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International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design

Volume 7 • Issue 1 • January-March-2017 • ISSN: 2155-6873 • eISSN: 2155-6881
An official publication of the Information Resources Management Association

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Designing Counter-Narratives: Constructing Culturally Responsive Curriculum Online

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ABSTRACT

The growing field of online education has developed inside a cultural context rooted in racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of inherent bias. Likewise, the design and development of online curriculum is not excluded from the biases that have historically plagued face-to-face curriculum. In this article, the authors call online teachers into action by encouraging them to adopt an engaged instructional design praxis that builds learning environments inclusive of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. Through the use of culturally responsive teaching, online teachers can create spaces of counter narrative that address curricular blindnesses and promote social justice.

KEYWORDS:
Counter-Narratives, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Curricular Blindnesses, Online Education, Social Justice Praxis

INTRODUCTION

As social justice teachers, it is important for us to understand the political, social, and cultural contexts in which the burgeoning growth of online education is occurring. Racial, gender, and ethnic biases that teachers bring with them into the virtual classroom can directly impact the ways in which they engage students, especially students of color. Not only are teachers changed by the hidden ideologies they maintain but their students are also negatively affected. When teachers bring their inherent biases into their classrooms, those biases impact students’ self-efficacy and confidence. In her essay, Audre Lorde (1978) referred to the inherent biases of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia as “human blindnesses” that are rooted in “the inability to recognize or tolerate the notion of difference as a beneficial and dynamic human force” (p. 31). Human blindness and the devaluing of human difference create what we term curricular blindnesses. Curricular blindnesses are policies and practices rooted in racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia—blindnesses that fail to recognize and value diversity in the curriculum. Unacknowledged racist beliefs and discriminatory practices of teachers allow for the vicious cycle of deficit thinking to continue in American education, which subsequently maintaining the curricular blindnesses both in traditional and online education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

The purpose of this article is to provide critical reflections on racial and gendered curricular blindnesses within the curriculum, both classroom-based and online while providing culturally responsive alternatives through the use of critical teaching and design practices. As co-authors of this article, we generally talk about curricular blindness that occurs within online courses in higher
education without focusing on a specific discipline because we are aware of the far-reaching impact of inherent racial and gendered bias across disciplines.

Critical reflections and culturally responsive design practices addressed in this article are grounded in education for social justice. Through the use of critical race theory (CRT) and Black womanist theory (BWT), we introduce key components necessary for developing critical online pedagogy as a means of addressing the human and curricular blindesses inherent in higher education. In short, we agree with Christian and Zippay (2012) in that “teachers must develop a knowledge base that includes knowledge about culture—their own and that of others and attitudes and beliefs necessary to teach diverse students effectively” (p. 38). As the field of online education continues to expand and grow, especially with massively open online courses (MOOCs) that reach the world, it is of vital importance that teachers become leaders in developing curriculum and course offerings that act as counter-narratives to the dominant narratives of White supremacy and gender oppression.

**Theoretical Frameworks: Critical Race and Womanist Theories**

To interrogate and critically analyze the curricular blindesses in both traditional and online courses, CRT and BWT are used as theoretical groundings for the analysis. CRT has been used throughout the field of education to analyze curriculum. It has informed educational praxis, research design, and interdisciplinary ways of evaluating issues of race, class, and gender (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Seeking to introduce racial issues into the examination of law and society, scholars of color began using CRT as an alternate tool for discourse analysis as it offers scholars alternative viewpoints to dominant Anglocentric perspective (Lynn, 1999). In their examination of the field of education, Lynn and Adams (2002) found that CRT “allows scholars to acknowledge [the] racist epidemic in American culture…and allows for the recovery and use of the relevant histories of People of Color” (p. 88). In short, CRT can be used as the basis for examining the condition of people of color through a racial lens without negating other aspects of their identity such as gender and class (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 1999; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002; Yosso, 2002). Through the CRT lens, we gain a pivotal awareness of the need for a more socially just curriculum—a curriculum that makes room for counter-storytelling and that exposes racial curricular blindesses (Carbado, 2002; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). By using CRT in online teaching, instructors “make changes to their online teaching strategies in a way that challenges the status quo, and ultimately facilitate transformative learning for the students themselves” (Wang & Torrisi-Steele, 2015, p. 20).

