



Beyond standards: College and career readiness and culturally responsive curriculum in teacher preparation

Holly Hungerford-Kresser^{a,*}, Carla Amaro-Jiménez^a, John Wesley White^b

^a The University of Texas at Arlington, United States

^b The University of North Florida, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

College and career readiness
Preservice teachers
Teacher preparation
Culturally responsive pedagogy

ABSTRACT

This study looks at the intersection of college and career readiness, culturally responsive pedagogy, and teacher preparation. We sought to uncover preservice teachers' perceptions of college and career readiness as they concluded their teacher preparation coursework. Findings demonstrate how future teachers wrestled with college readiness, and the shift in perspective from a skills-based definition to an understanding of it as a partnership between student and teacher. Our findings suggest the need for teacher preparation curriculum 1) focused on college and career readiness as more than a set of standards, and 2) framed within culturally responsive pedagogies. Our study highlights both as vital to our preservice teachers' development in content specific teaching methods as well as in their ability to thrive in an era of high-stakes testing and accountability.

1. Introduction

Standards in education, worldwide, are not new; they are often tied up in education reform as well as testing and accountability (Sleeter, 2012). As more skilled jobs require a college degree or some sort of postsecondary certification, in the U.S., “college readiness” has become a ubiquitous phrase (McCaughy & Venzia, 2015). To provide context, in the U.S. College and Career Readiness standards (CCRS) are meant to define how “ready” students are to begin their careers after secondary school (grade 12) or embark on post-secondary pathways. College and Career Readiness (CCR) has become part of reform discussions and standards creation, both nationally with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and with some state standards, such as Texas' College and Career Readiness Standards (Educational Policy Improvement Center, 2009). Standards and accountability systems are decades-old concepts, and they routinely serve as sorting mechanisms for students and schools globally, though they are unique to particular areas.

As U.S. schools work to meet testing goals attached to accountability systems, curriculum is often centered around these standards rather than on a more holistic view of students' developmental, cultural, and linguistic needs. CCR, often expected to add rigor to minimum competency state standards, functions as a strong sorting mechanism—tracking students as college bound or not (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017). In the U.S., college is a term that includes higher education institutions offering technical degrees (2-year colleges) as well as traditional universities (4-year colleges). Decades worth of research has shown that deficit-oriented pedagogies, or pedagogies focused on skills students are lacking, rather than the unique cultural gifts they bring to the classroom,

This work was supported by The Greater Texas Foundation under a Faculty Fellowship for First Author.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: hkresser@uta.edu (H. Hungerford-Kresser), amaro@uta.edu (C. Amaro-Jiménez), j.white@unf.edu (J.W. White).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2022.102049>

Received 8 March 2021; Received in revised form 10 August 2022; Accepted 11 August 2022

Available online 2 September 2022

0883-0355/© 2022 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

are particularly detrimental to students in high-poverty schools (Fine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2001). At the same time, student achievement is often tied directly to standards, measured with high stakes exams, while these were created with little to no emphasis on the culturally responsive pedagogies recommended to impact underserved students (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017; Sleeter, 2012).

As novice teachers move into the profession, they are impacted immediately by these policies and practices (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017). With the nationwide focus on CCR, we recognize novice teachers will likely be immediately impacted by competing standards and accountability systems (Miller & Weillbacher, 2020). As teacher educators, we believe it is essential to prepare our pre-service teachers for the complex realities they will face in their future classrooms. Critically responding to standards-based practices as well as honing culturally responsive teaching skills must start in teacher education and continue for in-service teachers (Chouari, 2016). Political trends in education should be taught but with space given to interrogate standards and associated curriculum, within educator preparation programs (Miller & Weillbacher, 2020; Sleeter, 2005). With this in mind, First Author created a curriculum for a Secondary English Language Arts methods class that critically studied CCR standards and initiatives through a culturally responsive lens (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995), centered in culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012). After three semesters of implementation and all data were compiled, we had two research questions for analysis: 1) How do preservice teachers define CCR upon entering the course, and 2) How do preservice teachers' definitions change, if at all, during their methods class?

2. Relevant literature

Although U.S. educational policy highlights the importance of CCR, there is currently no body of research that focuses explicitly on covering CCR in teacher preparation. This suggests novice teachers can be left largely on their own as they learn the demands of CCR and how these impact curriculum, pedagogy, and learning. While negotiating the many demands of novice teaching, they must also seek out ways to make curriculum culturally relevant and culturally sustaining for their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). We use CRP as an umbrella term throughout the paper, meant to include culturally sustaining pedagogies as well. Now, in the state of Texas, particularly, they must do it in a politically charged environment (House Bill 3979, 2021; Lopez, 2022). While CRP is not a new concept, dating back decades, we argue that in teacher education it is foundational to the curriculum, just as the legislated standards are meant to be. Thus we have situated the study of teaching for CCR in the framework of CRP, arguing these need to be woven into preservice teacher education in order to better prepare future and novice teachers for the ever-changing demands of the classroom.

