*REPORT*
**CUES Mapping Educational Challenges Workshop on**
**"Advancing the Scholarship of Culturally Responsive Teaching & Learning (CRTL)"**

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## Introduction

As a Land Grant, Hispanic Serving Institution, the University of Arizona has a unique opportunity to engage and learn from the Borderlands community in which we are situated, and to support sustainable relationships with Arizona's Native Nations and tribal communities. In this report, we summarize learnings and recommendations from a two-day, in person Center for University Education Scholarship (CUES) Mapping Educational Challenges (MECha) workshop held in February and March of 2025, at the U of A. This workshop focused on connecting teaching and learning in our Land Grant, Borderlands, Tribal, and desert communities to the classroom experience in ways that support and expand pedagogical practices. We explored ways to extend the classroom off campus and into the community, and furthered possibilities for advancing the scholarship of culturally responsive teaching and learning. In what follows, we share insights for advancing the scholarship of place-based and culturally responsive teaching and learning. We connect the workshop learnings and recommendations with possibility models, evidence-based inquiry, the U of A's strategic plan, and our local communities.

The stated objective of the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning MECha Workshop was "to generate ideas for studying the scholarship of teaching and learning that seeks to understand culturally responsive teaching and learning." Over the course of two days, 27 participants (including the facilitators), spanning 13 colleges and 4 units/offices, explored methods and critical practices for advancing scholarship on culturally responsive and place-based learning across various disciplines and classroom spaces—focusing specifically on the following:

1. **Discussions of culturally responsive teaching and learning as it connects to place, institutional identities, and diverse forms of knowledge.** Through various exercises, discussions and experiential learning, participants shared their challenges and successes in connecting their teaching to the greater Tucson and Borderlands community. Conversations focused on the role of the instructor and the student, and how advancing culturally responsive teaching and learning can translate into student success.

2. **Create connections between course content, local, and place-based knowledge systems.** Exercises within the context of the workshop allowed participants to examine and brainstorm how to better connect with students by connecting place-based knowledge systems with course content, honoring local place-based knowledge physically, emotionally, and environmentally. Discussions analyzed what has worked well and what challenges remain.

3. **Generate ideas for multiple forms of student success in culturally responsive teaching and learning spaces.** The focus of the workshop was magnified with a trip to a local gallery and community organization in South Tucson in which participants brainstormed ways to bring the local, cultural, and place-based knowledge into the classroom and bring the classroom into

community spaces. Turning the focus back to campus, the group considered student success in current programs and ideated methodologies for future growth and development in both teaching and learning.

The workshop objective and discussion were guided by the following questions:
- How have culturally responsive teaching and learning practices been incorporated into courses at the University of Arizona? What examples of placed-based or local knowledge have influenced these courses? What has worked well? What challenges remain?
- What role does the instructor or faculty member play in advancing culturally responsive teaching and learning? What role do the students play? What does or can student success look like in these courses? What do we need to know and how might we study it?
- What resonated with you (participants) from the Galeria Mitotera[1] art and mural tour as it relates to culturally responsive teaching and learning? How might locally-based knowledge and place-based examples be incorporated into classroom learning? How do we decide whose (or what) knowledge(s) to prioritize in culturally responsive teaching and learning spaces?
- What methodologies and methods are best suited to study culturally responsive teaching and learning? How do we know?
- What does it look like to ask scholarly questions and study the topics discussed during this workshop? What considerations or recommendations would you (participants) share for others preparing to engage in studying culturally responsive teaching and learning?

**Culturally Responsive and Place-Based Perspectives & Opportunity**

When Gloria Ladson-Billings first introduced the concept and practice of **culturally relevant pedagogy** [2], she argued that culturally responsive pedagogy supported students' academic success (intellectual growth), cultural competence (appreciating culture of origin and gaining knowledge of other cultures), and sociopolitical consciousness (learning beyond the classroom). Her work emphasized that culture is fluid, not static, and we must move beyond superficial and reductionist notions of culture[3]. Geneva Gay[4] defined **culturally responsive pedagogy** (CRP) as grounded in the assumption that when "academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students; they are more personally meaningful and more easily and thoroughly learned" (p. 106). She further described the "cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). Gay emphasized that CRP encompasses (1) developing a cultural knowledge base, (2) designing culturally relevant curricula, (3) demonstrating cultural caring and building community, (4) cross cultural communication, and (5) cultural congruity in classroom learning. Many scholars (see resources and readings below) have expanded Ladson-Billings' and Gay's scholarship

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[1] Galeria Mitotera is a Latinx/Queer owned gallery located in the City of South Tucson, Arizona. Co-Owners, Mel Dominguez & Melissa Brown-Dominguez opened Galeria Mitotera in July 2018 as a space to celebrate their culture, uplift artists of color in the community and create a safe space for community members and artists to inspire one another through art and togetherness. https://www.galeriamitotera.com

[2] Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.

