

## Culturally Sustaining Teaching and Leadership: A Study of a Learning Progression Rubric AERA Annual Meeting, Denver, CO – April 23, 2025

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Disparities between educators' backgrounds/experiences and the cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds/ experiences of their students continue to perpetuate inequities in educational outcomes. To address this issue, culturally responsive and sustaining teaching and leadership (CRSTL) practices are essential. This study provides initial validation evidence for the *Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Strategies Rubric* (CRSSR), a structured learning progression tool designed to clarify educator misunderstandings, promote reflective practice, and improve culturally sustaining educational strategies.

We asked: *Are scores from the CRSSR progression accurate, reliable, and sensitive enough to detect changes in educators' culturally sustaining practices over time?*

**Conceptual Framework.** The CRSSR progression rubric integrates key concepts from CRSTL scholarship and expertise development theories. This progression spans from novice to expert across three critical domains. (1) **Student agency and integration:** Emphasizing inclusive classroom climates that cultivate student ownership, belonging, and participatory power-sharing; (2) **Culture:** Encouraging active acknowledgment, integration, and sustainability of students' cultural and linguistic identities and community assets; (3) **Multidimensional strategy use:** Promoting educational equity and advocacy through holistic approaches that extend beyond classrooms into community and structural spheres.

**Methodology.** Participants completed two *Case-Based Instruction* (CBI) modules designed to simulate discussions regarding authentic educational—school and classroom—scenarios. Participants first “solved” a practice case (i.e., analyzed the case for problems and solutions) individually (Time 1), then discussed the case with peers following instructor-designed case-specific prompts informed by CRSTL literature and revised their initial analyses of the case (Time 2); a week later, the participants solved a new, application case on a similar topic individually (Time 3; see Figures 1 & 2). Cohort 1: Practice Cases: ‘Student Translator’ & ‘An Assigned Nickname’; Application Cases: ‘English only’ & ‘I’m not Black’. Cohort 2: Practice: ‘English only’ & ‘I’m not Black’; Application: ‘Student Translator’ & ‘An Assigned Nickname’.

### Participant Information.

**Study 1 (Cohort 1):** Included eight educators enrolled in an educational leadership course at a Northwestern U.S. public university, representing diverse roles, educational levels, and cultural identities.

**Study 2 (Cohort 2):** Comprised thirteen doctoral-level educational leadership students from the same university, occupying various administrative and leadership positions in education.

**Data Collection.** The study used multiple sources to gather comprehensive data:

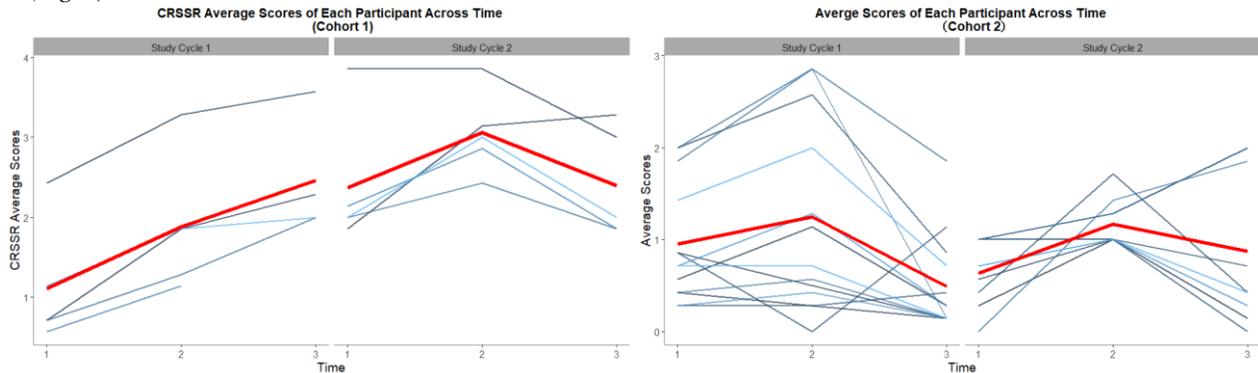
- Background questionnaires to capture demographic information, educational background, and workplace characteristics.
- Detailed written analyses of diversity-based educational scenarios.
- Participant ratings of perceived case difficulty to contextualize analytical complexity.
- Scores from the *CRSSR Learning Progression* rubric to measure longitudinal development in CRSTL practices.
- Additional measures of CRSTL self-efficacy and a *Problem/Solution Rubric* (in Study 2 only) to triangulate validity.

**Selected Analysis.** Data analysis involved analyzing descriptive statistics across time and conducting preliminary multilevel modeling (MLM) using R (*nlme*), to account for the nested and longitudinal structure of the data and autocorrelation effects across measurement periods.

