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The imperativeness of diversity in U.S. higher education is closely linked to the many different purposes and functions that colleges and universities have in contemporary society. These institutions are typically viewed as spaces to support intellectual work and advance our understanding of the world (Altbach, 2015); they are also settings for students to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will ultimately improve their employability and maintain America's economic competitiveness, technical excellence, and social and cultural vitality (Brand et al., 2013). Diversity as a strategic focus and priority encourages the integration of multiple perspectives in all domains of scholarship as faculty and students alike learn how to interact with and serve diverse populations (American Council on Education, 2012). Nonetheless, setting and then realizing diversity goals is a complex endeavor because of the many organizational structures and stakeholder groups within higher education (Hurtado, 2007).

Faculty serve an important role in the diffusion of diversity efforts through their design and implementation of transformed curriculum and cultivation of equitable teaching and learning environments (Kezar et al, 2008). Building the capabilities of and commitment from faculty to do this work often comes in the form of professional development (PD) (Macdonald et al., 2019). Though positive outcomes from such initiatives have been observed (Booker et al., 2016; Devereaux et al., 2010; Dewsbury & Brame, 2019), research continues to document chilly classroom climates and students' negative experiences (Canning et al., 2019; Harrison & Tanner, 2018; Shapiro & Williams, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). A reason for such inconsistencies may be the assumption that faculty participation in PD programs is the solution to improving classroom climate (Desimone, 2009). Faculty learning does not take place in a vacuum, and the usual focus of PD programs on instructors' teaching practices overlooks the importance of other

dimensions of teaching, including knowing oneself as an instructor and knowing the students in the classroom (Adams & Love, 2009; Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Manduca, 2017).

In this study, we explore how instructors perceive the role of diversity in their teaching and in their students' learning. While several related studies conducted in K-12 and postsecondary settings exist (Gordon, 2010; Pasque, 2013), recent research has revolutionized the discourses of diversity and equity in education. Acknowledging and increasing diversity on a campus is no longer the gold standard and the only component to achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion agendas (Tienda, 2013). Newer sociopolitical lenses have highlighted how this narrow goal ignores the oppressive structures on campuses and in classrooms (Adiredja, 2019; Barton & Tan, 2019; Gutiérrez, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nasir et al., 2016; Osei-Kofi et al., 2010). Informed by these bodies of work, we investigate if the critical consciousness present in current literature is reflected in how instructors conceptualize diversity in higher education.

Conceptual Frameworks

Conceptions, Approaches, and Practices

The relationship among conceptions, approaches, and practices is complex. Conceptions refer to the meaning that one ascribes to a phenomenon and represent different ways of understanding (Marton & Pong, 2005). Approaches are distinct from conceptions and are concerned with the intentions and strategies one uses in order to address a situation or achieve an objective (Case & Marshall, 2007; Marton & Saljo, 1984). Whereas conceptions and approaches are constructs residing within one's cognition, practices are one's observable actions and behaviors (Thompson, 1984). The theorized relationship suggests that how one conceives of the world informs the approaches one takes and ultimately the practices one employs (Pratt, 1992).

To better illustrate the relationship among these constructs, we draw on literature that has investigated higher education instructors' conceptions, approaches, and practices of teaching. Studies have reported that instructors' conceptions of teaching are likely aligned with the approaches they adopt (Kember & Kwan; 2000; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996). Researchers originally theorized that if an instructor's conception of teaching changes, their approaches and thus practices will subsequently follow (Gow & Kember, 1993; Trigwell, 1995). Ho et al. (2001) provided empirical evidence of this linear relationship from conceptions to practices and demonstrated that a development in teaching conceptions was associated with a concomitant change in teaching practices.

The direct and automatic flow from conceptions to approaches and practices have been criticized, as researchers observed misalignment between conceptions and approaches (Eley, 2006; Norton et al., 2005) and between approaches and practices (Hora, 2014). These researchers noted a recurring theme: Contextual constraints such as one's disciplinary affiliation, institutional support, or classroom environment play a crucial role in how an instructor makes decisions about their practices. Nonetheless, researchers argue that conceptions remain at the core of change. Hora (2014) describes conceptions as the defining "parameter" (p. 64) where the actualization of an approach or practice is contingent upon the problem space as created by a conception. Instructors may be motivated to try new teaching practices, but these changes will not be sustained without a corresponding development in conception (Radzali et al., 2018). While instructors may experience environmental variables that constrain the implementation of new teaching practices, conceptions may still persist (Castillo-Montoya & Ives, 2021).

Phenomenography

Much of the existing literature examines faculty conceptions using *phenomenography* (Åkerlind, 2005; Entwistle, 1997; Tight, 2016). While phenomenography is often presented as a methodology, certain ontological and epistemological assumptions serve as its foundation (Svensson, 1997). Phenomenography focuses on the qualitatively different ways that individuals experience, understand, and think about the same phenomenon (Marton, 1981, 1986). The aim of phenomenography is to identify a range of conceptions, rather than describe correct or incorrect ways of thinking (Marton & Pong, 2005). Because conceptions are internal constructs, a phenomenon is assumed to be inseparable from an individual's experience (Svensson, 1997). Therefore, phenomenography adopts a subjectivist and relative view of the nature of knowledge, where internal knowledge such as conceptions is dependent on the external reality and ultimately created through human thinking and activity (Svensson, 1997).