2.1. College and career readiness & standards based reforms

Conley (2010) defines CCR as the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in credit-bearing postsecondary education courses that lead to a baccalaureate program or a high-quality certificate program. The idea that *all* students should graduate from high school able to pursue postsecondary pathways has not been universal (Conley, 2010). Additionally, despite a focus on access to postsecondary education for all students, in the U.S. both policy initiatives and related research to access and attainment are “overwhelmingly focused on the individual level” (Jarsky et al., 2009, p. 368). In other words, the focus is on what can be done to impact individual students via select programs, rather than a focus on general classroom pedagogies themselves, taught across contents, to all students.

For instance, two of the most popular nationwide postsecondary readiness initiatives are Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) (Mehan et al., 1996) and “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs” (GEAR UP) (Standing et al., 2008). AVID students self-select into the program in middle school, while GEAR-UP was focused on cohorts created in the 7th grade. Both efforts focus on offering individual student groups opportunities rather than looking at how CCR is developed in content classrooms in which they are already enrolled. In previous work we highlighted how large college readiness initiatives such as GEAR-UP and AVID require students to self-select as “college bound” or to be a part of a specific cohort of students to receive services. We also noted how most educational models place CCR content as an addition to core courses rather than embedded within them (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017). There has thus far been no research demonstrating the efficacy of embedding postsecondary readiness into students' mandated courses, while retaining a focus on critical pedagogies and culturally responsive teaching—this research attends to that gap.

Educational reforms in the U.S. opt to remain context-blind (Sleeter, 2012), seeking wholesale solutions to problems identified in schools, ignoring connections to frameworks that might nuance these approaches, such as work on underrepresented students and culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). While studies connecting pre-service or novice teachers to college readiness are rare, there is a body of work on Standards-Based Reforms (SBR), and these studies can situate the tensions of novice teachers as they navigate the educational landscape. Early-career teachers are quickly exhausted by the demands of SBR and classroom expectations (Allard & Doeke, 2014). This makes sense, as novice teachers report having to balance content, pedagogy and a mandated-test preparation curriculum. Oftentimes, novice teachers abandon their early understandings of “good teaching” for teaching meant to ensure student success on high-stakes assessments. Tensions are exacerbated when the goals of multiple sets of standards collide with novice teacher beliefs about quality teaching (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017). However, there are case studies of novice teachers who find routes to successfully manage high-stakes accountability, while teaching according to their pedagogical beliefs, and this is often connected back to their teacher preparation curriculum (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017; Zoch, 2017). Teacher education can play an important role in this kind of situated resistance. There are calls in teacher education for “a race-radical #BLM-aligned approach” to novice teacher training (Mayorga & Picower, 2018), but graduates will have to simultaneously navigate the political climates of the schools they teach in. The rising number of novice teachers

in the field added to the numbers of teachers leaving the profession within the first five years, particularly those impacted by high-stakes environments (Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2018), further emphasizes the importance of this work in teacher education. Arguably, the reverberations of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt in the teaching profession for years to come, and will have a decided impact on these issues.

2.2. Historical context: culturally responsive pedagogies

For decades, researchers in the field of education have been studying critical pedagogies or culturally responsive models of teaching (e.g., Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). Gay (2010) defines CRP as teaching that leads to academic success for students by building on the many cultural skills and ways of knowing students have already mastered before arriving in the classroom; the interactions in a culturally responsive classroom teach students “to and through” their cultural strengths and the myriad intellectual capabilities and prior accomplishments (p. 26). Ladson-Billings (1995), in her seminal work with African American students, argued three necessary parts to CRP: high academic expectations and appropriate scaffolds for helping students meet them, reshaping curriculum in ways that allow teachers to build on students “funds of knowledge,” and encouraging a critical consciousness for students in regards to power relations. Over time, scholars have continued this work with different student populations, adjusted terminology, but all with the goal of impacting pedagogy for traditionally marginalized student populations (i.e., Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). CRP is not limited to U.S. contexts, studying the competencies pre-service and in-service teachers need to build student success in a rapidly changing world an international educational issue, remaining timely and relevant (Abacioglu et al., 2020; Alhanachi et al., 2020; Chouari, 2016).

There have been other connected frameworks like Valenzuela’s (1999) “additive schooling,” which argued for models of pedagogy that fully embraced students’ biculturalism and bilingualism, rather than considering them cultural deficits. However, teachers are pressured toward standardization, and this makes CRP increasingly difficult (Sleeter, 2012), because CRP is not typically built into state and CCR standards (Dover, 2013; Miller & Weilbacher, 2020). This standardized curriculum builds pressure requiring teachers to move at a particular pace, invariably coupled with a pressure to raise standardized test scores, by which students, teachers, and schools are held accountable (Achinstejn & Ogawa, 2006). When trying to meet state and national requirements while addressing the needs of underserved students in the classroom, there often is a political tension that arises, as novice teachers work to incorporate successful pedagogy with the pressures of preparing students for standardized exams (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017).

