

*Original Paper*

Examining the Intersections of Culturally-Relevant Pedagogies  
and Youth Literature in Theatre Performing Arts and Its  
Implications for a More Inclusive Learning Experience for  
BIPOC Students

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**Abstract**

*This work aims to examine the potential impact of theater guides based on the literary work of BIPOC authors and the culturally relevant pedagogical experiences rendered for students of color. We examine the ways that the exclusion of culturally relevant pedagogies in the creation of theater guides for BIPOC and non-BIPOC students hold the potential to further marginalize BIPOC narratives. We posit that standard approaches to the construction of theater guides of authors of color fails to center familial and cultural knowledge that centers the cultural authenticity of the literary work intended by the authors. This work acknowledges the historical exclusion of BIPOC voices in theatre performance and to that end, this work seeks to analyze how educational guides can work in tandem with Latina/o/x/e literature to center a more authentic experience of BIPOC communities. In this work we reimagine pedagogical practices that are 1) culturally competent and 2) bolster the intersectionality of the lived experiences of BIPOC communities in the educational guides of theatrical productions. This work will provide culturally competent two dramaturgical tenants for educators to consider.*

**Keywords**

*Theatre, Latinx, Literature, Dramaturgy, Education, Immigration, First Generation, Diversity, and Inclusion*

## Introduction

Systematic racism that upholds tenants of white supremacy in curriculum development in youth literacy and the arts needs to constantly be revisited for true inclusion when teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students. A fast-growing amount of research suggests that ethnic study has positively supported the academic achievement of historically marginalized students (Sleeter, 2011; Dee & Penner, 2017). Culturally relevant pedagogies have informed the field of education with findings that sustain the notion that when language and culture are incorporated in the learning process of linguistically and culturally diverse students' positive outcomes are rendered (Ladson-Billings, 1992b, 1994, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Gay, 2002).

Our current political climate continues to highlight the historical exclusion of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) voices. Theatre, as an institution, is presently contending with its own marginalizing systems on and off the stage. National movements such as We See You White American Theatre (WAT) (Note 1), Asian American Consortium (AAPI), and The Living Document continue to expose the omission and inequitable representation of BIPOC artists in all facets of theater production. Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) historically maintained similar exclusionary practices that highlighted stories written by and for dominant American audiences while neglecting marginalized communities. The extent of these practices are cursory at best, however the swift strides TYA companies have made since the release of (WAT) are substantial (Note 2). In an effort to produce more inclusive performance programming, Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) have turned to theatrical adaptations of BIPOC literary classics such as *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and *The Circuit* by Francisco Jimenez. These works center the first-generation Latina/o/x/e (Note 3) to experience in the US, however, facets of their respective educational guides which provide historical, artistic, and thematic context for educators and adolescents of K-8, may emulate theatre's exclusionary practices, by proposing guiding questions that do not center the lived experiences of BIPOC students and sometime decentering the authentic content of BIPOC history.

This work posits an intersectional analysis of literacy and culturally relevant pedagogies as it pertains to theatre that is more representative of BIPOC communities. We examine the ways that the exclusion of culturally relevant pedagogies further marginalizes BIPOC narratives and the ways that such exclusion fails to center familial and cultural knowledge that centers the cultural authenticity of the literary work intended by the authors (Dumais, 2002; Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005). This work acknowledges the historical exclusion of BIPOC voice in theatre performance (wa Thiong'o, 1997; Bloom, 2013; Chamberlain-Schnieder & Fray, 2020). To that end, this work seeks to analyze how educational guides can work in tandem with latina/o/x/e literature to center the experience of BIPOC communities. We reimagine pedagogical practices that are 1) culturally competent and 2) bolster the intersectionality of the lived experiences of BIPOC communities in the educational guides of theatrical productions. This work will provide culturally competent dramaturgical tenants for educators to consider.