[3] Ladson-Billings, G. (2014) Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: aka the remix. *Harvard Educational Review*. 81(1), 74-84.

[4] Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education.* 53(2), 106-116.
Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

and emphasized the importance of culturally sustaining practices, connection to sociopolitical consciousness, and the value of place-based pedagogies.

Understanding the wealth of local and community content and integrating that knowledge into our teaching and learning practices are central to **place-based pedagogy.** Additionally, we draw on the following to further critical and meaningful place-based practice (see Ball & Lai[5]):

- Emphasize positive and asset-informed representations of place inhabitation
- Learn critical tools for understanding and participating in not only local social and ecological issues, but in the processes and histories that play a role in constituting such local issues
- Practice in ways that are sensitive to cultural differences among individuals and groups who reside in and near the institution
- Practice in ways that are sensitive to the inequitable distributions of power and authority associated with different cultures and ethnic groups
- Recognize there will not be a single most important immediate focus for all place-based pedagogy.

As Ball and Lai remind readers, place-based pedagogy is not solely focused on teaching about local contexts, but also on listening to, empowering and partnering with local communities and place-based knowledge. Drawing upon the rich discussions and knowledge shared during the two-day workshop and guided by decades of scholarship on the topic, we turn now to our challenge and call to action.

### The Challenge & Our Call to Action

Culturally responsive teaching and place-based learning are central to higher education discourse, yet significant gaps persist between institutional aspirations and classroom realities. While such lenses hold immense transformative potential, they are often diluted, marginalized, or unevenly implemented in university initiatives, limiting their capacity to revolutionize educational approaches. For Land Grant and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) engaging in place-based learning that reflects and uplifts the communities we serve is not just an imperative but a responsibility: it enriches the educational experience and fosters student belonging and empowerment. This work requires building relationships grounded in local contexts, integrating community knowledge systems into curricula, and positioning students' cultural assets as essential to learning. When authentically practiced, these approaches forge student-centered environments that weave academic content together with unique local ways of knowing and lived experience.

Yet, the path to implementation remains complex. Many faculty are not prepared to engage pedagogical tools or design courses rooted in culturally responsive frameworks. Rigid disciplinary structures further inhibit integration, creating silos that stifle innovation, and limit systemic change. Students' lived experiences and "funds of knowledge"[6] are too often treated as tangential to the learning experience, reinforcing dominant epistemologies while marginalizing non-dominant or non-white ways of knowing.

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[5] Ball, E.L. & Lai, A. (2006). Placed-based pedagogy for the arts & humanities. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, 6(2), 261-287. See pages 271-273 for further discussion on summarized points.

[6] Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, *31*(2), 132–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534

As an HSI & Land Grant institution in the Sonoran Desert borderlands, we are both called and positioned to lead in advancing culturally responsive education. The U of A's strategic plan, *Delivering on Our Promise*[7], explicitly calls for place-based learning experiences that leverage "the strengths of our borderlands region" to ensure "success for every student." This vision recognizes our distinctive capacity to advance approaches that honor both academic rigor and cultural responsiveness. Translating this institutional commitment into systematic pedagogical practice demands rigorous inquiry into how culturally responsive teaching and learning can be authentically integrated across disciplines.

Like the Saguaro cactus, which sustains the Sonoran ecosystem through interconnected relationships, culturally responsive and place-based scholarship can serve as a keystone practice that transforms the experience on how we teach, learn, and engage with our students and communities. The question is not whether we can afford to advance this scholarship—it is whether we can afford not to.

## Recommendations

These recommendations that follow capture workshop discussions, ideations, and possibilities. As readers consider potential scholarly or research projects, we encourage you to attend to recommendations across all categories below.