As teachers are pressured to show strict fidelity to an increasingly standardized curricula, incorporating the aforementioned approaches becomes increasingly difficult (Sleeter, 2012). This standardized curriculum requires teachers to move at a particular pace, invariably coupled with a pressure to raise standardized test scores by which students, teachers, and schools are held accountable (Achinstejn & Ogawa, 2006). Further, because CCR standards are generalizable to be appropriate for all student audiences, it does not incorporate CRP. When trying to meet state and national requirements while addressing the needs of underserved students in the classroom, there is often a political tension that arises, as novice teachers work to incorporate successful pedagogy with pressures of preparing students for standardized exams (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2017).

It is clear that teaching in ways that engage all learners impacts student learning, however, much of this research is small in scale, such as classroom case studies, rather than widespread, quantifiable and easily reproduceable (Sleeter, 2012). As a result, the important findings from this area of study rarely find their way into policy work. Sleeter (2012) highlighted a pressing need for more systematic research that links culturally responsive pedagogy to an impact on teacher professional learning and improved student learning. At the same time, she indicated a need for describing and clarifying what CRP means and attending to the cultural contexts of students, as there has been application of the work to a variety of student groups worldwide. Since her call 10 years ago, there is still very little work done in that area, particularly in teacher education.

In sum, while these frameworks find their way into classroom instruction, this tends to happen piecemeal rather than through large policy initiatives or reform efforts. Major reform efforts take a monolithic view of what it means to be college and career ready, and typically ignore cultural relevance all together. As teacher educators, it is important to use culturally responsive models of teaching in our own classrooms, to help our future teachers begin to interrogate standards and policies as they are implementing them (Dover, 2013; Miller & Weilbacher, 2020). In turn, this models for pre-service teachers the kinds of classroom experiences their future students will need in order to thrive. Being “college ready” is about more than the college and career readiness standards that exist in our landscape—it is about being able to think critically and question the systems we find ourselves in.

2.3. The current landscape: #BLM and CRT backlash

Current events demonstrate the need to keep CRP at the forefront of curriculum design and not assume it will ever be permanently uncontroversial. As the global Black Lives Matter (#BLM) movement demonstrates, there is still a need for CRP and anti-racist pedagogy world-wide. One example of worldwide solidarity with #BLM, as well as backlash toward the movement is Australia, where indigenous Australians’ experiences of racism, violence, and oppression have been well-documented and connected to #BLM, as was the case with David Dungay (Bennett, et al., 2021). Support for #BLM in educational policy has been called for by universities more broadly (Anand & Hsu, 2020; Bennett, et al., 2021) and in teacher education more specifically (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). At times, watching the global movement unfold, it felt like the world was supporting the movement. However, with renewed calls and apparent worldwide solidarity has come backlash in the form of educational policy.

Using a local example, we can point to the resulting backlash via the discussion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Texas politics. A controversial issue in the last legislative session (Lopez, 2022), and often misrepresented by politicians and educators who do not

understand the theory in depth, it became a catch-all phrase for anything “anti-white” or that might make (white) students uncomfortable in the classroom (e.g. Roberts, 2021). While many states enacted their own legislation, including neighboring Oklahoma with [House Bill 1775 \(2021\)](#), in Texas this was [House Bill 3979 \(2021\)](#). The legislation, for example, states that in a social studies classroom “a teacher may not be compelled to discuss a particular current event or widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs” and when a teacher does choose to discuss such topics, they must to the best of their ability “strive to explore the topic from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective.” ([House Bill 3979, 2021](#)). This led to attacks on school libraries, teacher development curriculum, and calls for prohibiting CRT in all classrooms ([Lopez, 2022](#)).

While we know this example is contextual to the students we serve, who largely teach in our area after graduating, it is indicative of other movements and issues experienced globally by educators and those who prepare them. In the U.S., policies vary greatly state to state, and while we argue the need for inclusive content for all future educators, we also caution about the context-specific needs of particular groups of students in particular areas of the world. A critical understanding of text, subtext, bias, standards and legislation is critical in the time we are living for many reasons unique to the era, but with an emphasis on the historical significance of the work done around the world prior to this moment.

3. Methods

This longitudinal qualitative study took place in the first author’s English Language Arts and Reading methods class (grades 7–12) over three fall semesters, and each semester was a different cohort of students. Preservice English teachers take the methods course the semester before their clinical teaching (internship) in the spring. First Author received approval to conduct the research via institutional IRB, and only students who opted in were included in the data. As an action research study, the first author collected data throughout her teaching and supervising of students ([Hubbard & Power, 1999](#); [Somekh, 2006, 2009](#)). Data collection pre and post course questionnaires, fieldnotes on students’ classroom discussions, as well as classroom artifacts for triangulation purposes (including all student course assignments). [First Author] used data from each semester to improve curriculum and instruction in the methods class, student teaching semester, and mentoring during the induction years. Action research allowed for near immediate decision-making, and provided data integral to course improvement ([Somekh, 2006, 2009](#)). Now that the three-year study is completed, this paper is focused on analysis across semesters, in particular the pre- and post-questionnaire data.