## Setting the Stage

Theatre as an institution continues to enact historical exclusions, despite contemporary social movements. Writing in terms of the National Theatre of Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1997) claims that performance spaces are charged with historical and semiotic meaning, reinforced by the entities that control sites of performance: "The performance space of the artist stands for openness; that of the state, for confinement. Art breaks down barriers between people; the state erects them" (p. 15). Thus, whoever controls a physical space retains power over the space itself and the performances enacted in it, as well as the artists and spectators who are granted access to that space. Performance (Note 4) spaces are etched with a history of excluding BIPOC and female identified bodies and narratives - a phenomena replicated at the most introductory levels of performance. Even so, the last five years has seen a flourishing of cultural adaptations of literary works for the stage. Though some of these performances are no longer available due to the ephemeral nature of performance, other archival remnants offer insight into the process and care of such culturally specific performances. Performance ephemera such as programs, reviews, and student educational guides offer a different and more lasting performance, what Amelia Jones refers to as "Presence in Absentia" (Jones, 1997).

Following Jones' example, we are not specifically looking at the performances themselves because: 1. Student guides are the precursor to performance or reading the book itself which means that the content of the guides is often the first or second interaction a student has with the literary book (Note 5). 2. The literary books specifically center BIPOC voices. We are interested in how the text is handled in discussion. Finally, 3. If the intention of the performance is to highlight the literature, the guide, regardless of the intent of the performance, should follow the intent of the literary work in question. In this case, the performance may differ from the book in adaptation. The student guide becomes a crucial bridge that ties the literary text with the intentions of the performance or stage adaptation.

Educational guides offer a glimpse into what themes and critical perspectives producing companies and the creative teams they assemble value, and thus, impart upon audiences prior to their engagement with the work in question. Furthermore, educational guides set the stage for viewers, providing selected sign-posts for student audiences including cultural [nuance?] and political messaging. We argue that the inclusion of these student guides not only influence that audience's lens through which they engage with performances and make meaning of the performance, but that may in fact simplify cultural difference for a predominately white audience (PWA). This paper looks at two educational guides pertaining to works of color: *The House on Mango Street*, an adaptation of Sandra Cisneros' classic for Steppenwolf theatre and *The Circuit*, and adaptation of Francisco Jimenez's text of the same name for Santa Clara University. Both adaptations were created by a predominately white theatre institution (PWI) for, what could be assumed to be a (PWA) (Note 6). We examine these guides in order to propose more equitable ways in which to introduce performance to young audiences, with an acute emphasis on cultural sensitivity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The call for anti-oppressive practices in the teaching of Youth Literature in theatre and performing arts is needed more now than ever in order to offer authentic more inclusive learning experience for BIPOC students. On June 8, 2020 a manifesto known as *We See You White American Theatre* (WAT), written by a coalition of BIPOC art makers from across the nation, launched a crusade detailing the pervasive erasure of BIPOC voices on national stages. The resulting thirty-seven-page manifesto details the cultural (limitations) of theatre spaces to support the work of BIPOC art producers. The document captured a series of historical transgressions in regional theatre (largely New York) while also providing a considerable list of rectifying action items. Since 2020 numerous regional, community, and University theatre companies have adopted some of these action items into their practice or have pledged to do so in the very near future. A progress report was issued in 2022 detailing updating the public and theatre companies' development. Many companies have yet to support the tents set forth by the original document (WAT). The tenets of WAT were also heavily supported and some adopted via EDI initiatives/ acknowledgements by TYA companies including: Fifth Street Avenue Theatre, Bay Area Children's Theatre, and Stages Youth Theatre (Note 7).

The theoretical underpinnings that support the analysis of this work are grounded on two bodies of literature; cultural humility and student belonging. While the authors of this work posit culture as a fluid construct, the authors felt this work, nonetheless, necessitated a review of the way culture has been understood in academic spaces. Therefore, we review cultural competence and the debates that have been centered around such notions. We then turn to Identity and belonging and review how such constructs might inform the way that BIPOC students might be experiencing learning in theater performing arts.