BWT was developed as an alternative to inherent biases of sexism and racism within Afrocentrism and feminism, respectively. The emergence of the “womanist/Black feminist milieu began to take shape in the nexus of the civil rights and women’s rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s” even though the roots of resistance reach back to the work done by Black women to end slavery (Ross, 2015, p. 361). The term womanist was first used by Alice Walker to characterize the Black woman-centered philosophy and became popularized by Black feminist scholars like Katie Cannon, Margaret Shaw, and Layli Maparyan. BWT provides a framework for examining the intersections of race, class, and gender in the curriculum, scholarship, and research. “Race, gender and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). BWT challenges these neo-liberal frameworks by providing a holistic worldview that places the experiences of Black women, and other women of color, at the center of understanding, thus removing them from their lived experiences at the margins (Woodley, 2013).

By centering the female experience in theory and research, BWT creates a context for understanding gendered, racial, and cultural experiences (Blackmon, 2008; Kolawole, 1997; Ross, 2015). The womanist worldview and its associated social movement is “rooted in the lived experience of survival, community building, intimacy with the natural environment, health, healing, and personal
growth among everyday people from all walks of life, and articulated primarily but not exclusively by women of color from around the world, and now a gift to all humanity” (Maparyan, 2012, para. 1). Thus, the womanist perspective reaches across national and international borders incorporating women’s accounts of their lives throughout the African Diaspora (Johnson, 2014; Singh, 2014). In our research and writing of this article, the BWT framework provides us with a lens for examining gendered curricular blindnesses in online education.

Faculty, staff, and even the general public believe that cultural responsiveness is automatic in online learning, as teachers do not have physical interaction with students. Yang and Cornelius (2004) posited that the separation of students and teachers in time and space in online education removes the identification of race and gender and thereby “presents a bias-free teaching and learning environment for instructors and students” (p. 863). However, this concept of a bias-free teaching and learning environment is problematic because, as Mills (2003) stated in regard to traditional face-to-face curriculum, “the importance of race is diminished and sometimes completely eliminated when education, democracy, and capitalism are conflated and discussed within racially ‘neutral’ and colorblind paradigms” (as cited in McKnight & Chandler, 2012, p. 76). If curriculum designers for online learning do indeed consider groups of learners as homogenous, then they fail to consider the cultural experiences of students, particularly students of color, who may feel disconnected from these learning environments. By ignoring the reality of race, gender, and class, institutions add to the barriers that minority students already face as distance learners.

The continued discussions revolving around the digital divide as well as the achievement gap indicate that certain students face particular barriers to online learning. Such barriers as “a lack of availability and accessibility of technology, the quality of support, and insufficient development of skills” are extensions of these disparities and predominantly affect students of color and low socioeconomic statuses (Becker, Newton, & Sawang, 2013, p. 217). Clearly, students are not homogenous; they each face their own set of barriers based on race, gender, class, and ability. It becomes apparent, then, that a deficit model of teaching results from a failure to recognize and accommodate diversity, which validates our concept of curricular blindnesses. The connection between race, culture, and gender barriers to learning are supported by the data visible in dropout rates, student behavior issues, and student performance in classrooms (Valencia, 1997). In the end, the dismissal of students’ cultural experiences negatively impacts their achievement and retention rates through a failure to establish culturally responsive online learning environments (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). An educational system that remains blind to the needs of diverse student populations will continue to view student attrition as a cultural or gendered deficiency instead of as the institution’s failure to meet these students’ needs. “If institutions wish to train future professionals who can compete in a diverse society, these institutions must make racial sensitivity a primary part of the curriculum” (Diggles, 2014, p. 32). Taken together, CRT and BWT become meaningful frameworks for analysis throughout this article as they provide us with tools for exposing historical inequities, curricular blindnesses, and inherent biases in American education. Exposing these inequities is vital to understanding and acknowledging the need for a critical online pedagogy that validates the specific needs of marginalized students while expanding the worldviews of all online students.