3.1. Setting

3.1.1. The university

Urban State University (USU), a pseudonym, is located in a large metropolitan area in the southwest. At the time of this study, student enrollment was 34,868. The six-year graduation rate hovers at approximately 45%. Ranked fifth nationally in undergraduate diversity in the U.S., 25.4% of the student body is Hispanic, which gives the institution a designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), though in the past it had obtained a Minority Serving Institution (MSI) designation. At the same time, an estimated 43% of students were eligible for Pell Grants and 29% were first-generation college students. Because there is no state secondary teaching degree, students in this program are technically students in the College of Liberal Arts, making the demographic numbers of the college less specific. Thus, the university-wide demographics, coupled with the course-level demographics are the most accurate in explaining the population of the study.

3.1.2. The teacher preparation program

The College of Education at USU was one of the first two colleges of education in the country to partner with AVID to help preservice teachers create classrooms with an additive, college-going culture and to integrate into their curricula content designed to help prepare these students for college. [Garcia and Guerra \(2004\)](#) describe an additive classroom as one where students, regardless of background or perceived academic ability, are given equal opportunities to pursue the college or career path of their choosing. As part of this partnership, the teaching strategies emphasized within the teacher education programs focused on ways to help K-12 students be college ready. Via professional development sessions, faculty and preservice teachers were introduced to and encouraged to use a CCR focused curriculum in their courses to help strengthen pedagogy and focus on college readiness.

3.1.3. The methods course

The course traditionally had been taught with CRP and multicultural foci in mind, particularly in the selection of texts. However, semester by semester, this study changed the format of the course and the approach to teaching standards. This happened in two main ways: 1) not teaching standards alone, independent of context, 2) focusing on inquiry, allowing students more opportunities to question (with less direct instruction). First Author had always taught standards as “stand alone” entities, meant to demonstrate what needed to be taught to future students. In the past, she had taught standards via direct instruction, in a more cursory way, sharing them and then showing students strategies to apply when teaching the curriculum. Via this study, she began to teach standards as texts forged in particular eras and the political climates of those eras, just as she would with any other standard literary text. At the same time, over the course of the study, she began to recognize the value of a curriculum devoted to fewer “instructor led” truths, and more opportunity for students to wrestle with CRP and standards via inquiry-based pedagogy individually.

3.2. Participants

Study participants consisted of 33 students who were enrolled in one of three English Language Arts methods courses that the first author taught over 3 years (one section each fall); 27 of these students were females and 6 were males and all but one were juniors or seniors studying to become certified secondary English Language Arts and Reading teachers. The other student was a graduate student studying second language teaching who opted to take the course as an elective. Of the 27 females, nine identified as Latina/o or Hispanic, and two as African-American. 6 of the male students were white, 1 was Asian American. A total of 33 students participated in the voluntary questionnaire at the beginning of the course and 31 at the end of the course. Because this was a part of a course and [First Author] did not want students to feel obligated to participate in the study, all questionnaire responses were anonymous. However, they were coded to be able to connect pre and post questionnaire responses to individual students as well as analyze them across cohorts year to year. Students were not required to answer every question, but most did so. From the questionnaire data, 15 students had transferred to the university from a junior college, 16 started their postsecondary educations there, and 2 had transferred to the university from another four-year institution in the state. The majority graduated from public, suburban high schools; a few students categorized their schools as urban and one was home-schooled. When asked if they considered themselves “college-ready” upon arriving at the university, 16 responded yes, nine said no, and eight gave a combination response (yes/no, i.e., “in some areas yes, in some areas no”). A handful of students indicated they were college ready upon arriving because of their time in a junior college preceding their enrollment.

3.3. Data sources and analyses

Data for this study were collected via a pre and post-course questionnaire given to students in the methods class across three academic years. Quotations highlighted in findings are from these questionnaires. Each questionnaire sought information about students’ backgrounds, K-12 schooling, and the reasoning behind their degree choice(s) and pathways. Open-ended questions focused on participants describing their pre-college experience, their transition to college, their definitions of college readiness, and examples of college readiness they received or had seen in classrooms. On the end-of-semester questionnaire, students were asked to consider their previous responses, their new responses, and discuss how and why their answers had changed from the start of the semester. Questions included: “Describe your college path. Did you go straight to college from high school? (e.g., Did you attend junior college? Did you have a career or time out before attending college?),” “How do you define ‘college readiness?’ Think of this as a question of component parts,” and “What are the MOST important three skills a student needs in order to succeed at the university? Explain your reasoning.”