### **Cultural Humility**

Articulations of cultural competence emphasize the need to question one's own assumptions, biases, and beliefs in light of our understanding of other people. Cultural competence made its way into the field in social work and (Nadam, 2017) in counseling psychology (Sue, 2001) as a means to better serve linguistically and culturally diverse populations. For example, in the mental health field a multidimensional model of cultural competence (MDCC) was crafted in which multiple aspects of the competencies were considered (Sue, 2001). In spite of the push back that the counseling psychology and mental health fields have received regarding the notion of cultural competency, theorists like Derald W. Sue (2001) have stressed the importance of developing models that highlight the multi-faceted ways in which cultural competencies could be augmented among professionals. In addition to racial and culture-specific attributes of competence, his model incorporates *components of cultural competence* (i.e., awareness, knowledge, and skills) and *foci* of cultural competence (i.e., individual, professional, organizational, and societal). Sue developed this model in spite of critiques that insisted on retaining a color-blind approach to the service and care of the profession. This body of literature supports the notion that culture is multi-faceted and multidimensional.

At its emergence in the 1980s, cultural competence was innovative and revolutionary as it reflected significant advancement in thinking (Furlong & Wight, 2011; Harrison & Turner, 2011; Herring et al., 2013). Cultural competence offered a framework for disturbing the ethno-cultural diversity in America. Over time, however, other scholars have argued that cultural competence is not enough and have interrogated through critical reflective analysis the need for a more semantic appeal such as cultural humility (Danso, 2018). Scholars have posited that being culturally competent may not be a permanent or even an endpoint but rather cultural competence is a framework that could create opportunities for people and institutions to establish effective interpersonal and professional relationships that supersede cultural differences and account for a more equitable approach to including the lived experiences of historically marginalized groups of people (Cross et al., 1989). Whether we call it cultural competence or cultural humility the intent of the framework remains the same and that is an awareness of the need to include the experiences and representations of multiple narratives in institutional practices. In this work, we contend that cultural humility is necessitated in order to attain effective levels of cultural competence in the attempts to create more culturally relevant and specific guides. Student guides facilitate conversation on BIPOC literary texts and adaptations, including theatrical performances, and should pose culturally relevant questions for students to integrate and interrogate notions of identity, gender, and class. This requires a unique understanding of the communities engaging with student guides; their needs and limitations.

### **Student Belonging**

A greater understanding of diverse needs has to be accompanied by a concerted effort to disrupt racism and oppressive practices in schools. In theater performing arts, for example, guides that aim to frame a more inclusive and culturally responsive work in youth literature should consider their effectiveness. Particularly as it relates to interpreting the literary work of minoritized authors of color, a careful consideration of how that work contributes to identity and belonging of BIPOC students need to be examined. The interplay of ethnicity, identity, belonging (or not belonging), and racialization of all these constructs have a stake in the shaping of adolescent BIPOC learners. Therefore, a responsible inclusion of how theater guides are crafted in the interpretation of literature written by Latina/o/x/e authors need to account for cultural authenticity versus ambiguous notions that essentialize Latinidad or any minoritized group.

Research on belonging is bountiful in psychology, particularly as it relates to the fundamental human need to be accounted for (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In higher education, for example, research on belonging focused on the integration of students of color into campus life and the importance of their inclusion and representation in order to feel integrated in their college campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lee & Davis, 2000). Similarly, Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) practitioners continue to address historical exclusionary practices in theatre.

Social integration presented itself to be crucial to the concept of sense of belonging. The work of some scholars suggested that leaving school for students of color was due to a lack of social integration

(Tinto, 1993). In a study that focused on Asian college students, researchers found that multicultural experiences and ethnic group identification positively connected with Asian students' sense of campus integration (Lee & Davis, 2000). Hurtado and Carter found that students' engagement with course content outside the classroom increased students' sense of belonging. Such studies suggest that a sense of belonging is crucial for college retention and completion success, particularly as it relates to Latina/o/x/e students (Astin, 1993). As some scholars attempted to understand why students leave college, both sense of belonging and social integration seemed critically important. To anchor our understanding on how BIPOC students, particularly first-generation Latina/o/x/e students might engage with or make sense of theater performing arts educational guides, it was necessary to anchor our understanding.