This relational nature between conceptions and reality means that a conception, when expressed, emphasizes parts of reality that have been more deeply experienced and thought about by an individual (Lamb et al., 2011; Uljens, 1996). A fundamental assumption of phenomenography is that while conceptions holistically represent characteristics of a phenomenon, they can also be described compartmentally in terms of their reduced parts (Svensson, 1997). These reduced parts represent specific features of the phenomenon and are known as *aspects* (Marton & Booth, 1997). Experiencing variation in a particular aspect of a phenomenon is necessary for individuals to be aware of that aspect (Marton & Booth, 1997). Consequently, conceptions are defined by the awareness of variations in each aspect and the relationship among the different aspects of a phenomenon. Variation theory within phenomenography further formalizes such awareness and relationship into an *outcome space*,

which organizes the set of descriptions that are logically related to one another and reveals the distinctive ways in which individuals conceptualize a phenomenon (Marton et al., 2004).

Review of the Literature

Instructor Practices Related to Diversity

While faculty claim to value the diversity of their students this does not necessarily reflect in their classroom practices, as revealed in their words and actions (Maruyama & Moreno, 2000). Empirical research spanning decades has reported on the phenomenon of the *chilly classroom climate*, which describes the marginalization and discrimination minoritized individuals face in college and university classrooms. Such experiences have been tied to students' personal identities including race (Solorzano et al., 2000; Mallinger et al., 2016; Ogunyemi et al., 2021), sexual orientation (Vaccaro & Koob, 2018), religion (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Kosmin & Keysar, 2014), among others. *Microaggressions* (e.g. derogatory statements and invalidations (Pierce, 1970; Sue et al., 2007)) perpetrated by instructors are a main contributing factor to the unwelcoming climate experienced by students (Harrison & Tanner, 2018; Zamudio-Suaréz, 2016). In addition to racial and gendered comments, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015) reported that microaggressions frequently undermined the competence of students. As students' sense of belonging in class is diminished, their motivation and academic performance is negatively impacted (Freeman et al., 2007). Yet it is possible for implicit and explicit messages of deficit and exclusion to be replaced by tangible actions of an instructor that emphasize active listening and caring, recognize and validate student's experiences, and foster opportunities to meaningfully contribute in the classroom. Termed *microaffirmations*, these practices have been shown to encourage communication, promote relationship-building, and cultivate inclusive environments (Powell et al., 2013; Rowe, 2008).

Instructor Approaches to Diversity

Broadly, there is a wide body of literature that surrounds deficit- and asset-based approaches to diversity. A deficit approach is rooted in the understanding that teaching is about uncovering the deficiencies of student knowledge and abilities (Anderson, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Mulligan, 2002; Kosheleva & Kreinovich, 2018) and remediating these weaknesses (Baum et al., 2014; Menchaca, 1997). This approach has been recognized extensively among instructors in higher education (Asmar et al., 2000; McInnis, 1999; O'Shea et al., 2016). In contrast, an asset-based (also known as strength-based) approach seeks ways to identify and use students' existing knowledge and skills in the learning process (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2017; Lopez & Louis, 2009). Although its use by instructors in higher education is much less documented, there is a growing interest in and advocacy for asset-based approaches by student affairs practitioners (Lopez & Louis, 2009; Soria & Stubblefield, 2015).

Only two studies have focused on the specific pedagogical strategies instructors use to address diversity in the classroom. In the context of blended learning in higher education, Boelens et al. (2018) identified three approaches instructors adopted in response to student diversity: (a) *disregard*, where instructors consider no additional support was needed; (b) *adaptation*, where instructors increase the support they provided to match students' needs; and (c) *transformation*, where instructors see a need to redesign the blended learning environment to tailor to students. The *disregard* approach (Boelens et al., 2018) aligns with classic literature and reflects the notion of *color evasiveness* (Annamma et al., 2016) (formerly referred to as color blindness (Lorde, 1982; Milner, 2010)) which asserts that diversity can and should be ignored.

Pasque et al. (2013) categorized higher education faculty's pedagogical approaches to student racial conflict in the classroom. Using interview data from 66 faculty, five major

approaches to racial conflict were identified: (a) *not in my classroom*, where instructors reported no conflict; (b) *let's not make a scene*, where instructors recognize conflicts but avoid addressing them; (c) *taking control*, where instructors use their authority to maintain order; (d) *reactive usage*, where instructors leverage the conflict as a learning opportunity; and (e) *proactive usage*, where instructors purposefully integrate activities into the classroom that will spark conflict. Collectively, these approaches reveal a range of thought processes and assumptions that faculty have and hold when making decisions in the classroom. The color evasiveness approach described in classic literature is again reflected in the *not in my classroom* approach.

In their analysis, Pasque et al. (2013) recognized the various effects that may arise when faculty adopt certain approaches and enact certain practices. For example, deciding not to address conflict in the classroom in order to avoid making a scene in front of students may reduce immediate tension and conflict, but it negates an opportunity for the faculty to model leadership and promote and value diverse perspectives. Pasque et al. (2013) draw on Darder (1991) to acknowledge that efforts to prepare faculty for addressing racial conflict need to consider a multitude of factors including instructors' personal biases. Conceptions of diversity reveal the underlying assumptions and ways of thinking that influence approaches and practices.