While the first author used the questionnaire data to make course and program decisions over the course of the study (Hubbard & Power, 1999; Somekh, 2006, 2009), we conducted a fresh analysis of the questionnaire data using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For this analysis, we did not separate out the 3 cohort responses. First, we determined research questions. Second, we individually analyzed the questionnaires, reading for possible codes connected to the research questions. Individually conducting analyses of the data, we sorted the responses into categories that were prevalent in the majority of student responses across all three fall semesters. Third, we discussed our respective codes and combined them into relevant theme threads that each had noted in the data, particularly those related to shifts in perspective. Codes included: defining college readiness, reframing college readiness, personal connections to college readiness, and college ready classrooms. Finally, we collaboratively chose pieces of data from student classroom artifacts that triangulate these themes. Below we discuss the themes that best fit our two research questions.

4. Findings and analysis

We sought to identify how preservice teachers seeking secondary English Language Arts and Reading certification defined CCR both before and after taking a methods class infused with these concepts, situated in culturally responsive theories. Below, we have drawn on participants’ questionnaire responses to help demonstrate the themes we saw across students over multiple semesters, highlighting quotations we feel are emblematic of prominent themes.

RQ1: How do preservice teachers define college and career readiness? To begin, we looked at students’ initial definitions of CCR, at the start of the semester. Responses in the first questionnaire helped us sort participants into three broad categories: 1) those who were unsure what college readiness meant, 2) those who defined it as having a set of skills and knowledge to perform well academically, and 3) those who explicitly drew on their own experiences as college students to define it. For many, these definitions centered on often-used labels we see in the literature such as those grounded in individual study habits (“study skills and/or habits in preparation for achieving higher academic success”), time management (“learning to be organized in your notes and time management”), and maturity to respond to the transition from high school to college (“The maturity required to tackle the tasks and responsibilities that higher education places upon the student”) (Conley, 2010). Students often listed these not as either/or but rather a combination of skills, each of which helped reinforce the other.

Some students acknowledged the necessity of skills while considering more affective factors. For example, many students focused on college readiness as a process that including knowing oneself and learning how to use personal strengths and weaknesses as they transition to college life. One participant wrote:

I think college readiness is knowing how you are as a student. Knowing your study habits, under what conditions you learn best, how do you retain information, I think these are what make someone college ready. Not so much knowing what you want to do for the rest of your life.

Self-awareness (“knowing how you are as a student”) was a common theme among participants, independent of semester of participation or demographics. Students also emphasized a focus on current circumstances rather than focusing on future plans; respondents indicated a desire to focus on the college readiness over career readiness, even shunning the latter (“Not so much knowing what you want to do for the rest of your life”). Others emphasized that college readiness goes beyond knowing oneself and having an organized set of study skills, academic skills, or even knowing oneself. For them, college readiness involved maturity and a state of mind and then capitalizing on both. One student wrote:

I think college readiness really describes how prepared your mind is for college. Your money, your living situation, your car, and everything else aside, being prepared for college really means being ready to take responsibility for yourself and your actions. No one is going to baby you anymore, and you’re responsible for how well you do.

Similarly, the necessity of individual determination to succeed in college was a relevant theme. Students often opted to equate determination and responsibility:

A certain determination and willingness to do what needs to be done is required, and a heightened sense of responsibility. As far as academically, you just have to be willing to make your mind work and knows what works for your learning style; this applies to all contents.

These college students entered this methods course understanding that college readiness includes having the “determination and willingness” to get school done—whether that be learning the content or taking on tasks that were unfamiliar to them—and finding ways to motivate themselves to succeed. One student created the acronym WEBS, to describe it:

W: Students are Willing to go to class- even if it means waking up early, missing parties, and spending less time with friends.

E: Students are Excited for the material they will be learning, and even if they don’t particularly like a certain course or lesson, they’re excited for what the learning will provide for them in the future. The student is not only excited for their graduation, but the work that leads to their diploma.

B: Students understand that they are essentially coming in as Blank slates. They won’t know everything coming in.

S: Students are Self-reliant. They are responsible for their studying, sleep and work habits.

This definition articulates what so many of our participants initially felt about college readiness: that once a student arrives at the university, college readiness rests exclusively on the shoulders of the student. Students must be “willing,” “excited,” “self-reliant” “blank slates” in order to be successful in college. A majority of these students saw no reason to place any of the responsibility for students’ transition to college life on the university itself or any other educational system. These initial responses are typical of individually focused definitions of CCR. Students are college-ready or not, sorted by particular abilities or skills. There was no talk of systematic issues impacting CCR or CCR being foundational—an option for all students regardless of background.

RQ2: How do preservice teachers’ definitions change, if at all, during their methods class? As these methods students became more familiar with the concept of college readiness and their roles as future teachers, they began to change their views about what it meant being “college-ready.” One student mentioned, “College readiness is a much broader topic than I originally imagined.” Another participant wrote:

At the beginning of the semester I thought that students had to know everything about school, but students cannot know every possible thing they should about college. Instead they should know about themselves and what works for them, and be able to learn from their mistakes and quickly adapt.