### **What Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* was Intended To Do**

As an activist, teacher, and literary icon, Sandra Cisneros' first novel, *The House on Mango Street* provides an organic glimpse in which central themes of culture and tradition are explored. Particularly in relation to what it means to come of age for young Latina women of immigrant-origin descent. At the intersection of this also lies the exploration of what it means to live in a multilingual and multicultural world as one leaves their home to a new land and makes sense of new ways of being. The book was intended to honor the lives of students that Cisneros herself had come in contact with. Informed by Cisneros' positive perception of her students, the intent of this book was to celebrate the lived experiences of her students and center such experiences with an inclusive lens. In an interview that celebrated her 25th anniversary she openly confides,

“My idea was to write it in a way that would not make anyone feel intimidated, but welcome. I had in mind a book that would be understood and appreciated by all readers, whether a working-class person, a child, poet, literature student, writer, or bus driver. So I came from that angle of being inclusive. I kept a child in mind as I was writing it, but it wasn't just for children. I kept fellow poets in mind, but it wasn't just for poets.” (*Queir ós*, 2009, para. 7)

As an immigrant writer- scholar herself she longed for the lived experiences of her students to be heard and intended for multiple generations and audiences to connect with her work.

### **What Francisco's Jimenez's *The Circuit* was Intended To Do**

As an undocumented child and the son of migrant farmworkers, Dr. Francisco Jimenez's first novel, *The Circuit* provides an autobiographical story in which he openly shares memorable experiences from his childhood and adolescence. In each chapter of the book, he creates a story around those memorable experiences. His intention was to describe the difficult life circumstances of migrant children and their farmworker families. In each chapter of his book with vivid language and descriptive prose, Dr. Jimenez highlights a humane story in which incredible strength and resilience is embodied in the face of adversity, poverty and discrimination. At the core, the aim of his book was to provide a story of hope in which migrant farmworker children like him, who often face immeasurable obstacles might be able to see themselves in the pages of this book, make personal connections to the stories shared, find hope

and breakthrough. The book also intends to celebrate the positive influence of educators that care and the powerful impact that this might have on the lives of children. Finally, the book aims to explore the power of literature to move the consciousness of the reader and to help people understand the struggle that farmworkers and their children experience in the United States.

In the next section, we take an analysis of the line of questions, themes examined and aesthetics explored in the educational guides that are created for educators to use by theater young adult coordinators and educational institutions of higher education. We examine closely the political context and terminology selected and omitted in these guides and study its implications for learning for young BIPOC youth. If the intent of the educational guide is to introduce key concepts, terminology and aspects of the performance pertinent to the student's understanding of the performance at hand, then the reach and scope of these guides are paramount. For students engaging with cultures outside their own, these guides become a "how to" sort of engagement in and outside the classroom with the content and the concepts of the themes explored in the text and the performance.

### **The House on Mango Street - Steppenwolf Theatre**

Steppenwolf's 2009 stage adaptation of *The House on Mango Street* opened to mostly favorable critical response. Critics maintained that while adapting Cisneros' classic to the stage is a daunting task, the stage production, adapted by playwright Tanya Saracho and directed by Hallie Gordon, enacts a narrative structure not present in Sandra Cisneros' collection of vignettes by the same name (Chaitman).

### **Aesthetics of the Guide Itself**

The educational guide, written by Whitney Dibo, former Young Adult's Program Coordinator at Steppenwolf theatre, provides three key discussion/learning objectives for students: Identity, responsibility, and gender. Each component is reflected in the classroom discussion questions, character breakdowns, student exercises, and thematic explorations. As a whole, the student guide successfully introduced key concepts appropriate for students aged 8-14. However, it is not culturally specific in comparison to Cisneros original text. In fact, it falls victim to the reinforcement of popularly held Latina/o/x/e troupes in popular media. The first indication, minute at first, is the motif use of the calavera (skull) and papel picado (celebratory perforated paper) motif/ artwork used throughout the guide near pagination, headers and subheaders. The calavera aesthetic is synonymous with the regionally specific Mexican celebration of Día de Muerto, a topic not covered in the Cisneros literary text (Note 8). Contributes to what Michelle Habelle-Pallán calls, a "Spanish Heritage Fantasy," making Mexican culture more palatable to mainstream audiences. In this case it falsely depicts Mexican and Chicano culture, rendering them one in the same. Since identity is such an important aspect of both the text, and student guide, the aesthetic misappropriations Habelle-Pallán describes becomes discernible for [non-western] communities seem more evident.