Anglocentric Inclinations: A Historically Biased Curriculum

Racism, sexism, and classism are major threads woven into the fabric of the American educational system (Chan & Wang, 1991; Cheng & Yang, 2015; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Ogbu, 1978; Wiley & Wright, 2004; Yosso, 2002). Anglocentrism has been the dominant model and framework for adult education and instructional design in American higher education (Crichlow, 2015). This is apparent in everything from the Germanic lecture style to the positivist approaches to research and teaching practice. In an attempt to legitimate educational research as scientific, positivist constructs try to center Anglocentric experiences as normative and the only experiences worthy of consideration (Keisch & Scott, 2015; Woodley, 2013). Thus, White privilege places the experiences of Anglo-Americans
at the center of inquiry by naming their experience as “universal or normative,” while “all else by default becomes marginal” (James & Farmer, 1993, p. 120). This exclusionary viewpoint argues for a contextualization of curriculum from a historical perspective that privileges the experiences of the oppressor over the oppressed. In both traditional and online educational environments, an Anglocentric approach has led to a curriculum that privileges the White experience over the experience of minorities in American society.

Anglocentrism in education is a problem that reaches beyond the United States. In a study out of Finland, one researcher looked specifically at what the students bring into their online courses. The two areas of interest were the student’s knowledgeability and his or her activity (or participation) in the online class. The research indicated that the more active a student is in the course, the more successful that learning environment will become (Neiminen, 2015). While this data seems valid, it does not go far enough to address Anglocentrism in online spaces. We argue that there is a need to look into why some students do not participate as often or as actively as others. Our notion is that students from diverse cultural, racial, economic, and religious backgrounds may not feel included in or connected to the material or course design, which could result in their non-participation or low success rates in online courses. Similarly, another article by two Turkish researchers glides over the cultural aspect of designing online curricula. Cinar and Zuzun (2016) mentioned in brief that, among other aspects such as interactive learning and an awareness of the learner’s preferences, online curriculum must be “sensitive to cultural differences” (p. 382). While we certainly agree, we find that the authors did not approach online course design through a multicultural lens, nor did they detail how to create spaces that are effectively sensitive to marginalized distance learners. Across the globe, curricular Anglocentrism is the norm, and if it is discussed, it is typically done so in passing or as just one element of proposed changes.

Despite the underrepresentation of culturally diverse curricula, there are some paths being forged. Anglocentrism has been readily accepted within the academy, but many social justice teachers are challenging these notions of power, domination, and systemic oppression through the development of alternative curricular pedagogies (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Giroux, 1979; Pinar, 1995; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007; Valencia, 1997). The discrimination and systematic oppression of people of color persist even though some curriculum within higher education has become inclusive of race, class, and gendered perspectives. McKnight and Chandler (2012) found that “institutional versions of curriculum are predisposed toward anti-democratic education because they tend to marginalize or entirely exclude the voices of the ‘other’ by way of privileging and socially reproducing the patriarchal, white normative perception of the world” (p. 4475). This lack of democracy within curriculum perpetuates the silencing of diverse voices.

As we have seen, curricula design and development within higher education systems are not impervious to racist, sexist, and classist bias (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993; Pinar, 1995). Such inherent biases can be seen in everything from educational policies to the design and development of curriculum. Instructional design, “a systematic process that is employed to develop education and training programs in a consistent and reliable fashion” (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007, p. xx), within the American education system is grounded in an Anglocentric perspective, which supports systems of oppression and marginalization (hooks & West, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Pinar, 1995). The growing field of online education has developed inside a cultural context influenced by the same types of curricular blindesses.

**Constructing Change: Toward a Critical Online Pedagogy**

The issues of curricular blindesses that are woven throughout academia are merely reflections of the problems inherent in the larger society. Because curriculum mirrors society, an Anglocentric point of view becomes the dominant perspective in education and one that is promoted over others, which in turn dictates educational policy and practice (Atwater, Freeman, Butler, & Draper-Morris, 2010). This dominant perspective is even perpetuated in foundational instructional design theories.
like Jerome Bruner (1966), Herbert Simons (1996), and M. David Merrill (2002). Such racial and gendered dominance in instructional design generates a need for the reverse, namely, an inclusion of minority perspectives, a space for counter-narratives, and an approach to teaching that is culturally responsive. According to Andrade (2015), “online learning has much potential for providing access to diverse populations of learners,” but instructors must design a pedagogy that helps all learners to succeed (p. 8). In opposition to an Anglocentric approach, we recommend using a culturally responsive teaching method, which acknowledges the lived experiences of students (Gay, 2000; Johnson, 2014).

Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). We view this theory of culturally responsive teaching as a necessary means of providing teachers with opportunities to engage students more deeply in social justice issues. Moreover, a culturally responsive curriculum affords students access to resources that will further develop them as critical agents for social change. In the case of this article, we maintain that online teachers should apply this theory specifically to develop curriculum that challenges the dominant paradigms in not just face-to-face classrooms but virtual ones as well.

Due to the potential for anonymity (Caruthers & Friend, 2014), online teaching is an often-overlooked arena of education that requires culturally responsive teaching for the benefit of all learners. According to Bandura (1977), “teaching that addresses a student’s cultural traditions affects not only the learning process, but also the student’s self-efficacy—the student’s belief in his or her ability to achieve a specified goal” (as cited in Martins-Shannon & White, 2012, p. 4). Bandura’s (1977) connection between culture and a student’s level of confidence and ability to learn becomes all the more relevant in the realm of online learning, where teachers must rely heavily on texts, images, and resources as opposed to direct student/teacher interaction. By making room for alternative perspectives, a culturally responsive approach to designing online curriculum promotes students’ achievement “by teaching diverse students through their own cultural filters” in spite of the distance between student and teacher (Gay, 2013, p. 50).

As social justice teachers, who are grounded in and committed to culturally responsive teaching, we make the following recommendations for the development of culturally responsive online curriculum and teaching practices.

Recommendation #1: Create Culturally Responsive Learning Environments

To begin, teachers must strive to develop culturally responsive online learning environments. To do this, culture should be a key consideration when designing online courses. Wang (2007) argued that “cultural attributes...can affect online presence and learner perceptions,” and he added that there is empirical research needed regarding the ways in which cultural attributes influence learners’ engagement in online activities (p. 295). If students’ success in online courses is tied to their cultures, as Wang (2007) suggested, then, as teachers, we must find a way to design courses to accommodate our diverse student populations. An online course that neglects or ignores diversity leads to the isolation of social intellect and negatively impacts students’ abilities to succeed (Liu, 2005).

More than impacting student success, however, is the notion that developing culturally responsive online learning environments is a matter of repairing prejudice and moving toward solidarity through discussions of differences. Gruber (2015) referred to online teaching and learning using the term stories. She believed that to tell just one story is to create a misinterpretation of people or a place that leads to prejudice and the perpetuation of power. Online learning, she argued, must become more adept at “creating spaces in our classrooms and in our research that welcome multiple stories and multiple approaches to online teaching” (Gruber, 2015, p. 40). She went on to cite Selfe and Hawisher (1999), who posited that the online classroom [was assumed to be] more equitable. Nobody had to worry about gender and race, two features that can easily be determined in face-to-face discussions. Furthermore, economic status or geographic locations were only visible if online students would expose it. Instead, the focus would remain on the interactions and discussions that students could
have in online environments, leaving out potentially discriminatory behavior based on race, gender, class, and economic background. (Gruber, 2015, p. 41)

Selfe & Hawisher’s (1999) early ideas about discrimination in online spaces is neither supported nor satisfactory. For example, Conaway and Bethune (2015) found that while teachers may not be able to “see” the students in their online classrooms, they can and do use the names of their students to form assumptions about race. “Students who are identifiable by race or ethnicity due to name association can be targets of implicit bias by online instructors, possibly having an adverse effect on evaluations of student work or the amount of attention an instructor provides to the student” (Conaway & Bethune, 2015, p. 163). While it may indeed be easier to hide one’s identity or worldview in a distance course, our goal as teachers should not be to ignore or mask diversity but to encourage an online learning environment in which multiple stories and counter-narratives can be shared and celebrated. To this end, we highlight three areas in need of attention and change if we are to begin to develop culturally responsive learning environments: a culturally inclusive curriculum, ethnic and cultural diversity in textbooks, and ethnic and cultural diversity in images.