**Selected Results.** Results indicate initial CRSSR scores were both reliable (intercoder and internal structure) and sensitively variable among participants across cohorts—highlighting the participants’ distinct initial capabilities and

competencies in culturally responsive and sustaining practices. Analyses revealed a strong, positive correlation between workplace cultural diversity and CRSSR scores ( $r = 0.64$ ). This finding underscores the relationship between the cultural diversity of educators' work environments and their capacity for engaging in culturally sustaining practices.

**Figures. 1 & 2.** Visualization of CRSSR Descriptive Statistics Over Two Cycles of CBI modules for Cohort 1 (left) and Cohort 2 (right).



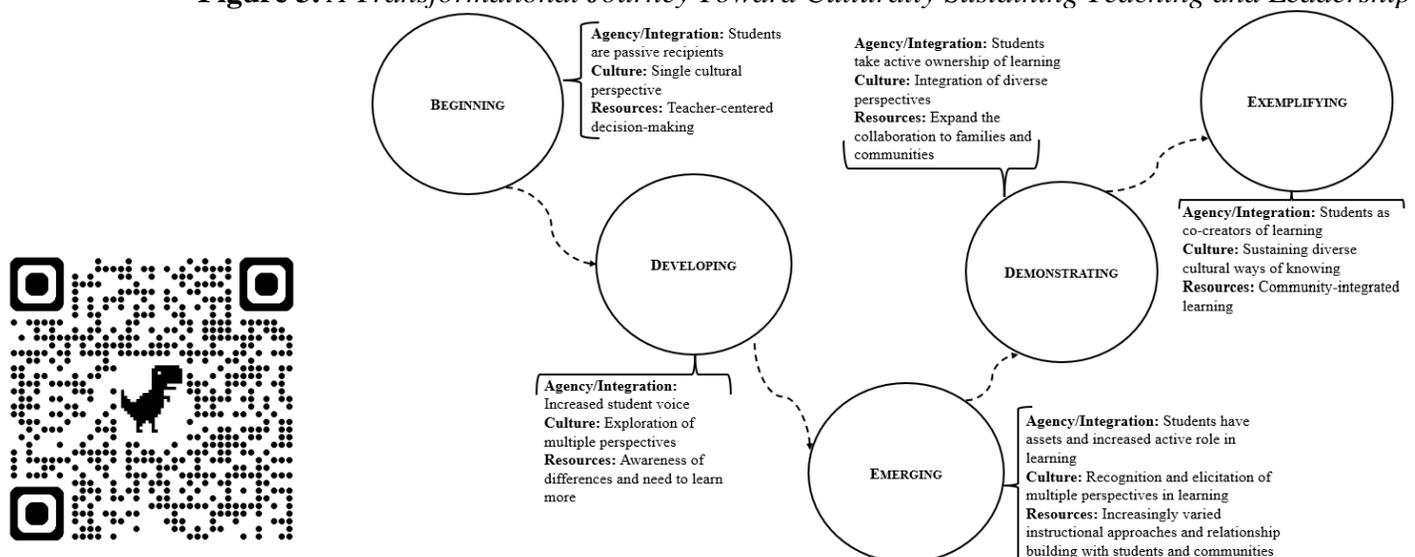
Multilevel modeling, with Cohort 1 participants, demonstrated that workplace cultural diversity significantly and positively predicts CRSSR progression scores ( $B = 4.72, p < .001$ ). Notably, this effect was moderated by educators' years of classroom experience (interaction  $\beta = -0.78, p = .013$ ), indicating that the influence of a diverse workplace becomes more pronounced as educators accumulate classroom experience.

We attribute the growth in CRSSR scores of Cohort 1 to be closely related to the strength of their discussion around classroom cases (between Time 1 and 2 in the respective CBI module cycles; see Figure 1)—leveraging one another's ideas and solutions to complex cases that facilitated deeper learning. Lack of transfer of learning suggests a need for more prolonged engagement with case analyses. Cohort 2, on the other hand, did not have productive discussions—characterized by abundant caution for saying the wrong thing and even regression in proposed solutions and strategies over time for some. This also may be due to the more sensitive nature of Cohort 2 practice. Nonetheless, the sample is small, and further studies are needed to confirm these results and uncover potential relationships.

### Implications

- The CRSSR rubric emerges as a valuable diagnostic and developmental tool for educators, enabling systematic assessment and enhancement of culturally sustaining teaching and leadership practices.
- It holds significant potential as a practical resource within teacher education and educational leadership preparation programs, facilitating structured growth in culturally responsive pedagogical competencies.

**Figure 3.** A Transformational Journey Toward Culturally Sustaining Teaching and Leadership



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