Instructor Conceptions of Diversity

In the education research sphere, we note two papers that provide frameworks for instructor conceptions of diversity in higher education. The first of these papers is by Jokikokko (2005), who used phenomenography in their analysis of interview and survey data from 25 Finnish teachers who recently graduated from a program focused on international teacher education. Three different categories of diversity were identified: (a) visible diversity; (b) invisible diversity; and (c) diversity as individual and personal differences. *Visible diversity*

refers to differences among groups of students that are easily identifiable based on external attributes, including race, religion, and languages spoken. *Invisible diversity* describes group differences that are only discernible after interactions with students, such as family history, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. The last category refers to the *individual differences* students have that are not associated with belonging to a certain group or population. Jokikokko (2005) further noted that teachers who held this last conception of diversity often referred to differences in students' learning abilities (e.g. reading or writing difficulties).

Gordon et al. (2010) employed phenomenography in order to investigate university instructors' conceptions of diversity. Using data from asynchronous email interviews from 34 instructors around the world (i.e. Australia, UK, New Zealand, Canada, Pakistan, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, and USA), the authors identified four conceptions of student diversity in a pedagogical context: (a) *homogenous*, in which students are seen as an assembly; (b) *groups*, in which instructors recognize different groups of students; (c) *individuals*, where diversity is seen in terms of individual differences between students; and (d) *comprehensive*, which encompasses student differences at both the group and individual level. Gordon et al. (2010) also identified three conceptions of learning and teaching (i.e. pedagogical actions) associated with student diversity: (a) *ignore*, in which student diversity is not acknowledged, (b) *compensate*, in which actions are implemented that acknowledge and accommodate for the different characteristics of groups or individual students, and (c) *utilize*, in which the diversity of groups of students as well as individuals is recognized and used as a pedagogical resource. Ultimately, these two complementary dimensions of diversity were combined to create an outcome space.

Examined together, the findings from Gordon et al. (2010) build off of those from Jokikokko (2005). Gordon et al. (2010) extended the notion of group versus individual

differences as reported by Jokikokko (2005), and amassed data in which a hybrid conceptualization (e.g. the comprehensive conception) emerged. Additionally, the three conceptions of teaching and learning in the context of student diversity as described by Gordon et al. (2010) reflect the three approaches identified by Boelens et al. (2018) and the five approaches from Pasque et al. (2013).

While the conceptions described by Gordon et al. (2010) appear to be all-encompassing, education research in the past decade has significantly advanced the discourse surrounding critical consciousness and the impact sociopolitical climates have on ideas related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Haynes (2021) has indicated a relationship between racial consciousness and the behaviors of White faculty, which flags the need to investigate other underlying assumptions and levels of awareness. In this study, we seek to apply a sociopolitical lens when investigating how instructors in higher education conceptualize diversity. It is duly important for conceptions of diversity to be investigated within the context of the United States. While Gordon et al. (2010) included instructors from a number of countries, our study is wholly situated within the United States, which has a unique history of race relations and other forms of cultural diversity (Banks, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Sociopolitical Perspectives

Since the turn of the 21st century, education researchers have increasingly attended to the social and political ways of understanding education, teaching, and learning. Termed as the *sociopolitical turn* by Gutiérrez (2013), this growing body of research foregrounds issues of identity, power, and systemic oppression which contrasts the cognitive perspectives that previously dominated the field. The sociopolitical perspective encompasses multiple frameworks that theorize the social nature of teaching and learning. For example, constructs acknowledging

students' experiential and cultural knowledge, such as community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), cultural capital (Erickson, 1996; Lareau, 2011), and funds of knowledge (González & Moll, 2002), expand on the cognitive notion of students' prior knowledge to account for the social ways of knowing and identity development. Constructs such as hidden curriculum (McCabe & Trevino, 1995; Sambell & McDowell, 1998; Semper & Blasco, 2018) and rightful presence (Barton & Tan, 2020; Squire & Darling, 2013) highlight how the U.S. education system is used as a social mechanism to reproduce hierarchical structures related to ways of being and knowing. The goal for researchers who use a sociopolitical perspective is twofold: (a) to uncover and critically examine what kinds of knowledge, experiences, and practices are valued and considered more legitimate than others, and (b) to recognize how structures in the education system create a divide between the dominant and the underrepresented and how this divide influences student identity and power relations in the classroom (Adiredja & Andrews-Larson, 2017; Gutiérrez, 2013; Tolbert & Bazzul, 2017).

The sociopolitical perspective has yet to be merged with the scholarship on instructor conceptions of diversity. The large number of reports documenting the negative impact that instructor practices have on students' sense of belonging suggests it is not only important for education researchers to make the sociopolitical turn, but also for instructors to push the sociopolitical perspective from the realm of research into practice. Given the relationship between conceptions, approaches, and practices, a change in practices requires a change in conceptions. While there have been reports of instructor conceptions that attend to different categories of student identities and demographic characteristics (Gordon et al., 2010; Jokikokko, 2005), these studies do not offer an understanding of how these conceptualizations relate to power, access, and the values of the Western hegemonic educational system (Adiredja &

Andrews-Larson, 2017; Gutiérrez, 2008). To fill the gap in the literature, our research question is: *How do instructors conceptualize diversity in higher education?* The findings of this descriptive study are foundational to understanding how faculty think about diversity and why certain approaches are taken and practices are implemented.

