant readings; highlight key considerations; provide opportunity for questions | Brief lecture, video, or open discussion about topic of focus |
| Discussion rounds | Use of prompts to deepen and expand reflection of the topic; ensure that all participants have an opportunity to share and process thoughts | Partner, small group, or whole group discussion rounds; timed segments for participants to trade off sharing |
| Check-out round | Provides opportunity for participants to reflect on experience in circle and with discussions | "Use one word to describe your experience in circle today" "Share one take-away from today's class" "What is one thing that someone else said today that has resonated with you" |
| Closing | Provides a clear ending to the circle | Quote, poem, deep breathing exercise |

**Sharing "I Am" Poems.** The first activity, "I Am Poem", prompted instructors and students to compose a poem, where each line begins with the phrase "I am". Prior to the exercise, instructors led a restorative circle discussion round, where students shared examples of their lived experiences of their social identities as it related to race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, and other social identities. Next, instructors provided students with a prompt and about ten minutes to write an "I am" poem. Instructors also left this activity up for interpretation, asking students to share identities in each line of the poem that are personal and social. Next, each student read aloud their "I am" poems with a partner and engaged in an open dialogue of how they felt sharing their poems with a peer. Then, students were invited to read aloud their "I am" poems in a large discussion circle, if they so chose. A popcorn discussion circle (i.e., based on volunteering rather than use of a talking piece) followed the sharing of "I am" poems, where students and instructors shared their feelings about reading and hearing "I am" poems, made connections with others, and validated others' identities articulated in the "I am" poems.

**Creating Ecomaps for Self-Awareness**. Students also completed an ecomap project to deepen their cultural and personal self-awareness. Using concepts of ecological theory with some focused self-reflection, each student created their own ecomap and accompanying narrative to explore the impact of relationships and contexts in their environment on their worldview and life experience. Instructors asked students to assess their own comfort level in sharing their experience with the activity.

After reviewing the work of Bennett and Grant (2016), who describe the utility of ecomaps in social work and adult education for gathering qualitative data about experiences and influences within individual ecological systems, students created their own ecomaps with accompanying narratives. Students reviewed ecomap samples provided in the article (Bennett & Grant, 2016) and were given creative freedom to develop their own versions or use a provided template. Instructors encouraged students to create their own legend to describe the quality of connections to each circle/life context (e.g., straight line, dashed line, squiggly line,

etc.). The ecomap provided students an opportunity to reflect on and describe interactions within the social, formal, and informal institutions and networks that create a sense of how and why they function as a professional or an adult learner in graduate school.

Accompanying the visual ecomap, each student also wrote narratives to tell the story of the six to eight contexts that were most salient to their identity and life experiences. Instructors encouraged students to share to their comfort level, promised that the specific narrative details would only be read by instructors, and reiterated the instructors' ethical responsibility to follow up with students if their ecomaps and personal narratives raised concerns regarding their safety and well-being. Students had the opportunity to discuss their experiences developing their ecomaps with their peers and instructors in class using partner and small group discussions.

## Structured Activities That Cultivate Awareness of External Systems

Building on the internal awareness work, students engaged in a series of activities aimed at developing awareness of how they are impacted by external systems of privilege and oppression (see Table 1). These activities were intended to expand upon knowledge building activities to deepen their understanding of external systems in addition to their own positioning and perspective of various external systems. In this section, we describe three activities that promote student learning in this area.

**Restorative Privilege Walk.** The course instructors modified a popular group activity in social justice education, the privilege walk. In a privilege walk, participants learn about how systems of privilege and oppression affect individuals differently based on their social identities such as race, gender, and class (see https://youtu.be/hD5f8GuNuGQ for media clip describing the privilege walk). A facilitator asks students to stand in a straight horizontal line across a room and respond to statements about privileges. Some examples of privilege statements include, "if you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs" and "if you've never heard a derogatory comment related to your sexual orientation or gender identity". At the end of the activity, students who responded "yes" to the privilege statements will be standing toward the front of the room, while those who answered "no" will be standing in the back. Social justice educators have recently critiqued this activity (Silverman, 2013; Stephens et al., 2019), arguing that less privileged students who stand in the back of the classroom are vulnerable to the gaze of more privileged participants in the group and that the activity centers the learning experiences of privileged participants. In addition, the activity may also emotionally trigger

participants beyond their level of comfort, and in these learning contexts, participants may exert much emotional labor, making it difficult to learn and shift their perspectives and build community.