### The Line of Questioning

The distinct line of questioning coupled with the aesthetic choices reveal that the guide itself may be geared towards a specific non-BIPOC audience. Definitions and questions surrounding the theme of identity avoid the more specific notions of economic class, race, and ethnicity. We argue that a lack of specificity furthers the exclusion of culturally sustaining pedagogies, marginalizing BIPOC narratives by glossing over the culprits of Esperanza's family's socio-economic [situation]. For example, Cisneros's original text infers Esperanza's economic situations, ultimately describing both her family's litany of previous apartment dwellings to eventually describing the House on Mango Street as "small and red with windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath" with bricks "crumbling in places, and a front door so swollen you have to push hard to get in" (Cisneros, 4). Esperanza further mentions her home's proximity to a boarded-up laundromat robbed two days prior and the judgmental comments made on her new home by a neighborhood nun. This blatant description of poverty is never broached in any of the guide's "Questions for the Classroom" sections, even though it is recited verbatim in the performance playtext. Though the guide's historical snapshots on the city of Chicago offer a more direct political entry for students, it never specifically asks students to consider how socio-economics intersects with race and ethnicity (Krenshaw, 2017).

The guide tends to concentrate on the notion of heritage as a means to implicate race and ethnicity. The term heritage is mentioned a total of seven times throughout the guide. The term culture is mentioned three times. We take to task the use of the word heritage as it may not authentically encompass the intersectionality of gender, class, and status of immigrant-origin youth. In using the term heritage, the guide is missing the author's intended themes of discovery in the literary work. The use of culture might be utilized in a more specific way in relation to the literary work but it is not fully defined in relation to Cisneros's work. The absence of the terms race and ethnicity purposefully restrict opportunities for students to discuss the latter identity term's inherent socio-political implications on BIPOC communities. According to Peter Kivisto and Paul Croll, culture is a "broad term that can include within it traditions, folkways, values, symbols, language, and religion" (p. 11). By that same token, heritage, according to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, often refers to "something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor." That is, heritage is also an intangible value endowed upon individuals, but down not only its own define how and to what extent these values intersection with other values, or how they are capitalized by dominant culture.

Conceptual versus biological definitions vary widely and are all but impossible to universalize across performance studies. In *Race and Ethnicity: The Basics*, Peter Kivisto and Paul R. Croll describe latent definitions of race and ethnicity that both differentiate and associate the two previous definitions before asserting that though both terms are mutually exclusive, race can be seen as a subset of ethnicity- that is, both scholars situate race as a subset of ethnicity [re-cultural affect not easily divorced from race]. This means the implicit politics of race must be extended to the use of the term ethnicity. Neither of which is used to describe cultural differences within the guide. Cornell and Hartman argue that "Race



tends to be imputed to groups by powerful outside groups, while ethnicity is often claimed by the groups themselves” (2007, pp. 26-32). Considering the source of the student guide, questions arise as to how identity and questioning serve the text.

The construct of Race and Ethnicity is composed by and for the sustainment of a dominant hierarchy - in this case Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) and audiences. We argue that in not using terminology that explicitly deals with the inherent politics and how we contribute to them, one runs the risk of perpetuating these hierarchies with these educational guides.

### **Themes - Identity, Responsibilities, Gender**

Similarly, the three themes highlighted in the student guides, Identity, Responsibility, and Gender, provide a cursory understanding of each term without explicitly naming inherent socio-political implication of each topic. Each term is followed by a tacit understanding of what it conceptually and theoretically represents, starting with a dictionary definition, without explicitly connecting the definition to the cultural and political association. Each term is followed by a series of open-ended questions. For example, The House on Mango Street guide defines identity via Merriam Webster as “The distinguishing character or personality of an individual.” The series of questions that follow are equally as vague: “What tools do we use to define ourselves? And how much do our neighborhood, heritage and family contribute to our personal identity? In The House on Mango Street, Esperanza is in the process of solidifying who she is and what she wants to become” (p. 1). Neither race or ethnicity is ever specifically mentioned in defining or [line of questioning] and thus fails to, more equitably, support a culturally relevant analysis that is required to tackle the entanglements of race, ethnicity, and class present in Cisneros’ text.