Seeing students as arriving to the classroom with cultural capital and individual strengths (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2001; Paris, 2012) they could use to adapt and learn was a frequent shift in definition by the end of the semester. Additionally, this idea that students could benefit from self-reflection and self-awareness, and that it was important to be ready and willing to “learn from their mistakes,” was a common response on the post-semester questionnaire. The data show that while the theme of increased independence remained, participants began to see themselves (as future teachers) and their future students as active participants in learning. They saw the relevance of students having increasing agency and responsibility for their own success. Similarly, they saw that the teaching of certain skills in secondary ELAR classrooms as a way to help students achieve such agency:

College readiness involves taking large strides toward independence. In order to be college ready, students need to start seeing learning as an active process that they play a part in. Students should feel a sense of power over their lives and education. They should be prepared to push through when times get tough, or ask for help when they need it. Certain skills such as note taking skills, scheduling skills, higher-level questioning, etc. are also helpful for college or career bound students.

The representative quotation above is important for a number of reasons. First, it highlights a growing sense of student empowerment as requisite for college success. Helping secondary students navigate curriculum and find agency is imperative to a culturally sustaining curriculum (Paris, 2012). Second, it strengthens the belief that specific content should be taught in secondary classrooms (“note-taking skills, scheduling skills, higher-level questioning”). Our data show that the college and career content embedded into the methods course made more visible and prominent this important part of the “null curriculum”—skills or knowledge that students need to be successful in school and beyond but that are seldom overtly taught in formal academic settings (Eisner, 1994).

It is important to note that definitions did not remain static, but instead developed to include not just the student but the teacher. One participant wrote, “At the beginning of the semester I considered ‘college readiness’ from the student’s point of view. I still do but have added the teacher’s perspective on it.” The addition of the teacher’s role in college and career readiness is one of the more profound findings from the data. These preservice teachers began to see themselves as an integral part of postsecondary readiness, making it clear that it is a partnership between student and teacher, rather than a set of skills and abilities students either have or do not have, or a label to affix to a student (Conley & McCaughy, 2012). This shift in perspective takes the onus off the student alone, and adds weight to the importance of the teachers who support students in secondary classrooms. Future teachers’ understanding their potential role in their students’ postsecondary pathways is vital. Students come to the classroom, bringing their own varied experiences and cultural capital, and it is up to teachers to help them navigate the academic world while capitalizing on individual strengths (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2001; Paris, 2012).

More specifically, their views seemed to become more nuanced; numerous student responses noted on the second questionnaire that in addition to a need for basic skills (note-taking) and good study habits (not procrastinating, always going to class, etc.), students who successfully transitioned to college also need more complex skills (e.g., academic literacy) and other more affective traits related to motivation and persistence. This is an important finding, because it can be built upon. As preservice teachers begin to learn that college readiness is about more than skills, it means university course curriculum can be adjusted to talk about their future ELAR classrooms and their future students, and what they might need to teach them to be ready for college—alongside (or intertwined with) the traditional ELAR curriculum. While it is a limitation of the classroom piece of this study, future research looking at the potential of teaching college readiness as an explicit set of skills as well as the additional cultural and affective pieces to the puzzle would be of value to the field of teacher education. Considering the current political climate locally (Lopez, 2022), and around the globe (Bennet et al., 2021), the field would benefit from studies conducted world-wide and situated in a variety of contexts and political landscapes, just as our preservice teachers would benefit from understanding the global educational contexts they are stepping into, despite the pressures to focus exclusively on the local.

5. Implications and conclusion

5.1. Where they begin

These preservice teachers’ initial definitions were largely student-centered and highly individualized, which is logical in light of the individualized approaches to CCR that have populated their educational experiences (e.g., Mehan et al., 1996). Our findings suggest that preservice teachers benefit significantly from the opportunity to reflect on the CCR concepts and connect them to their own experiences, via coursework embedded with culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012). Critical pedagogies demand this reflective piece, otherwise preservice teachers simply reinforce their personal narratives situated in their experiences as secondary students (Britzman, 2003). For some students, this connection between theory and reality was true in their own secondary experiences. For some students, this practice helped them see what before had not been obvious to them. They became more aware that the skills and dispositions they used to successfully transition to college were indeed learned, and in some cases overtly taught to them, rather than innate traits. As noted above, it is critical to make tacit concepts more obvious if teachers are to address them with their own students. For all of the preservice teachers, making these connections proved useful as a starting place from which to learn more about standards and curriculum.