There were two ways course instructors "restored" the privilege walk activity with the aim of supporting challenging conversations in a compassionate community. First, course instructors asked participants to stand together in the circle, rather than in a straight line and to "step in and step back" to indicate "yes" to statements about privileges. This modification allowed all participants to begin each prompt in a neutral position rather than experiencing the collective disparity that results from the original activity. Second, after the activity, course instructors encouraged students to process and debrief with peers. Each student engaged in a think-pair-share activity, where they journaled their personal experiences of the activity, followed by sharing their reflections with a partner, and then utilized a talking piece to take turns sharing their experiences in a discussion circle. The discussion circle was followed by an open discussion about privilege and oppression, facilitated by the course instructors. This activity provided opportunities to both reflect on personal experiences with various external systems as well as respectfully observe those of others within the shared space.

**Critical Analysis of Concepts of Assigned Readings.** The course instructors facilitated concepts from assigned readings in restorative circles. Following a class check-in and a brief instructor-led lecture outlining major concepts from the week's assigned readings, one course instructor provided students with a question aimed at connecting the readings to their lived experiences. Each student shared their response to the question while holding the talking piece. After the first round, instructors often encouraged students to pass the talking piece again in the circle with the option of affirming and making connections to what their peers previously shared. After a few circle rounds with a talking piece, instructors and students then participated in an open discussion to continue sharing their reflections. This process was then followed by a think-pair-share structure; course instructors typically provided students with an additional question aimed at further developing students' critical awareness of the concepts from the assigned readings. After personal reflection and open discussion in partner formations, students then regrouped in a discussion circle to share the main points of their discussions.

An example of this discussion structure was reflected in a class where students discussed assigned readings describing heteronormativity, religious oppression, and how educators can be allies for LGBTQ+ students. Students shared their personal responses to the question, "what are some ways that you think your upbringing and own cycle of

socialization (religious or otherwise) may have influenced your views and/or personal biases on heteronormativity or homophobia?" in a discussion circle, utilizing a talking piece and subsequent rounds. This was followed by a think-pair-share structure, where students reflected and shared their responses to the question, "what are some ways that leaders and helping professionals may be able to negotiate personal biases and their professional and ethical approaches to student support?". We found that the discussion circles and think-pair-structure helped students learn from others' lived experiences and work together to deepen their understanding of systems of oppression. Alternating between pairs, small group and whole group discussions also provided all students with opportunities to engage in discussion structures that were most comfortable for them.

### Analyzing Systems in Films

The course instructors utilized multiple film clips and documentaries to spark discussion about the impact of identity and power and systems of oppression on intersectional youth in schools. One film, *Valentine Road*, helped students explore how these concepts manifest in social institutions (school, media, criminal justice, family) that impact youth. *Valentine Road* is a documentary that retells the story of Larry King, a 12-year old gender non-conforming and gay youth of color who was tragically murdered by a classmate in a middle school in 2008 (for more information about the film, go to https://www.npr.org/2013/09/30/226597210/valentine-road-a-path-to-teen-tragedy). The film depicts how homophobia, transphobia, and racism showed up in the school, community, media, and the criminal justice system, all of which were factors influencing the bullying, harassment, and eventual murder of Larry King. It also provided a valuable case example through which students could critique the school system and educator responses to this tragedy.

The course instructors recognized that the issues explored in the film could have a psychological and emotional impact on students, and hence, students were provided a content warning prior to the in-class film viewing. Minutes before the film, course instructors facilitated a previewing circle, where students participated in a deep breathing exercise and guided meditation. The circle would help support students mindfully watch and then reflect on the film. In addition, students were provided with a simple prompt, "what role did identity play in this story?".

After the film viewing, the course instructors facilitated a post-viewing deep breathing and mindfulness exercise. Course instructors then asked students to participate in a think-pair-share. The thinking phase consisted of students writing about their immediate reactions to the film and the question. Students then formed pairs to discuss their reflections. Afterward, course instructors facilitated a discussion circle. In the first round, course instructors and students passed around a talking piece to voluntarily offer their reflections. The second round was an open discussion circle, where course instructors encouraged students to dialogue more about the role that identity and systems of oppression played in the events leading up to Larry's death and the aftermath.

### Structured Activities that Cultivate Culturally Responsive Practices

As the ultimate goal of this course was to prepare future educators to effectively support diverse student populations and advocate for equitable school systems, the skills and practices needed to achieve these goals are critically important. However, since there is no one set of practices or procedures that would work for all students or systems, instructors focused on introducing flexible approaches that emphasize the valuing of unique experiences, intersectionality, and ecological perspectives. Given the context that the students in this course were enrolled in a comprehensive training program where they were learning technical skills in other courses, priority was given to the increasing awareness of systems as well as how to respond to needs with these realities in mind.