- **Culturally Inclusive Instructional Design:** One of the most effective ways that we might move toward a culturally inclusive learning environment is through analysis and redesign of the curriculum. In short, we assert that an analysis of the curriculum is essential to ensure that it is inclusive of diverse thought and perspective. Above, we discuss that a historic approach to instructional design was and is based on the White perspective. Such an exclusive approach perpetuates a largely accepted form of institutionalized racism as it silences the voices of all others. Banks’ (1992) call for curricular diversity reflects the urgency of the need for change while indicating that such a change has already begun:

  The Anglocentric curriculum that is institutionalized within our nation’s schools, colleges, and universities is being seriously challenged today and will continue to be tested until it is revised to accurately reflect the experiences, voices, and struggles of people of color, women and other cultural and social groups in American society.” (p. 27)

  Hence, schools, colleges, and universities must develop and adopt a multicultural curriculum when designing online courses. Vai and Soluski (2016) wrote, “Voices from the field serve as a means of bringing the voices and perspectives of different players into the class. Their perspectives may be cultural, educational, economic, social, or political” (p. 145). Our goal as online teachers are to ensure that the curriculum “materials represent current issues” (Vai & Soluski, 2016, p. 145). In short, teachers must acknowledge and validate the cultures and lived experiences of people of color, women, and other marginalized groups in the curriculum itself.

  A practical example of this curriculum review and redesign can be seen in the learning design courses taught by Dr. Woodley, one of the co-authors of the article, at New Mexico State University (NMSU). On initial review of the model course syllabus for the learning design courses, there was an apparent lack of relevant, culturally responsive pedagogy included in the course content. Dr. Woodley was able to integrate scholarship through the use of books and journal articles written from a variety of national and international scholars. As NMSU is situated in the borderlands, it is important to include content for teachers that is relevant for students and families that live in the borderlands. The redesign of the curriculum included incorporating writings from Hispanic authors, evaluation of technology for classroom usage that could be used with a student’s family members, e.g. ClassDojo, as well as students, and even a YouTube social justice project that challenged book bans around the world.

- **Ethnic and Cultural Variance in Textbooks:** Our next suggestion for creating a learning environment that is culturally inclusive is to adopt textbooks that promote ethnic and cultural diversity. The textbooks chosen must be ones that equally consider all students, avoiding the disingenuous color-blindness that can affect textbook selection. According to Kallen (1971),
people are color-blind when “they must pretend not to see [color]; recognizing, they must deny that there is anything to recognize; so far as the difference they perceive is a difference of color” (p. 52). This inauthentic space of textbook selection further reinforces the alienation of diverse perspective within the learning environment.

Through a critical understanding of the concepts contained within culturally responsive teaching theory, teachers can develop an awareness of the impact textbooks bring to a diverse learning environment. For example, Neuwirth (2003) described her experience of teaching before and after learning the story of the Native American experience from insider perspectives. Before, she “used books that gave so-called objective accounts of these groups but were written by scholars who were not intimately knowledgeable about the subject” (p. 275). After, she recognized that she “should have used materials that were written by the people from within the various Native American groups or by others who had firsthand knowledge about both historical and contemporary issues” (p. 275). This is just one example, but it illustrates that adopting textbooks that embrace cultural diversity validates students’ unique funds of knowledge (González & Amanti, 2005).

To avoid the perpetuation of Anglocentrism in online learning environments through the textbook, one of the co-authors of this article avoids assigning a master narrative and instead compiles a collection of readings based on the learning objectives. The course is an online English Composition II course. In it, Lockard creates learning units that contain a variety of texts and readings from diverse voices and writers—these texts function in place of the traditional textbook that students are typically asked to buy and to read. Students are given a list of unit-specific readings and are usually asked to read one or two pieces from that last. Then, to give students an opportunity to access ideas that interest them, students are asked to choose two supplementary readings: an additional reading from the list that Lockard provided and another reading that they locate for themselves outside of the classroom. Replacing the textbook with readings that represent ethnic and cultural diversity is just one way to ensure that the students in our online courses are represented in the course readings.

• **Media Diversification:** Finally, we posit that a culturally responsive online learning environment is one that ensures representation of diverse ethnicities and cultures in the selection and use of images, videos, anecdotes, etc. A teacher who approaches online teaching through a multicultural lens will use pictures, videos, and stories that respect the races, ethnicities, and cultures of all students and also understand the contexts in which they were made. A teacher could use a variety of international and cross-cultural images in support of the subject being taught rather than only using European or American images that may present other cultures in derogatory and dehumanizing ways. Nieto (1992) recommended using “pictures from magazines of people around the world, stories that emphasize the similarities in human feelings across all groups” (p. 287). Online teachers have the opportunity to create spaces where students’ cultures are validated through the use of multicultural visuals, media, and discussions.