Methods

Recruitment and Participants

Our study was conducted across multiple two-year and four-year minority-serving institutions (MSI) in California, United States. The instructors who served as participants were recruited from three PD programs: One focused on training and support in course redesign and active learning for instructors at two-year MSIs, another promoted departmental discussions on curriculum and assessment through faculty learning communities at a four-year MSI, and the third provided mentoring in pedagogy to postdoctoral scholars who teach part-time at two-year and four-year MSIs. All instructors in our study engaged in their respective PD programs for at least one year. While this convenience sample through the PD programs was likely not representative of faculty at large in higher education, the sampling was also purposeful for the following reasons (Patton, 1990). Instructors who teach at MSIs are more likely to have interacted extensively with students from diverse backgrounds in their classrooms. The instructors also sought support and resources to develop pedagogical knowledge and improve their instructional practices. These specific contextual factors potentially provide information-rich experiences in relation to the phenomenon of diversity.

The sample included 30 instructors: 16 were full-time faculty at four-year MSIs, six were full-time faculty at two-year MSIs, and eight were postdoctoral scholars who served as part-time instructors of record at two-year and four-year MSIs. In terms of racial and ethnic backgrounds,

19 instructors identified as White or Caucasian; five as Hispanic, Latina/o/x, or Chicana/o/x; two as Asian or Asian American; two with multiple racial and ethnic identities; and two unknown. In terms of gender, 17 instructors identified as female, 12 as male, and one unknown. In terms of disciplines, 19 instructors were in the natural sciences, eight in the humanities, and three in the social sciences. Each instructor taught a range of courses with a variety in class size and subject matter within their respective disciplines.

Data Collection

Individual instructors were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol designed to explore their conceptions of diversity in relation to teaching and learning in the classroom. The semi-structured interview format allowed instructors the freedom to expand their views while maintaining a focus on the discussion (Bernard, 1988). Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each, and the protocol consisted of six main questions: (1) When you hear the word diversity in relation to higher education, what comes to mind? (2) Was there ever a time in your academic career when you thought about diversity in a different way? How did you think about diversity then? (3) Are there other words that your campus or department use to describe ideas related to diversity? (4) Does student diversity influence how you teach? (5) Does student diversity influence how your students learn? (6) What do students who excel in your course or discipline have in common? What do students who are struggling in your course or discipline have in common?

Throughout the interview, we asked probing questions to seek more depth to answers when necessary. The second interview question prompted instructors to describe their retrospective conceptions of diversity and was designed based on the critical incident technique (Butterfield et al., 2009; Flanagan, 1954) to reveal any critical incidents, or encounters, that

prompted participants to transform the way they think about diversity. This question was included to capture a wider range of variations in the outcome space, as the current conceptions of the participants may have converged based on their common experiences of working at MSIs. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and de-identified before analysis.

Data Analysis

Immediately following each interview, the researchers completed a contact summary form (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The contact summary form served three purposes: (a) guiding data collection strategies for the next interview by identifying which probing questions were fruitful, (b) suggesting new codes or ways to refine existing codes, and (c) serving as a point of coordination between the two researchers involved with interviewing instructors.

The analytical process was organized into three steps. First, two members of the research team developed preliminary codes using the contact summary forms and close readings of the transcripts. Conceptual labels were created to describe what each instructor appeared to be attending to when discussing their experiences. At this time, the research team consisting of all four authors also drew parallels between ideas identified in the interviews and existing constructs in the literature. This comparison served as an iterative process in which the investigative findings influenced the literature reviewed by the researchers, which in turn informed the refinement of data analysis. Second, these initial codes were transformed into conceptual categories by drawing relationships among the different aspects and variations emerging from the data. A constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed to compare descriptions and definitions for each category with those from previously analyzed transcripts. This allowed for the confirmation or disconfirmation of previous conjectures, the guarding against biases, and the maintenance of consistency. Finally, data for each intersection of aspect

and variation were revisited to further refine and develop the aspects of the phenomenon and delineate the variations within each aspect in the outcome space, resulting in different conceptions of diversity held by the instructors.

Reliability and Validity

Our research team consisted of diverse perspectives including different nationalities and varying intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender. We used a process of argumentation at all three stages of the analytical process (Schoenfeld, 1992) to come to a consensus regarding the development of the codes, aspects, variations, conceptions, and the outcome space. Any disagreements were debated and fully resolved in research team meetings. Engagement in this activity provided a check against personal biases and aided with reliability throughout the process. Åkerlind (2005) described this process as dialogic reliability in phenomenography, where researchers reach agreement “through discussion and mutual critique of the data and of each researcher’s interpretive hypotheses”.

Entwistle (1997) has described the value of phenomenography in higher education as producing actionable insights into learning and teaching. Åkerlind (2005) has further argued that phenomenographic research should result in an outcome space regarded as appropriate and useful by the relevant communities. Throughout the iterative coding process, preliminary codes, aspects, variations, and outcome spaces were presented to various communities of education researchers, undergraduate and graduate students, and university faculty and administrators in research meetings and national conferences. Validity stems from the refinement of the outcome space through these repeated cycles of critique and feedback and emerges from the perceived usefulness of the outcomes space.