5.2. Possibility of impact: standards and reflection

The findings above highlight an important point: scholarship on CCR often misses the important and valuable connection of policy to culturally responsive teaching. We should not teach the concept of college readiness for all students as a set of standards taught in isolation because the belief that all students deserve an opportunity to pursue a college degree is itself a culturally responsive position (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). CCR standards taught in isolation are not the pathway to postsecondary success (Conley, 2010); however, these can be thought of as a roadmap to help preservice teachers make classroom and instructional decisions. These decisions should take into account how CCR is situated within the discourse of both the classroom and school, how the curriculum being taught can ensure students’ opportunities to pursue postsecondary pathways, and how to give students opportunities within classrooms, as well as in school as a whole (McCaughy & Venezia, 2015; Mehan et al., 1996). Novice teachers can impact their future students’ postsecondary readiness via classroom culture and instruction (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005). Our data indicate that tying the teaching of CCR to individual reflection about those concepts (Britzman, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995) can have a positive impact on the ways in which preservice teachers begin to conceptualize their role helping future students become college and career ready.

5.3. College and career readiness as a partnership

Research on CRP indicates the importance of allowing teachers space to reflect on their own educational histories and to begin by understanding themselves (Chouari, 2016; Gay & Howard, 2000; Samovar et al., 2012). This was a vital piece to this classroom curriculum. These preservice teachers had just a single semester to reflect on the concept of CCR. However, even in this short amount of time, their perspectives began to shift in significant ways. Our data indicate that these preservice teachers' understanding of college and career readiness evolved to become far more than mere standards to teach; they saw the framework expanding to encompass a partnership between teacher and student. While they learned about school-wide postsecondary initiatives (Jarsky et al., 2009), they also learned the importance of their roles in building college and career classrooms in culturally responsive ways (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Participants learned college and career readiness can be a partnership between classroom teacher and student, but this study also demonstrates college and career readiness is a partnership among stakeholders, including those of us in teacher preparation.

5.4. Limitations and future research

What we have presented above is only an initial study of CCR, CRP, and teacher education. Thus, we see this as a jumping off point, a place to begin dialog with other teacher educators and K-12 teachers. Obviously, our findings are limited in that we focus solely on preservice teachers' perspectives. As people who are motivated to make a career in the classroom, these college students' perspectives on what it means to be college and career ready (and even on the need to preparing all students for this goal) may differ from a wider population. Similarly, all of our study participants were preservice teachers rather than full-time practicing teachers. Thus, this field of inquiry would benefit from studies that look at how novice teachers, more experienced teachers, school administrators, and parents of school-aged children define and work toward preparing K-12 students to be college and career ready. Finally, we recognize there are many other factors that influence students' readiness and what they are taught (or not taught) in their pre-collegiate school experiences. If our educational institutions genuinely desire to make all of our K-12 students college and career ready, we need to invest in research that helps demonstrate the broad variety of needs associated with academic and social success at the university and find ways to address these needs in our schools' classrooms. Being at the fore of influencing the new cadre of K-12 teachers, teacher education institutions are a good place to start such research.

6. Conclusion

In the ever-evolving technologizing of careers, the globalization of industry, the demands for an ever-more talented and educated workforce, and the need for citizens who can read and think critically, there can be no doubt that preparing K-12 students to be college and career ready is paramount. It is important to recognize how the potential of CCR and the tenets of CRP combine to make a more robust framework for college readiness. It is likely the COVID-19 pandemic will only emphasize this need as our educational system grapples with educating "the whole child" in light of a global crisis (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). We believe teacher education plays an important role in attaining this goal, as well as any systemic educational goal. If CCR is a goal for all students, then teacher educators need to be explicit about teaching it. They need to make explicit the skills and dispositions that may be hidden to some students, encourage our own students to make personal connections to it, and give preservice teachers the tools they need to tackle the scaffolding of these skills in culturally responsive and sustaining ways.

References

- Abacioglu, C. S., Volman, M., & Fischer, A. H. (2020). Teachers' multicultural attitudes and perspective taking abilities as factors in culturally responsive teaching. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *90*, 736–752. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12328>
- Achinstein, B., & Ogawa, R. T. (2006). (In)Fidelity: What the resistance of new teachers reveals about professional principles and prescriptive educational policies. *Harvard Educational Review*, *76*(1), 30–63.
- Alhanachi, A., de Meijer, L., & Severiens, S. E. (2020). Improving culturally responsive teaching through professional learning communities: A qualitative study in Dutch pre-vocational schools. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *105*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101698>
- Allard, A., & Doecke, B. (2014). Professional knowledge and standards-based reforms: Learning from the experiences of early career teachers. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *13*(1), 39–54. <http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/files/2014v13n1art3.pdf>.
- Anand, D., & Hsu, L. M. (2020). "COVID-19 and black lives matter: examining anti-asian racism and anti-blackness in U.S. education. *Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education*, *5*(1), 190–199.
- Bennet, B., Ravulo, J., Ife, J., & Gates, T. G. (2021). Making #blacklivesmatter in universities: A viewpoint on social policy education. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *41*(11/12), 1257–1263. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-11-2020-0512>
- Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). The influence of school administrators on teacher retention decisions. *American Educational Research Journal*, *48*(2), 303–333. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831210380788>
- Britzman, D. (2003). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Byrd, K., & MacDonald, G. (2005). Defining college and career readiness from the inside out: First-generation college student perspectives. *Community College Review*, *33*(1), 1–12.
- Chouari, A. (2016). Cultural diversity and the challenges of teaching multicultural classes in the twenty-first century. *Arab World English Journal*, *7*(3), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol7no3.1>
- Conley, D. (2010). *College and career ready: Helping all students succeed beyond high school*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Conley, D., & McGaughy, C. (2012). College and career readiness: Same or different? *Educational Leadership*, *69*(7), 28–34.
- Dover, A. G. (2013). Getting "up to code": Preparing for and confronting challenges when teaching for social justice in standards-based classrooms. *Action in Teacher Education*, *35*(2), 89–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2013.770377>
- Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC). (2009). *Texas college and career readiness standards*. Austin, TX: University Printing Services.
- Eisner, E. (1994). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs* (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan College Publishing.
- Fine, M. (1991). *Framing dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school*. Ithaca: SUNY Press.

- Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2020). *COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S. education policy: Lessons from pre-pandemic research to inform relief, recovery, and rebuilding*. Economic Policy Institute [Research Report] <https://files.epi.org/pdf/205622.pdf>.
- García, S. B., & Guerra, P. L. (2004). Deconstructing deficit thinking: Working with educators to create more equitable learning environments. *Education and Urban Society*, 36(2), 150–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124503261322>
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching* ((2nd ed.)). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G., & Howard, T. C. (2000). Multicultural teacher education for the 21st Century. *The Teacher Educator*, 36(1), 1–16.
- House Bill 1775, Oklahoma State Legislature. (2021). <http://oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=HB1775>.
- House Bill 3979, Texas Legislative Session 87(R). (2021). <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=87R&Bill=HB3979>.
- Hubbard, R., & Power, B. (1999). *Living the questions: A guide for teacher-researchers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Hungerford-Kresser, H., & Vetter, A. (2017). Political tensions: English teaching, standards, and postsecondary readiness. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 16(3), 407–422. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-05-2017-0061>
- Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & Stuckey, D. (2018). The changing face of teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 75(8), 44–49.
- Jarsky, K. M., McDonough, P. M., & Nunez, A. (2009). Establishing a college going culture in secondary schools through P-20 collaboration: A case study. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(4), 357–373.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing Co.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97, 47–68.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lopez, B. (2022). *Watch: North Texas superintendents say uproar over critical race theory in schools is a Republican 'manufactured crisis'*. March 24. The Texas Tribune <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/03/08/superintendent-spotlight/>.
- Mayorga, E., & Picower, B. (2018). Active solidarity: Centering the demands and vision of the Black Lives Matter movement in teacher education. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 212–230.
- McCaughy, C., & Venezia, A. (2015). *Supporting the dream: High school-college partnerships for college and career readiness*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Mehan, H., Villanueva, L., Hubbard, L., & Lintz, A. (1996). *Constructing school success: The consequences of untracking low-achieving students*. Cambridge, UK: University Press.
- Miller, K., & Weilbacher, G. (2020). Examining the intersection of social justice and state standards with elementary preservice teachers. *Action in Teacher Education*, 42(4), 368–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2019.1677529>
- Moll, L., Amanti, D., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (2001). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. In N. Gonzalez, L. Moll, & C. Amanti (Eds.), *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms* (pp. 71–88). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates.
- Moll, L. C., & Gonzalez, N. (1994). Lessons learned from research with language-minority children. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 26, 439–456.
- Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, pedagogy, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93–97. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>
- Roberts, K. (2021). *How will you know if critical race theory is taught in your child's school?*. July 1. The Daily Cannon <https://thecannononline.com/how-will-you-know-if-critical-race-theory-is-taught-in-your-childs-school/>.
- Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., McDaniel, E. R., & Roy, C. S. (2012). *Communication between cultures*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Sleeter, C. (2005). *Un-standardizing curriculum: Multicultural teaching in the standards-based classroom*. Teachers College Press.
- Sleeter, C. (2012). Confronting the marginalization of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. *Urban Education*, 47(3), 563–584.
- Somekh, B. (2006). Constructing inter-cultural knowledge and understanding through collaborative action research. *Journal for Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice. Special Issue: The Dark Side of the Moon: A Critical Look at Teacher Knowledge Construction in Collaborative Settings*, 12(1), 87–106.
- Somekh, B. (2009). Agency through action research: Constructing active identities from theoretical models and metaphors. In S. Noffke, & B. Somekh (Eds.), *Handbook of educational action research* (pp. 370–380). Sage.
- Standing, K., Judkins, D., Judkins, Keller, B., & Westat, A. S. (2008). *Early outcomes of the GEAR UP project: Final report*. U.S. Department of Education [Research Report] <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/gearup/early-outcomes.pdf>.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. State University of New York Press.
- Zoch, M. (2017). It's important for them to know who they are": Teachers' efforts to sustain students' cultural competence in an age of high-stakes testing. *Urban Education*, 52(5), 610–636. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915618716>