Dr. Woodley consistently reviews her course content to ensure that diverse images of people are used in all of her online courses. This includes all stock photos, animations, and even videos that are utilized in the learning modules. Websites like Ted.com, YouTube, and TeachTube provide curriculum designers and teachers with access to international presenters that can provide new levels of meaningful instruction for learners. The continued growth of online resources makes it easier for teachers to get access to images and media that is promote new understanding of people, places, and things. Intentionally including images and media that represent the diverse student population in online learning is one of the easiest ways to begin the transformation to more culturally responsive curriculum.
Recommendation #2: Develop Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Practices

The recommendation regarding curriculum, textbooks, and media help us to see how teachers can work toward creating culturally responsive learning environments. Beyond the learning environment, we also see a need for developing culturally responsive online teaching and learning practices. As the number of students of color continues to grow and the demand for online programs increases, online faculty “should also take into account the dynamics of race, gender, and class when shaping virtual classroom space, recognizing that the virtual teaching space can be just as intimidating and oppressive to students as a real-world classroom” (Turpin, 2007, p. 17). As previously stated, online instructional design has followed the path previously forged by Anglocentric “concepts, paradigms, and content” (Banks, 1991, p. 33). He argued that “although the school and university curriculum remain Western-oriented, this growing number of people of color will increasingly demand to share power in curriculum decision-making and in shaping a curriculum canon that reflects their experiences, histories, struggles, and victories” (p. 33). Hence, culturally responsive teaching is a vehicle that allows for teachers to self-reflect, and a conduit for equity in curriculum that empowers a diverse population of students while expanding the knowledge of all online students. Within an online environment, promotion of racial and gendered equity can lead to deconstructing Anglocentric ideologies while introducing alternative pedagogies into the online environment.

- **Storytelling as a Form of Counter-Narrative:** One of the ways we recommend deconstructing Anglocentric ideologies in online environments in through the inclusion of storytelling exercises and activities. By providing these types of exercises and activities, online teachers create the opportunity for deconstructing stock stories of the dominant culture about “issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender; and including multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives” (Gay, 2002, p. 108). Culturally responsive teaching gives voice to all students and motivates students to share their experiences by using stories as counter-narratives. The stories provide life experiences and help students to situate themselves in learning communities. Ladson-Billings (1998) wrote that “historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression” (p. 14). Storytelling provides spaces for students to present their voices and to understand the impacts of power, race, and gender in society.

Storytelling produces counter-narratives that “contradict the othering process” by allowing students the opportunity to speak from a space that places their experience at the center of inquiry (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). As teachers become “culturally competent leaders . . . who develop and enact a vision of schooling that truly addresses the needs of all students,” students become co-creators in the construction of empowering learning environments (Smith, 2005, p. 28). Thus, storytelling becomes a tool of social engagement and revolutionary praxis in online environments.

There are a variety of technology tools available that provide students with the opportunity to share their stories in online courses. Technology tools like Brainshark®, Storybird®, and Screencast-O-Matic® provide students with the opportunity to record stories through a storyboard function; while tools like Bubblr® and Comic Master® provide students with the opportunity to use animation to tell their tale. Engaging students with online storytelling can be fun as well as empower the students. Another co-author, Mucundanyi, designed a project for his online course requiring students to create Pecha Kucha presentations on different topics revolving around their lived experiences. A Pecha Kucha presentation is composed of 20 slides of pictures, allowing students to become narrators. He recommends that students record their presentations by using free screen recording software such as Screencast-O-Matic or QuickTime Player. Then students post their Pecha Kucha presentations on a discussion board. The discussion board not only provides opportunity for the students to share their stories but it also allows comments for improving their future performances. Based on the
course evaluations, students reveal that sharing their stories via Pecha Kucha is one of their favorite transformative, “aha moments,” of the course.

- **Collaborative Learning:** A second way of deconstructing Anglocentric curriculum online is through the creation of collaborative learning spaces. Collaborative learning exercises and activities, grounded in culturally responsive teaching practices, promote student engagement as well as foster student success in online environments. One area in online courses where this type of critical collaborative praxis can take place is on the discussion boards. Rizopoulos and McCarthy (2009) asserted, “threaded discussions can be successfully used across the content areas to foster group work and encourage higher order thinking skills” (p. 375). Student learning is strengthened as students engage with one another and the teacher via the discussion boards.