**Ecomaps**. As the majority of the students in the class were studying to be school mental health professionals, it was important to address culturally responsive counseling skills as a critical outcome. Ecomaps, along with many of the other course activities, served multiple purposes on the path to developing cultural humility and cultural responsiveness. While this activity was introduced earlier in the course to facilitate reflection of their individual identities and systems of influence, it was also an opportunity to practice a culturally responsive counseling skill on themselves. Using ecomaps as an interviewing and counseling tool allows mental health providers to engage in the exploration of a client's ecological system of identity and support (Bennett & Grant, 2016). Ecomaps provide opportunities to support clients in exploring their own personal ecosystems while giving the counselor insight into environmental influences and outlets of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and sources of resilience. It is a tangible tool to help counselors shift from a deficit-oriented perspective that is often the norm when working with marginalized groups. Ecomaps can also be helpful in providing a structure through which a counselor may be able to discuss issues of discrimination and oppression with their clients and identify areas for systems advocacy.

**Equity Projects.** Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994) as a theoretical framework, students worked in small groups to unpack a specific social justice issue impacting a marginalized group. Students were encouraged to select a topic of interest and relevance to their future professional roles. Some example topics included school discipline systems, LGBTQ+ inclusion and support systems, and supporting Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students. The presentation format was flexible (e.g., PowerPoint, creation of a video, circle plan, group activity, etc.) and included the following components: analysis of the issue within each system with examples of how it is manifested at those levels (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem; Espelage, 2014) and a brief action plan and list of recommendations to increase equity for marginalized group(s) within each specific context (e.g., counseling, school, community, etc.). System analysis and action planning were to be grounded in theory and research and appropriately cited.

In addition to the group project portion of this assignment, students were required to complete a personal reflection paper to analyze their own positioning as it related to the topic and group of interest. This aspect of the assignment was included with the goal of bridging the awareness of self and that of external systems. For this personal reflection, students were asked to answer the following questions:

1. What is your relationship to the issue/marginalized group under study (e.g. ally, personal connection, outsider, etc.)? How did this perspective and relationship impact your approach and comfort level with the topic?
2. How does this issue relate to your current and/or future role as a leader and/or educator? How might this information inform your future professional actions?
3. What insights did you personally gain after going through this process? What questions did it raise?
4. How will you continue your learning to deepen your understanding of this topic and other issues of oppression?

### Student Narratives

In this section, three students in our class (the 3rd, 4th, and 5th authors of this paper) describe their personal experience with forms of restorative pedagogy in the class.

### Student #1

I felt a deep academic transformation during this class. The best way I can describe it is as "academically therapeutic". The restorative justice model is much more holistic, egalitarian, and inclusive than a regular classroom dynamic. When I say inclusive, I mean that it takes the entirety of the knowledge in the room (not just the professor) and utilizes it to teach. The messaging to me was, "we all have knowledge to share and in this way we all learn". Because my learning was experiential and because I connected with the information emotionally, I was able to retain it. Both of the professors modeled respect and appropriate group sharing behavior. It was a powerful experience having authority figures take you, and what you have to say seriously. I also experienced the power of listening and holding space in silence for others. I found this format to be a positive conduit for the exchange of opinions that can often be acrimonious and painful. The format facilitates thoughtful responsiveness and scholarly dialogue. We are living in a time period of reckless disregard for the spoken and written word, this class felt healing and like a return to a normative, respectful, and intellectual exchange. The classroom should be a space for honest debate and robust dialogue. It was my experience that sitting in the restorative justice circle reinforced these qualities and ensured they would be respected.

### Student #2

As a first-year graduate student and person of color in a cultural class, I did not know what to expect. The chairs were arranged in a circle, the professors were sitting in the circle alongside the students, and the syllabus was presented in a collaborative way. We discussed the topics listed on the syllabus, the agenda, and any topics we were interested in adding or spending more time on. Our class sessions often began with a check-in round or mindfulness exercise, which I quickly understood were absolutely necessary for this class. While this course was not content-heavy, it was emotionally rigorous. I remember sharing personal experiences and realizing how this process was both therapeutic and challenging, and not just for me, but for the group. Despite establishing trust in the circle, contributing to the dialogue required courage and vulnerability. The class sessions were about two and a half hours. Yet, we often found it was not enough time to fully elaborate on the intricacies and complexities of the social justice topics we discussed. I regularly left the class feeling inspired- like a sort of intellectual momentum- wanting to share and learn more.

### Student #3

The framework of restorative circles in this classroom fully promoted the exploration of education through a lens of liberation, democracy, compassion, and possibility. The structure of a circle provided a gentle way to coax students out of their shells and let them know that they are seen, heard, and respected regardless of who they are, what they believe, and where they come from. My own growth developed when I practiced self-compassion, and realized

that despite my fears of judgment or rejection, I should whole-heartedly contribute my thoughts to the conversations for both my own and the class' learning. That give and take of ideas, wisdom, and experience gave me a glimpse into seeing what it might take to cultivate a peaceful and just world. One such example was the Modified Privilege Walk activity; it was thought-provoking as it helped me witness the idea that we are all in this together, in both our privilege and oppression. So often, humans create separation between one another when we focus on "who's ahead" and "who's behind". However, by stepping into the circle at the same time, I saw that we all share the burden in awakening to and overcoming oppression, regardless of whoever we are, and wherever we come from.