Findings

Instructors in this study attended to five aspects when conceptualizing diversity: (a) Student Identities, (b) Intelligence Mindset, (c) Student Engagement, (d) Instructor Actions, and (e) Legitimized Membership. Based on the variations within each of these aspects, we identified a three qualitatively distinct conceptions. The first conception maintains a focus on fixed qualities about groups of students and standards for higher education. Borrowing from the field of philosophy, we term the first conception *essentialist*, as essentialism defines the nature of entities in the world by a set of immutable traits. The second conception centers on student achievement, with students divorced from their context. We call the second conception *functionalist* because the functionalism ideology in philosophy asserts that entities in the world are defined by how (well) they function within their environments. The third conception, which we designate *existentialist*, foregrounds individual student experiences. Existentialism is based on the view of individuals not merely as thinking subjects but as acting, feeling, and living humans with stories that extend beyond their immediate environments. In the following sections, we describe how instructors with these three conceptions interpret and enact each of the five aspects. We further summarize the variations within each aspect and between the conceptions in a phenomenographic outcome space (Table 1).

Student Identities

Student Identities describes how an instructor interprets the characteristics that make students diverse. The *essentialist* conception is based on the interpretation that student characteristics are permanent and unchanging, thus we call this *static*. An instructor viewing diversity with an *essentialist* conception emphasizes the fixedness of certain qualities of students. For example, in the following excerpt, one instructor recognizes that students have different

linguistic backgrounds but assumes that students who cannot understand the language of instruction do not belong at that institution:

Static: “Linguistic diversity, well, some of my Chinese students have been great in terms of effort. Some of them, I think, never understood a word I said. And I don’t know why they’re here. So there’s diversity of that background in that respect.”

Here, the instructor interprets linguistic background as a permanent trait that defines who students are as learners. The instructor questions the presence of students who could not understand the language, which suggests a belief that there are certain features that are deemed necessary in order to succeed in higher education.

From the *functionalist* conception, student characteristics are perceived as *malleable*. An instructor operating with the *functionalist* conception acknowledges that student differences position certain students better for success than others. However, as illustrated in the following excerpt, the instructor does not view this difference as a defining trait of the student and instead sees the student’s potential to be shaped and supported:

Malleable: “Just students who didn’t have that background, and so I went in trying to, you know, ‘Here’s a bunch of readings. Let’s read them and talk about them.’ They didn’t know what to do. They just had such diverse backgrounds. And some had good high school backgrounds, some not up to that, and so that’s always been a challenge. I’ve always been sympathetic to students. I’ve tried to make things as accessible as I can.”

The instructor in the excerpt recognizes that while the varying levels of prior academic preparation can affect student performance, there are resources and strategies to help students be as functional as possible in the classroom.

In the *existentialist* conception, the origins of student identities are foregrounded and viewed as outputs of the *experiential* lived histories of each individual student. For example, one instructor articulates how experiences from student backgrounds may impact who these individuals are as learners:

Experiential: “I’m not going to be able to sit with all 200 students and find out what is it about their background that resonates with what we’re trying to learn. And by background, it might mean the stories their family told; it might mean the way they were taught to approach an assignment in high school—and those don’t intersect or overlap in any way. So of course, the fact that they come from different backgrounds from each other and have had different educational opportunities until they walked in the door affects how they learn and it affects whether or not they feel confident, or a little bit imposter-ish, about being on a campus.”

The *essentialist* and *functionalist* conceptions acknowledge student backgrounds, whereas the *existentialist* conception interprets background as individual experiences and realizes the impact these experiences have on the sense of belonging.

We conjecture that our study shifts the focus of diversity away from *what* features are recognized to *how* they are recognized. The same student feature can be viewed from all three conceptions. As an example, consider the student characteristic of linguistic background as described in the first excerpt. An instructor who adheres to the *essentialist* conception assumes that the status of linguistic background is static and unchanging, so students who cannot understand English do not belong in the classroom. In contrast, an instructor with the *functionalist* conception views linguistic background as malleable and might promote specific programs to help students develop their English language skills. Lastly, an instructor with the

existentialist conception views language backgrounds as an asset brought to the learning environment and tied to the unique cultural knowledge and experiences of individual students.

Intelligence Mindset

Intelligence Mindset describes how an instructor perceives student intelligence. In the *essentialist* conception, intelligence is characterized as a *fixed*, innate quality. An instructor viewing intelligence from the *essentialist* conception assumes that students' current skill set and knowledge defines their ability to succeed. For example, in the following excerpt, one instructor asserts that students who perform poorly on an exam do not have the potential to improve:

Fixed: "I was a person who sometimes told my students if they did poorly on the test, 'Maybe you should consider changing your major.' (...) I'm basically telling that student, 'You cannot get better than this,' and 'You will always do bad on all the exams no matter what you do.'"

In this excerpt, the instructor interprets intelligence as a pre-determined trait that categorizes students as either able or unable to succeed in the discipline, suggesting that there is a certain standard of knowledge and skills that students must possess in order to thrive in a particular major or in higher education.

In contrast to the *essentialist* conception, intelligence in the functionalist conception is a characteristic that can be developed with time and resources. An instructor operating from the functionalist conception may see the potential of all students to gain expertise in a discipline but adheres to a *deficit* perspective. In the following excerpt, an instructor compares two sets of students and sees both as capable, yet emphasizes that one group of students have not had the experiences to develop the skills needed for higher education:

Deficit: [Referring to students at a two-year institution] “Sometimes I tell my students, ‘When I look at you, a lot of you are as motivated and as intelligent as my class at [four-year institution]. But all of you lack the background from age 13 to 18 to study harder. It’s the discipline to solve problems.’ I mean, when I was at [four-year institution], I had kids at 18 that are like, ‘Oh, when I was 14, I was at robotics camp.’ ‘I know how to program a robot.’ ‘I know a programming language.’ (...) And I tell [my students], ‘These kids have done a lot of things already, and they are way far ahead of you guys. But if you compare just intelligence, there’s no difference (...) They just have had so much more exposure and have done so much more. So you guys need to catch up.’”