According to Ukpokodu (2010), threaded discussions in online learning can promote “communal learning, perspective thinking, and active learning” (p. 245). He argued that discussions are an effective way to promote collegiality and critical thinking among learners. Inside of this collaborative space, social justice educators have the opportunity to act as facilitators that guide students as they begin to interrogate issues of racism, classism, and sexism within culturally responsive online environments. To this end, online learning then becomes a space for practicing freedom as well as engaging in critical reflection (hooks, 1994).

In addition to online discussion boards, Lockard uses two spaces in her online English Composition courses (which utilize the Blackboard platform) for spaces of student collaboration: Blogs and Groups. Historically, she has used the blog function in several different ways, but overall, Lockard uses this as a space for informal writing, idea sharing, and collaboration. In the blog forum, students are encouraged to use hyperlinks, images, informal writing (including emojis and text speak), and attachments to present their ideas and works in progress to their peers. Their classmates, in turn, are expected to “comment” on each other’s blog posts. The general intent in using the blog is to create a space where students post their work and then provide formative, constructive feedback for their peers. The Blackboard platform also has a “Groups” function, which allows the teacher to randomly or deliberately break the online students into small groups. Within those groups, students can create their own private discussion boards, blogs, email forums, and more. Lockard uses these as peer consultation forums where students post their polished essay drafts and, again, receive feedback for improvement. Unlike the blog space, Lockard uses “Groups” as a more formal space for the sharing and critique of student writing. However formally they are used, in these and other online learning spaces, teachers have the opportunity to show students not only the value of collaboration and idea diversity but also the strength of peer-to-peer interaction that is drawn from students’ own “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

**CONCLUSION**

We argue that the development of online curriculum is not neutral of the biases inherent in face-to-face curriculum. As Lee (2003) explained, “The challenge is for designers of learning environments to consider how cultural practices, especially among student populations of color and those living in poverty, may offer opportunities to improve the design of learning technologies” (p. 42). Using the concept of culturally responsive teaching, we can develop a critical online pedagogy that takes into account the unique cultural, ethnic, and gender experiences of distance learners. By validating students who, even in online courses, find themselves in the margins of an Anglocentric educational system, we can begin to move toward a more holistic, inclusive approach to instructional design. Twenty-first-century students are gravitating toward online and mobile learning in droves. As more and more face-to-face classes are translated into virtual ones, it becomes critical to ensure that each student has access to an online learning environment that actively combats the prevailing curricular
blindnesses. A critical online pedagogy developed using the recommendations discussed above will support online teachers in fostering authentically democratic classrooms and will ensure the acknowledgment of alternative perspectives, diverse experiences, and counter-narratives.

As social justice teachers who also teach online, we recommend the use of culturally responsive teaching and instructional design methods that create online learning environments, which challenge the existing curricular blindnesses. While we advocate for online faculty to have a theoretical understanding of the cultural contexts for teaching in critical online environments, it is also vitally important for praxis to come from the theory. Theory without engaged critical praxis is in silent compliance with the dominant narratives of bias and oppression (Freire, Marshall, Bigwood & Ramos, 1976; Gay, 2010; hooks, 1994). We advocate for an engaged critical praxis in online instructional design through the development of culturally responsive curricula that “recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students…[by]…placing them at promise, instead of at risk” (Gay, 2010, p. 1). Within these engaging online spaces, teachers and students co-create learning environments that replace traditional, exclusionary Anglocentric ones. These spaces of counter-narrative cultivate multicultural social learning processes, which allow learners to share their experiences and values (Nevgi, Virtanin & Niemi, 2006). In short, engaged critical praxis uses techniques that empowers each student to build on his or her own cultural, ethnic, and gendered experiences while valuing the experiences of others. An awareness of these modes of communication in addition to the above recommendations for creating culturally responsive learning environments will help teachers establish critical online pedagogies that foster student success.
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International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design

Volume 7 • Issue 1 • January-March 2017 • ISSN: 2155-6873 • eISSN: 2155-6881
An official publication of the Information Resources Management Association

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