### *Recommendations for Teaching and Learning*

*Institution*
- Increase the number of opportunities for university employees to communally engage with culturally responsive pedagogies and place-based learning
    - **Example:** Hosting workshops like MECha. *Participants repeatedly stated how thankful they were for the opportunity to engage in this workshop and to have an affirming space to connect with others on campus.*
    - **Example:** Supporting employees to attend and develop trainings on navigating the current sociopolitical climate as it relates to teaching and learning. *Participants mentioned the need for resources, language and mechanisms for engaging in reflective conversations.*
- Prioritize efforts that center the culture, language and perspectives of minoritized and multilingual students
    - **Example:** Increasing funding for initiatives such as the Curriculum Development Institute (CDI). *Participants stated it was helpful to have a mechanism to share and receive feedback on examples of how culture and place can be incorporated into various disciplines.*
    - **Example:** Building further capacity for classes taught in Spanish. *Participants discussed promoting bilingual education and bilingualism as an asset through teaching in English and Spanish, including bilingual courses and/or having a section of a class in Spanish.*

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[7] Delivering on Our Promise: Strategic Imperatives for Arizona's Keystone Institution (Fall 2025). https://president.arizona.edu/delivering-on-our-promise

*Faculty and Staff*

- Work with local organizations and build on existing partnerships[8]
  - **Example:** Galeria Mitotera. *Participants agreed that culturally responsive pedagogy would benefit from an outside of class experience within the local community. Our tour with Galeria Mitotera evoked feelings of peace and grounding that participants agreed is a goal for how students may experience culturally responsive teaching. University employees should be a bridge between the local community and the university.*
- Leverage university programs, channels and communities of practice
  - **Example:** Applying to and engaging in the U of A Curriculum Development Institute (CDI). *Participants entered the MECha workshop with questions about how to strategically describe their efforts and how to apply culturally responsive pedagogy. We discussed using opportunities such as the CDI to define, describe and promote culturally responsive teaching.*
- Re-think classroom experience, materials and messaging
  - **Example:** Including culturally responsive, place-based materials, experiences, and assignments that are meaningful to students. *Consider what texts and perspectives are included and excluded in our classrooms. Integrate culturally responsive assignments within courses whereby students can design, study, and present on their own learning processes.*
  - **Example:** Providing students opportunities to bring their whole selves to the classroom. *When asked to describe an artifact, participants were emotional, vulnerable and empowered. This act of storytelling is humanizing and provided an opportunity for each participant to share their experiences and knowledge. This also allowed participants to connect, build relationships and contribute personal perspectives from familial interactions.*
  - **Example:** Empowering and engaging students by giving them choice and autonomy. *Participants gave several examples about how they integrate choice into their classes through collaborative activities like building community agreements.*
  - **Example:** Engaging in student-instructor co-creation and collaboration. *Participants repeatedly touched on the idea of students as valued knowers and colleagues. As mentors, we should build opportunities for creative activities that center student strengths, including them as collaborators and change agents in projects like participatory action research (PAR).*
  - **Example:** Normalizing an open-mindset and learning as a process. *As instructors, we should model learning as a process and normalize the revisiting of concepts and frameworks. In most disciplines, the incorporation of culture is a new idea which necessitates a growth mindset about the student educational experience.*

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[8] Also see the CUES 2022 Spanning Boundaries project as another example of partnering with local community organizations. https://cues.arizona.edu/2022-cues-spanning-boundaries-challenge

- ○ **Example:** Proactively considering our personal bias and how this "shows up" in university spaces. *Participants discussed recognizing their privilege and conducting self-assessment by "grading themselves" and taking any relevant training. It is important that we recognize our students as stakeholders and practice active listening when they communicate their needs/wants of the academy.*

### *Recommendations for Research and Scholarship*

- ● Examine multiple metrics of student success (e.g. student wellness and/or mental health) that move beyond traditional institutional data points (e.g. GPA, retention rates)
  - ○ **Example:** Design new measures for studying student success, which may include student wellness and/or mental health.
- ● Prioritize multiple methodologies including qualitative methodologies, community-based research, and participatory action research[9] (PAR) that also ensures students, campus partners, and community partners are included in the research—as co-researchers (e.g. PAR) and as active participants whose voices and stories are centered.
  - ○ **Example:** *Spanning Boundaries 2022—Community Stories of Sustainability and Resilience: Promise for the Learning Experience. Participants noted throughout the workshop the importance of including community members and students as co-authors and co-researchers.*
- ● Utilize research projects to center and highlight students' cultural knowledge and their ways of knowing and thinking.
  - ○ **Example:** Integrate asset-based frameworks to guide the scholarship like Funds of Knowledge[10] and Community College Wealth[11]. *Integrating students' cultural knowledge is a core element of culturally responsive teaching practices. Continuing the practice within the development of research projects provides opportunity for students to see themselves as researchers.*
- ● Disaggregate quantitative and institutional data to better understand the stories of various groups and communities of students.
  - ○ **Example:** Estela Bensimon's[12] scholarship on equity-mindedness. *Disaggregating and interpreting data to understand and address challenges are necessary components of Bensimon's equity by design.*

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[9] We again point readers to the 2022 Spanning Boundaries project where PAR methods were utilized with students and community partners. https://cues.arizona.edu/2022-cues-spanning-boundaries-challenge. See also the resources and reading list which includes many community-based and PAR methodology resources.