The instructor in the excerpt acknowledges that prior experiences and academic preparation impact student performance but suggests that students still have the ability to “catch up” to those who are more prepared. This is in contrast to the *essentialist* conception where intelligence is characterized as a fixed trait, yet both the *essentialist* and functionalist conceptions assume that students are lacking in an area that is required for success.

In the *existentialist* conception, intelligence is viewed from an *asset* perspective. In the following excerpt, one biology instructor describes how the knowledge possessed by a music major can be leveraged and valued:

Asset: “You don’t want to feel like, ‘Oh, everyone seems to be getting it, but I’m not. I must be dumb.’ It’s like, ‘No, no, no, wait, what’s your major? Oh, you’re a music major? So what can you tell us about this?’ You know, that kind of thing, including and really trying to figure out how everyone can participate and feel like they belong—feel like they are helping.”

The instructor recognizes that performance in one area or discipline does not ultimately define the learner as they possess knowledge and skills in other areas or disciplines. The instructor also probes to determine what assets the student brings to the classroom. Intelligence, as defined in the *existentialist* conception, encompasses a whole spectrum of knowledge and skills, all of which are valuable assets for learning.

Student Engagement

Student Engagement describes how an instructor perceives the impact diversity has on students' interaction with the course content and with one another. In the *essentialist* conception, student diversity is considered *irrelevant* or even an *impediment* to student engagement and learning. An instructor operating from the *essentialist* conception either does not acknowledge the impact student diversity has in the learning process or attends to how student diversity is a hindrance to learning that cannot be overcome:

Irrelevant: “So you’re saying that from the student’s point of view, does their own diversity influence the way that they learn? I wouldn’t think so. I think that we all learn in similar ways.”

Impediment: “Some of my students will be like, ‘I’ve only been speaking English for three or four years.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, of course you can’t write the same as somebody who has been speaking it for 18.’”

The instructors in both of these excerpts assume student engagement does not meaningfully benefit from the presence of diversity. In the irrelevant perspective, student diversity does not play a role in learning and thus does not need to be acknowledged. In the impediment perspective, student diversity is viewed as deficits.

The functionalist conception is characterized by the idea that there are students who have certain knowledge and skill sets needed for success in the course, and there is another group of students who do not possess such knowledge and skills. An instructor viewing student engagement from the functionalist conception believes that a learning environment should be organized in a way that *supports weaknesses* of certain students. For example, one instructor emphasizes the structure of an activity which enables this support:

Supporting Weaknesses: “If I give my students group work, that means that there’s a group of four, but only two people work because the smart kids do all the problems. (...) I say, ‘After you’re done with the problem, I’ll pick one random person to do the problem at the whiteboard. So if you don’t know how to do the problem, you guys don’t get a point for this.’ So then, everybody needs to know, so they need to talk to each other, right? (...) So they have a learning movement in those exercises.”

Here, the instructor recognizes that diversity is manifested in the different knowledge and skills students possess and intends to create an environment where more accomplished students can support their peers. Both the *essentialist* and functionalist conceptions acknowledge that there are certain forms of student diversity that prove to be a hindrance to success; however, rather than viewing it as something that cannot be overcome, the *functionalist* conception recognizes that assistance can be given through purposeful organization of student engagement.

In the *existentialist* conception, diversity enriches learning and student engagement is characterized by the interpretation that every student possesses a unique combination of knowledge, experiences, and skills, thus we call this *reciprocity*. For example, in the following excerpt, one instructor describes the benefits of students interacting with others and articulates the importance of creating these opportunities in the learning environment:

Reciprocity: “I think more experiences that students have in the classroom and outside the classroom—in terms of working with a diverse student population—is going to ultimately help them in the long run because, whether they go to academia or another job when they enter the workforce, they’re going to be forced to work with diverse employees. And so, the more that they understand how to work with different personalities, different mindsets, the more prepared they’re going to be to help make a change for the world. I think that creating these opportunities within the research lab or within the classroom will really spur students to understand, sort of, how ideas are generated from multiple types of people from different backgrounds, and that it will really benefit them in the long run in terms of contributing to our society and creating a more meaningful existence in terms of their work or their personal life.”

The instructor in the excerpt acknowledges how valuable diversity is during students’ development of knowledge, skills, and experiences in higher education. The instructor also recognizes how the learning environment should leverage diversity to initiate and stimulate the interaction among students. While student interactions are only viewed as a unidirectional benefit of knowledge from the more accomplished students to those with weaknesses in the *functionalist* conception views, the *existentialist* conception acknowledges that all students have meaningful insights to offer and the potential to learn from one another.

Instructor Actions

Instructor Actions describes how an instructor perceives their role in teaching students from diverse backgrounds. The *essentialist* conception is characterized by the belief that the role of an instructor is to employ instructional strategies based on *equality*. An instructor with this conception attends to the idea of fairness and meritocracy:

Equal Treatment: “I treat everyone the same. I grade everybody the same. I’m grading based on the quality of their work.”