The remaining themes follow a similarly nebulous structure. The theme of responsibility corresponds to the literary concept of a bildungsroman or “coming of age story.” We agree with the guides’ correlation of both terms. Gender and age significantly alter Esperanza, the titular character’s responsibilities to family, community, and self. However, the “questions for the classroom” segment that follows, makes no mention of culturally specific responsibilities attributed to Esperanza, making it difficult for non-Latina/o/x/e students to consider the role intercultural identity plays on her social and familial status. Perhaps the most successfully articulated theme, Gender, does mention culturally specific constructs, more specifically machismo. Defined as “masculine pride” the brief section entitled “rebellious against machismo” does not fully contribute toward a greater application of the concept. Rather it asks students to consider: “Do you think the machismo culture has declined since 1979? If the play took place in today’s world, do you think Esperanza would see more or fewer women looking out of windows?” - a reference to the litany of female characters trapped by the culturally prevalent gendered norms.

### **The Circuit - Santa Clara University 2018**

The theatrical adaptation of Francisco Jimenez’ *The Circuit* premiered at Santa Clara University in 2018 as part of SCU Presents Art for Social Change- a university department dedicated to examining

how “we can be a catalyst for social change.” The intent was to tour the performance after its 2018 premiere throughout Northern California before the onset of the pandemic. The student guide that follows is intended to serve as a post-show study guide aimed at elementary school students. The guide is short and sweet, providing a series of thirteen discussion questions and three additional classroom activities. Though supported by an academic institution, the author or department responsible for the creation of this guide is unknown. The guide, in this case, is tailored towards the instructor, and provides additional support and context materials for the classroom. In short, the post-show study guide packet is not a workbook intended for student consumption, but rather a discussion aid to be administered by educators. For that reason, we cannot speak to the aesthetic contributions of the packet, as it does not present any notable ones, nor does it attempt to. Instead, for the purpose of this paper, we will concentrate on how the Jimenez’ original text promotes a more nuanced cultural and socio-political conversation on the farmworker experience through the eyes of a young child. In contrast, the guide’s line of questioning tends to eviscerate the intended cause. In fact, the packet’s omission of any historical background, dramaturgical research, and production details, may significantly undercut the depth of conversation in the classroom.

The packet contains a post-show study guide, additional information about Dr. Francisco Jimenez, the literary author, and a statement addressing SCU Presents concerns about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In general, the packet takes a more explicit political stance. Selected discussion questions specifically ask students to contend with causes of migration and how immigration status affects upward mobility. The packet, however, fails to define key terminology in either the text or theatrical adaptation, provides no additional historical context outside of the author’s brief biography, and contains limited to none culturally relevant classroom activities that would further center Latina/o/x/e students.

### **Aesthetics of the Guide Itself**

The intended audience appears to be educators, and thus, the packet itself lacks any visual aesthetics meant to engage students. The official declaration against ICE, is more in support of institutional credibility than student engagement.

### **Line of questioning**

SCU Presents’ packet does not avoid the more specific notions of economic class, race, and ethnicity. Certain questions specifically ask students to contend with the root causes of immigration, nativism in the US, as well as how status affects upward mobility. Some questions of the post-show guide acknowledges that life was difficult for the Jiménez family in Mexico, and they continued to face hardships after coming to the United States, before asking: “What might motivate a person to face hardships in a different country” (p. 3) a brief history should be first reviewed. The question is poignant, but unmoored given the packet’s lack of historical context. A brief history of US/ Mexican immigration history might provide a more detailed and timely response from students. Questions in this guide further acknowledge the nebulous immigration process. “Applying for immigration papers is a

process that often takes years. Living conditions in a person's home country can be so difficult that they do not have that long to wait, leading to the decision to immigrate without papers. While the question itself is crucial to Jimenez' text, the historical context is needed for a proper discussion of its political, cultural, and social implications. Whereas Steppenwolf's student guide provides ample historical information that may be new to students, SCU does not provide enough, leaving teachers to decide additional background materials.

