CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY FOR MEN OF COLOR

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As an increasing number of campuses take on the critical work of designing and implementing supports for undergraduate men of color, defining and articulating a theory of action promotes clarity and consistency among practitioners within and across campuses. This brief is one of nine dedicated to various facets of the theory of action driving the implementation of the UW Brotherhood Initiative. In this brief, we describe the BI definition of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and provide an overview of the research on this concept as it pertains to undergraduate men of color. We also share some examples of the ways in which culturally relevant pedagogy is put into practice within the BI.

DEFINING CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

The BI defines **culturally relevant pedagogy** (CRP) as an instructional model focused on the intersection of student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness as a means to advance collective empowerment and student achievement. Informed by decades of Black scholarship and coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), CRP encompasses the teaching methods and practices that honor the impact of culture on learning, and conversely support ways of learning that honor culture.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY FOR MEN OF COLOR

Culturally-informed pedagogies are designed to address the cultural mismatch between school and community environments. Situated within this diverse group of pedagogies, CRP specifically seeks to bring the school and community environment into alignment by incorporating cultural referents and community-based knowledge into the curriculum as a means to empower students of color as learners and increase student success. In turn, CRP supports all students in identifying and resisting the multitude of ways that dominant forms of teaching and instruction can further marginalize and disregard bodies of knowledge founded in communities of color.

Though most of the discussion surrounding culturally relevant pedagogy is rooted in K-12 practice and research, postsecondary educators have increasingly turned to CRP in response to diverse undergraduate and graduate student populations, challenging the race-neutral and one-size-fits-all approach of higher education classrooms - particularly at predominantly white

institutions (Hinton & Seo, 2013). Centering culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom can range from assignments that highlight the cultural perspectives of students to community-based learning activities designed to investigate the challenges and opportunities facing specific cultural communities. For undergraduate students of color, culturally relevant pedagogy has been shown to help students engage more fully in the course material (Colvin & Tobler, 2013), create new and lasting bonds with communities they care about (Pak, 2018), as well as affirm and deepen their own identities.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE

The Brotherhood Initiative has, since its inception, considered culturally relevant pedagogy a condition for success in promoting learning and well-being for undergraduate men of color. All four strategic areas of student enrichment within the BI Theory of Action[1] rely on assignments, activities, speakers, and experiences that validate and incorporate the diverse cultural communities and histories represented in the BI community.

Fostering a Validating Learning Environment

At the core of the BI class environment are intentional and ongoing opportunities for students to experience academic validation. Consistent with the key elements of validation

theory (Rendon, 1994), BI faculty work to help students "see themselves in the curriculum" (Linares & Muñoz, 2011, p. 19) and expose students to individuals - both guest speakers and peer mentors - who come from backgrounds and communities similar to their own. Academic validation is further fostered through assignments that are designed to affirm students' cultural experiences by exploring topics rooted in their personal or family history. Scholars are then able to build from their experiences and community knowledge to understand and identify the real-world implications and impact of broader course concepts and frameworks. For example, first-year students spend fall quarter developing a family oral history presentation that highlights important life events, values, and perspectives of a close or extended family member. Throughout the period of presentation development, Scholars are learning about the various dimensions of community cultural wealth as a way to identify and articulate the wide array of assets and abilities that are abundant in marginalized communities. Ultimately, students come to understand the concept of community cultural wealth through the lived experiences of those in their community. Such assignments provide opportunities for Scholars to witness themselves and each other as sources of knowledge and as powerful learners.

The BI classroom is designed as a constructivist space where learning is more than just acquiring knowledge, and instruction goes beyond simply communicating information (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). The classroom supports both individual and collaborative processes that engage Scholars in knowledge construction around identity, culture, and general well-being. Through assignments,

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1 The BI Theory of Action features four strategic areas of student enrichment, which include: Academic Guidance & Support, Psychosocial & Identity Development, Community-Based Learning & Leadership Development, and Career Development & Professionalization. These areas represent an intentionally holistic approach to promoting student learning and development. For more information on the components of the BI Theory of Action, please visit https://brotherhoodinitiative.org/research/

activities, and teacher-student interactions, BI Scholars can reflect upon their experiences and incorporate new information into their pre-existing knowledge. In this way, the BI pedagogy and curriculum are, by necessity, becoming more culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) in that they uphold culture as a fluid and dynamic representation of the lived experience. For example, visual methodologies such as participant-generated photo elicitation[2] and digital storytelling have been a consistent instructional approach for the BI first-year, second-year, and study abroad courses over the past few years. Through visually-based assignments, BI Scholars have reflected on what concepts like 'masculinity' and other aspects of their identities mean within their culture or their country of origin. This approach simultaneously synthesizes shared conceptions of masculinity and reveals emerging expressions of identity unique to each student.

Contemporary political and social issues also highlight the significance of the BI classroom as an important space for reflection and support for men of color. Through formal group assignments, such as designing a project for positive social change or creating a podcast focused on the Black Lives Matter movement, Scholars are encouraged to explore how complex issues impact each other and those in their communities. Additionally, class discussions on topics like toxic masculinity provide Scholars with a supportive environment to be vulnerable and speak to experiences and perceptions that shape their worldview. The BI's commitment to culturally relevant

pedagogy ensures that instructional practices and course content can integrate and respond to emerging issues related to the safety, health, and/or academic resilience of BI Scholars.

Utilizing Data-Informed Continuous Improvement

A primary component of the BI experience is the seminar for first- and second-year Scholars. The seminar was designed using data from extensive interviews and focus groups with undergraduate men of color at UW to better understand their experiences, needs, and concerns. This data was integrated with findings from the literature on men of color and expertise from UW faculty, staff, and students on the BI Steering Committee. Through these data-driven processes, the first year curriculum was developed in response to opportunities and challenges that BI staff believed to be pertinent to the inaugural cohort of BI Scholars. Beginning in the first year, comprehensive course and initiative assessments were examined to modify future versions of the seminars.

With each new cohort, the BI course pedagogy and content strives to become increasingly more relevant to the experiences and perspectives of men of color at the University of Washington. Utilizing data gathered from comprehensive quarterly surveys, individual interviews, assignments and reflections, advisor check-ins, and more traditional student success metrics (GPA, fall-to-fall retention, etc), the content and delivery of the BI courses continues to evolve to meet the academic needs and cultural commitments of the BI Scholars.

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2 Although most often associated with visual research methods, it can also be used as a pedagogical approach whereby students take photographs in response to a question or prompt, and write an accompanying paragraph to elaborate on their response. For more information on visual methods see Kelly & Kortegast (2018).

Sources

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The nine briefs exploring the BI Theory of Action include:

- Introduction to BI Theory of Action
- Sense of Belonging for Men of Color
- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for Men of Color
- Culturally Responsive Guidance for Men of Color
- Continuity of Support for Men of Color
- Academic Guidance and Support for Men of Color
- Psychosocial and Identity Development for Men of Color
- Career Development and Professionalization for Men of Color
- Community-Based Learning and Leadership Development for Men of Color

These briefs are available at https://brotherhoodinitiative.org/research

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