In the excerpt, the instructor asserts equal treatment of all students, where diversity does not need to be considered. Student performance is divorced from or not impacted by student diversity.

In the *functionalist* conception, diversity impacts student circumstances, which has the potential to affect performance. There is an understanding that it is within the scope of an instructor’s profession to attend to these differences and alter instructional strategies to *accommodate* student diversity. For example, in the following excerpt, one instructor describes the ways in which their course acknowledges that students may be maintaining multiple roles and commitments in addition to academics:

Accommodations: “I mean, I don’t know all the situations that my students have, but I try my best to have policies in my class that make clear to students that it’s okay for them to have other things going on in their lives and for things to come up, right, to accommodate them in that way. (...) So I do that by dropping homework and dropping a quiz without any penalty.”

The instructor acknowledges that student diversity has the potential to impact student performance in a course and addresses unforeseen student circumstances by adjusting the assessment parameters. An instructor operating from the *functionalist* conception paints diversity as a shortfall of students that interferes with their success, and it is the responsibility of the instructor to be understanding of these circumstances and give students grace.

The *existentialist* conception not only acknowledges that student diversity impacts student performance but also understands the importance of diversity within the classroom, in the discipline, and in society. An instructor operating from the *existentialist* conception recognizes

that it is the responsibility of the instructor to *intentionally implement* specific pedagogical and curriculum approaches that foster productive thinking and conversations centered around diversity and social justice issues. One instructor describes how they felt it was their duty to introduce these issues to their students:

Intentional Implementation: “I really thought about like, ‘Who cares if this class is about mechanics and materials? This is still about humans.’ (...) And so I think bringing in some of these conversations into my class (...) I feel like it’s my duty—that I have to do it. That’s why I did that assignment on diverse products and—the very first female crash test dummy was just designed. Because we’ve always used the standard male crash test dummy, women are more likely to be injured and die in car accidents, because the cars have been designed to protect a standard male crash test dummy. (...) And so I showed them this picture, ‘Here’s the first female crash test dummy. Why is this important? Why do we need to create different crash test dummies?’”

Here, the instructor holds a sense of moral obligation to educate their students about diversity and shed light on social justice issues stemming from the discipline. There is an understanding that the instructor should integrate curriculum and assignments with this focus. While an instructor operating from the *functionalist* conception may only consider the impact diversity has on student performance in the classroom at a specific snapshot in time, an instructor with the *existentialist* conception considers instances beyond this single time point and acknowledges how diversity impacts society. An instructor adhering to the *existentialist* conception recognizes their responsibility to cultivate students’ development as critical scholars and professionals.

Legitimized Membership

Legitimized Membership describes how an instructor positions students relative to implicit classroom norms and structures. The *essentialist* conception considers students as *outsiders* to higher education. An instructor operating from the *essentialist* conception assumes that some students cannot maintain the standards necessary to persist and succeed and therefore do not belong. For example, in the following excerpt, one instructor describes how their students did not possess the knowledge and awareness of classroom standards and practices:

Outsiders: “My first semester ever, I would just teach, and then give a midterm, and then I would say, ‘Oh my God. We did all these problems and lectures. How come they don’t know how to do this?’ Because the first expectation when you teach is, everything you say, students should know how to do. And I tell them when I teach, ‘Everything I say, I assume you know how to do. If you don’t, you’re not doing the minimum.’”

The instructor places the responsibility of poor performance on the students, taking on the role as a gatekeeper in higher education. The *essentialist* conception is characterized by the notion of implicit benchmarks that determine if certain students belong in the classroom.

The *functionalist* conception acknowledges that students’ prior experiences may not have prepared them for the rigorous environment of higher education, positioning students as *guests*. An instructor adhering to the *functionalist* conception holds a sense of responsibility to help students reach the expected standards or benchmarks. In the following excerpt, one instructor describes how a first-generation college student may not have the knowledge and skills to succeed in higher education, so it is the instructor’s role to help this student develop the required knowledge and skills:

Guests: “Right now, I have tons of assignments (...) If I didn’t scaffold it for them, they would be like, ‘Oh. It’s fine. I’ll just study for the exam and I’ll do well’ (...) And so I put

in a ton of scaffolds because I think that it helps the students that might be a first-generation college student or something like that. So I'm like, 'Here's all the homework, and it's really important that you do it every week, and here are the applications, activities, and the quizzes.' And I do all of that because I think it helps the student diversity. The students that don't know that they need to study every week, right? They might not know how to really do that."

While both the *essentialist* and *functionalist* conceptions acknowledge implicit standards, the *functionalist* conception is distinguished by the understanding that an instructor plays a role in supporting students as they navigate higher education to achieve these standards.

The *existentialist* conception attends to the *rightful presence* of students in higher education. An instructor adhering to the *existentialist* conception acknowledges that students bring valid and meaningful knowledge and experiences even if they do not align with existing norms, practices, and standards. In the following excerpt, one instructor describes how students hold just as much authority in bringing knowledge and experience to the classroom. The instructor also critiques the norms of higher education as it suggests exclusion and argues for the need to accept other ways in which students engage:

Rightful Presence: "For an instructor, it should be productively humbling to say, 'I can't know everything about your experiences. (...) Particularly teaching world history, some of what we're going to teach this quarter or discuss as a group, someone in this room might know better than I do because I'm not an expert on everything that's ever happened in the world.' (...) I felt it was important to invite the students into the exploration process and to make them feel like they could be experts about some piece of it. (...) There's so much about the discourse of academic English and the discourse of

higher ed that is still couched in a really WASP-y, white way. And if we presume that's the only way people will display or perform knowledge, then we're cutting people out automatically who don't want to present that way or don't want to speak that way.”