## Discussion

In an increasingly diverse world, educator development programs must support the development of cultural humility and cultural responsiveness of future educators. Such cultivation can effectively occur in democratic and restorative classroom settings. In this paper, we demonstrated that restorative pedagogies are a vehicle for democratic and relationship-centered education. In addition, this type of pedagogy can cultivate future educators' critical awareness of self, external systems, and critical consciousness of privilege and oppression. Presently, restorative practices in schools have been primarily utilized in situations involving harm (e.g., bullying, conflict among educators and students). We argue that restorative practices may also be utilized in the teaching and learning process, particularly in courses aimed at cultivating cultural humility and responsiveness.

## Limitations

While shifting from traditional training methods to restorative pedagogy had some clear and powerful benefits, there were also several areas of limitations and opportunities for future growth. First, both instructors of this course had undergone several formal RJ and circle trainings prior to teaching this course. This experience provided a strong foundation upon which to translate these practices into the classroom. The need for specialized training in the area of restorative circle processes may serve as a barrier for instructors interested in using the strategies described in this paper. While circle processes are not necessarily required to facilitate these activities, it would be important to use some intentional and ongoing processes to establish group norms and community building to create an appropriate space for this type of dialogue. Understanding the risk level for potentially triggering topics and conversations and having a plan for how to support students is key.

Another lesson learned in this process was the varying needs for structure and guidance across students. While developing some comfort for ambiguity is important for this work, some student feedback indicated a need for more specific and direct guidance as it related to class assignments, particularly those associated with skills and action. Subsequent iterations of this course included the integration of the equity literacy model (Gorski & Pothini, 2018) and the use of specific case studies into the culminating project. This model provides specification regarding equity literacy abilities (i.e. ability to recognize, respond, redress bias and inequities, and ability to create and sustain bias-free learning environments). The equity literacy framework also outlines a 7-step model for analyzing and responding to bias and inequities.

An important consideration and potential limitation of teaching within these topics, regardless of approach, is conflicting ideologies or worldviews that students may enter such spaces with. However, restorative pedagogies require more active engagement and thus may be even more challenging for those with conflicting views. In programs where equity-oriented courses are optional, it may be especially difficult to even attract students who are not interested in or who don't believe that inequities exist. Within the context of the required graduate course described in this paper, the audience included students entering fields where cultural responsiveness is clearly embedded into the associated national standards and program philosophies. However, it's important for trainers to be aware that everyone enters this type of work at different stages, with varying degrees of knowledge, experience, readiness and even openness to confront the difficult realities related to systems of oppression and privilege. This consideration is even more relevant with the possibility of using these strategies within professional development settings where current and long-time educators may vary even more in political and ideological belief systems, particularly within the current socio-political climate. Facilitators should be prepared for resistance and take care to monitor adherence to community guidelines and address any harm that may be caused during difficult conversations. While it is unrealistic to claim that all people who participate in processes like the one we have described in this paper will leave with transformed worldviews, the hope is that the resulting awareness of new ideas, perspectives, and relational synergy will potentially disrupt stagnant perspectives and plant seeds for the critical consciousness that is needed for culturally responsive practice. Future research is needed to study the effectiveness of restorative pedagogy on subsequent attitude and behavioral shifts.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that while the majority of students reported that the experience with restorative circles in this class was an overall positive one,

there were some students that reported preference to traditional lecture style and direct instruction. It is true that the structure of a restorative classroom is a significant cultural shift from traditional schooling that most students have experienced through their educational careers. Such a shift is likely to cause discomfort and even resistance. It is important to normalize such reactions during the early stages of the course sequence and acknowledge these feelings without judgment and to encourage students to participate and share to their comfort level. It is also important to remember that typically, restorative circle processes are voluntary, which is not the case when it is embedded in a required course. However, students were not penalized for "passing" (i.e., choosing not to contribute) during any discussions and always encouraged to only share within their own comfort levels. Despite any resistance that may have been present, all students participated in class discussions and activities. Students were also offered opportunities for RJ trainings and resources over the course of the semester to deepen their understanding of the philosophy.

## Conclusion

Cultural humility and responsiveness require a lifelong commitment of gaining new knowledge, participating in dialogue with others, and reflecting. Thus, completing one course is merely scratching the surface. It is critical that university-led training programs and K-12 schools provide opportunities for educators to continue developing cultural humility and responsiveness throughout their professional careers. Moreover, we advocate that educators bring restorative pedagogies into their daily practice in schools as they facilitate classrooms, meetings, and attend to harm and conflict. The ideas and activities presented in this paper can also be modified for professional development processes, faculty meetings, special diversity units for students, and other learning opportunities.

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