[10] Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31, 132–141.

[11] Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006

[12] Bensimon, E.M. (2024). What is Equity-Mindedness? Los Angeles: Bensimon & Associates. https://reji-bsu.org/overview-equity-mindedness/

*Recommendations for Scholarly Dissemination*
- Partner with community members to host open-houses and receptions whereby community members engage with the scholarship, offering feedback and insight about broadening the efforts.
    - **Example:** Galeria Mitotera. *Return to the sites where community partner organizations or local businesses are housed. In doing so, we continue to prioritize local and community knowledge while also supporting local economy. Further, we remove access barriers that might exist when asking community members to come to campus for events.*
- Develop a collaborative and interdisciplinary special issue highlighting the practices and scholarship of culturally responsive teaching and learning in publications.
    - **Example:** *About Campus,* a scholarly magazine, led by Dr. Z Nicolazzo (MECha workshop participant). *Participants were excited about the possibility of partnering across disciplines to co-develop and co-author publications highlighting their scholarship.*

## Acknowledgements

## Author Bios

**Corin Gray**, formerly known as Corin White is a molecular biologist identifying as an African American Scholar and first generation. In 2010, she received her bachelor's from Spelman College and a doctorate studying ecological genomics from Kansas State University in 2015. Her research interests range from basic science to undergraduate sense of belonging and she has published work in journals such as Frontiers in Cellular and Infection Microbiology and Online Learning. At the U of A, she serves as an Assistant Professor of Practice in the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology where she teaches both upper and lower division courses.

**Judy Marquez Kiyama** is a Professor in the Center for the Study of Higher Education, Department of Educational Policy Studies and Practice. Judy is a community-engaged scholar with nearly 25 years of experience in research, practice, and administration. She works to interrogate systems of power that perpetuate inequities for minoritized communities and is committed to understanding the cultural and collective resources drawn upon to confront and (re)shape such systems. Judy served as the Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Development from 2020-23 and furthered the U of A's HSI efforts around equity-focused faculty recruitment and hiring practices, developing faculty capacity in research, teaching and curriculum, and service, including creating and overseeing the Curriculum Development Institute.

**David Morden** is an Associate Professor of Voice and Movement in the School of Theatre, Film and Television where he performed in *Proof,* directed *Lend Me a Tenor* and *Inspecting Carol* for Arizona Repertory Theatre, and directed three one-act adaptations of *Medea* for the Studio Series. He has acted locally with The Rogue Theatre (Polonius in *Hamlet*, Louis de Rougemont in *Shipwrecked!*, Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, among others). David also directed The Rogue's productions of *Measure for Measure*, *Major Barbara*, *Ghosts*, *A Delicate Balance*, *The Goat*, *among others*. David has performed regionally and internationally at the ACT Theatre, Greek Active, the Utah, Colorado and Seattle Shakespeare Festivals as well as Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, DC, and at the Jagriti Theatre in Bangalore, India, where he also taught a voice workshop for actors.

**Tarnia Newton** is an Associate Clinical Professor in the College of Nursing and a family nurse practitioner (FNP). Her focus of interest is exploring the advancement of health for all through culturally responsive pedagogy and service-learning immersive experiences as alternative interventions to improve cultural humility and population health. Her approach emphasizes experiential learning that connects students directly with community needs, fostering a deep understanding of how social determinants of health impact wellness outcomes. This community-centered education model prepares graduates to develop innovative, place-based solutions that advance health for all by addressing health inequities at their roots.

**Resources and Readings**

In addition to the resources cited in the report, the following sources helped inform the discussion during the workshop and can be useful when developing a research project around the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Esposito, J., & Evans-Winters, V. (2021). *Introduction to Intersectional Qualitative Research.* SAGE Publications.

Friedman, B.D. (2020). *Community-based participatory action research: It's all about the community.* Wiley & Sons.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014) Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: aka the remix. *Harvard Educational Review*. 81(1), 74-84.

Paris, D. (2012) Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93-97.

Paris, D. & Alim, S. (2017). What Are We Seeking to Sustain Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 85-100.

Paris, D., & Winn, M. (2014). *Humanizing research*. SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544329611

Smith, L. T. (2012). Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. *Contemporary Sociology*, *29*(3), 567. https://doi.org/10.2307/2653993

Tachine, A., & Nicolazzo, Z. (2022). *Weaving an otherwise: in-relations methodological practice*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Thambinathan, V., & Kinsella, E. A. (2021). Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *20*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211014766

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