### **Themes - Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE):**

Finally, SCU Presents decision to include a statement regarding ICE takes an explicitly political stance and notes its support for undocumented communities. Although the statement regarding ICE is made in support of the undocumented community, a move that is more congruent with Jesuit values, it reads as a disclaimer against thematics represented onstage. The statement addressed to "our community" contains its own clause detailing the reasoning behind the university sanctioned statement.

"It was brought to SCU Presents' attention that there were student concerns about ICE during the previous performances of *The Circuit*. Specifically, there is a scene at the end of our show where the principal of Pancho's school enters with an ICE agent, saying that the Immigration Department has been authorized to remove him from school and that his family is being deported back to Mexico. Students raised concern that this meant they might be reported to ICE, and that it meant support for the deportation of undocumented immigrants" (p. 7).

This preamble attempts to simultaneously validate the performance while protecting the institution from further criticism. The statement itself, addressed to "our community" reiterates the Universities stance on immigration, given their Jesuit values (Note 9). The statement on its own is not problematic. In fact, any institution of higher education who decidedly takes a stand on these issues during what is arguably a politically tumultuous time is exercising a civic responsibility in light of academic censorship. However, more work is needed in order to inform students of the multiple factors that lead families such as the Jimenez' to leave their country and find themselves in similar predicaments with ICE.

### **Tenants To Consider**

In an effort to create a more equitable experience for BIPOC students to engage in culturally relevant pedagogical experiences in the performing arts, it is important that the theatrical guides; a) resists monolithic notions that essentialize groups of people and b) examine cultural diversities within cultural groups.

The original intent of literary works such as *The Circuit* and *The House on Mango Street* centered great value on providing historically marginalized communities the opportunity to see themselves in the text and make personal connections with the themes in these literary works. In the American schooling context, the literary works of preference that are too often utilized in the classroom are classical canons. These texts provide little to no entry points into the BIPOC experience, providing limited if any opportunities to connect with the characters and themes of those types of literary works. This is a

critical and important component that often gets overlooked. We propose two tenants that might strengthen theatrical guides to be more culturally relevant to students of color.

#### Tenant 1: Resist Monolithic Notions that Essentialize Groups of People

In the process of considering crafting a more inclusive learning experience for BIPOC students and incorporating culturally sustaining literature in theater performing arts, it is important that writers of such guides remain mindful of the way groups of people are portrayed. In the two theater educational guides that we examined in this article, *The House on Mango Street* and *The Circuit*, the lived experiences of these two Latina/o/x/e writers is centered from two different perspectives of the Latina/o/x/e community. Sandra Cisneros speaks from the voice of a young Chicana girl growing up in an urban city, Chicago. Whereas Dr. Francisco Jimenez speaks from the perspective of a rural town, Santa Maria. While both books share a bildungsroman, or coming-of-age themes in a time of crisis and poverty they differ greatly in communities of practice and cultural ways of being. It is critical that educational guides resist monolithic tendencies to group diversity and Latinidad in general terms that gloss over critical and important differences from context to context. We suggest that guides specifically consider how gender, class, and geographical context affect upward mobility for protagonists and their families. This is something that though tacitly mentioned is not as developed in the theatrical guides that guide adolescents in the process of unpacking meaning. Gender and class, as is most structures of power in society, determine upward mobility. The same microcosm can be found within the diversity of Latina/o/e/x communities.

#### Tenant 2: Examine Cultural Diversities Within Groups of People

It is equally important to acknowledge that cultural diversity exists even within racial and pan-ethnic groups. When working with BIPOC students it is critical for educators to convey to students the notion that groups of people do not represent a monolith. Resisting notions that essentialize cultural norms or expectations of being is particularly important for theater performing arts and literary courses where students make inferences and informed interpretations about themes, topics, and connections to texts. Activities designed to raise students' awareness on the diverse experiences that one cultural group may embody relies deeply on our willingness to embrace the intersectionalities that ethnic and racial groups represent. Among Latinx communities, diverse narratives, lived experiences, communities of practice and linguistic variances exist. Therefore, we offer this as a tenant of consideration so as to provide a more holistic approach to creating theatrical guides that embrace authentic diversity.

#### **Implications for Inclusion**

Moving forward, educational guides should aim to include definitions and discussion questions that more thoughtfully invokes the intersections of class, race, and ethnicity. In doing this a more just representation of the authors original intention for the literary work is authentically included and BIPOC students find more organic access to the work. Failing to invoke class, race, and ethnicity may reinscribe exclusive practices that decenter BIPOC voices in theatre and literature. This is also an opportunity for Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) to provide non-BIPOC students with more

culturally relevant ways to engage with their classmates and cultivate a more diverse society. Specifically centering and honoring the lived experiences of BIPOC students and thoughtfully representing the original intention of the author of the literary book fosters an authentic attempt at inclusion. Decentering dominant culture (i.e. American exceptionalism, patriarchal values, and perpetuation of ethnic stereotypes) lead us to interrogate how we contribute to a continuous exclusion of historically oppressed and silenced voices. Any type of historical context provided in educational guides cannot be told from the perspective of a Western lens but instead it should be told from the group that the literary work originally intended to represent.

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## Notes

Note 1. See Dewey, Lia Christine. *We See You White American Theatre: An Exploration of Inward-Facing Theatre Activism*. Diss. The Ohio State University, 2021.

Note 2. [https://issuu.com/wsywat/docs/wsywat\\_accountability\\_report\\_website](https://issuu.com/wsywat/docs/wsywat_accountability_report_website)

Note 3. Some artists and scholars advocate for the increased use of Latinx due to its transgressive gender, sexual, and linguistic politics. Others are more hesitant/ blatantly opposed claiming “linguistic imperialism” (Latino Commons) and that the difficulty in pronunciation alienates monolingual Spanish or English speakers. Latino the preferred term when adopting a panethnic identification or speaking of self and community in national terms. The “x” in Latinx makes the term non-binary, at once expressing an intersectional examination of history, philosophy and gender. (he

“x” suffix replaces the standard o/a ending of nouns and adjectives that describe gender in Spanish language. Latine contends to be gender-neutral and is preferred by individuals who believe the “x” disrupts the grammatical structure is Spanish. However, Spanish, by default, is a gendered language. Thus Latinx is used by scholars wishing to disrupt gender binaries. Throughout this paper we will use all iterations of the term as a means of inclusivity and because the terms are not always interchangeable.

Note 4. For more information, please see: Mikhael, Yasmin Zacaria. Not your daddy’s theatre criticism: countering white supremacy culture with inclusive possibility models. Diss. 2021. and/or Reser, Samantha. “Exploring Best Practices of Teaching Theatre for Social Change to Youth.” (2022).

Note 5. The text itself being the second text in question.

Note 6. <https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/santa-clara-university/student-life/diversity/>

Note 7. For a more complete list of noted TYA producing theatres, please visit <https://www.tyausa.org/member-organizations/>. Though not all organizations note EDI initiatives on their websites, some companies make it a point to highlight an organizational commitment to diversity and inclusion. The merits of such a statement vary with some putting forth tangible action items while others state a commitment and acknowledgement as a stand alone statement. It is difficult to know to what extent these statements were influenced by WAT documents, however, there have been a proliferation of theatre companies posting their own statements of support following the release of WAT's manifesto in 2020.

Note 8. The use of the dia de los muertos images is attributing iconography about a specific mesoamerican tradition that is not utilized in Cisneros' original text. Hence misusing and disconnecting Latinx cultural values.

Note 9. Key values in Jesuit High Education include: 1) Curis Peronalis, Latin phrase meaning care of the person. 2) Magis, Latin meaning the "more," striving to do better for the greater good. 3) People For and With Others, embodies a spirit of giving and providing service to those in need and standing with the poor. 4) Unity of Mind and Heart, mind and heart as congruent when the whole person is educated and engaged. 5) Contemplatives in Action, take action to address social problems through a habit of reflection centering one's spiritual life. 6) Finding God in All things, SCU is an inclusive campus to people of all faiths and spiritualities, including those that are atheists and agnostics, encouraging students to define who or what God is to them. (Retrieved from <https://www.scu.edu/csi/leadership/initiatives/jvia/>)