Here, the instructor validates that students and their ways of knowing and speaking belong in higher education. In fact, the instructor articulates that students are experts in these ways and that their presence needs to be established through the disruption of the current norms and discourses of higher education. From the *existentialist* conception, authority and expertise is distributed among both students and instructors.

Outcome Space

All of the instructors interviewed in our study recognized diversity, yet as our findings have shown, there is a wide range of how diversity is understood and manifested. The five aspects (Student Identities, Intelligence Mindset, Student Engagement, Instructor Actions, and Legitimized Membership) represent the compartmental characteristics of diversity that instructors in our study attended to. We identified the three conceptions (*essentialist*, *functionalist*, and *existentialist*) based on a holistic integration of the aspects around similar philosophical assumptions (Table 1).

In the *essentialist* conception, an instructor perceives students as having static characteristics and fixed intelligence. Diversity is either irrelevant in the classroom or can hinder student learning and engagement. An instructor adopts pedagogical strategies based on equal treatment and meritocracy and positions students as outsiders to higher education.

In the *functionalist* conception, an instructor holds the understanding that students can be functional in higher education with support and resources. Student characteristics are viewed as malleable and student intelligence is perceived from a deficit perspective. An instructor

accommodates students' diversity and learning environments are organized so that accomplished students can support those with weaknesses. Students are guests since their presence still requires affirmation and assistance from the structures and authority in higher education.

In the *existentialist* conception, an instructor views individual experiences as the origin for student characteristics and as assets in building upon knowledge and skills. An instructor facilitates reciprocity or exchange between students and takes responsibility for engaging them in discussions about how their experiences and the experiences of others impact their work as scholars in higher education. Students are considered rightfully present in higher education.

Discussion

Motivated by the recent discourse surrounding the social and political nature teaching and learning, we sought to examine instructor conceptions of diversity because the current literature lacks awareness of this sociopolitical perspective. In this section, we articulate how our findings serve as a unique contribution to the literature that connects the conceptions of diversity field to the sociopolitical lens. We highlight how the *existentialist* conception we have identified is the manifestation of critical discourses in instructor conceptions of diversity.

Student Identities

Previously, researchers have reported on the different student features instructors notice. There have been categorizations of diversity based on the visibility of certain characteristics (Jokikokko, 2005; Loden, 1996) and the level (group or individual) at which these differences are discerned (Gordon et al., 2010; Jokikokko, 2005). The outcome space we propose transforms the conversation by focusing instead on how instructors interpret these differences. Viewing the aspect of student identities from this new frame of mind allowed us to identify the existence of the *existentialist* conception, which has previously been absent in the literature. An instructor

who recognizes that personal identities shape student learning and engagement in the classroom may also hold an understanding that personal identities and academic identities are not operationally distinct (Nasir & Saxe, 2003). The implications for having an *existentialist* conception move beyond simple recognition of differences between students to acknowledge how personal identities are tied to familiarity with institutional contexts and expectations, demonstrating an awareness of student cultural capital (Erickson, 1996; Lareau, 2011). An instructor with an *existentialist* conception will be more likely to consider the extent of students' access to traditional social discourses of higher education when making pedagogical decisions.

Since we have focused on how instructors interpret student diversity as opposed to what types of student diversity exist, we were able to draw connections between the conceptions we identified and the instructor practices that other researchers have reported in the literature. We argue that microaggressions and other acts of discrimination are practices of instructors with the *essentialist* conception. An instructor adhering to the *essentialist* conception assumes that student identities are fixed. The implicit biases held by an instructor are typically tied to historical forms of discrimination (e.g. Mendez v. Westminster, 1954) which may undermine the competence of minoritized students and decrease their sense of belonging (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Intelligence Mindset

Our work provides three different interpretations of intelligence. Previously, the notion of implicit theory (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) has dominated the research on mindset. Researchers have reported two ways of understanding intelligence (Dweck, 2008; Rattan et al., 2012). The first is fixed mindset, which is when an individual assumes that intelligence is an innate, permanent trait. The second is growth mindset, which is when an individual holds the belief that

intelligence can be developed over time. The *essentialist* conception that we identified is characterized in the same way that fixed mindset is in current literature.

We argue that the construct of growth mindset can be interpreted by instructors in two ways—from a deficit perspective, which reflects the assumptions that characterize the *functionalist* conception, and from an asset perspective, which aligns with the *existentialist* conception. The differences between the *functionalist* and *existentialist* conceptions have implications for the approaches instructors use. An instructor adhering to the *functionalist* conception is more likely to implement pedagogical approaches that uncover student knowledge and ability deficiencies. An instructor with the *existentialist* conception is more likely to use pedagogical approaches that recognize and build upon students' existing knowledge and skills. Our three conceptions of viewing intelligence provides a more nuanced and complex understanding of how instructors think about students' capacities and capabilities.

Student Engagement

The *existentialist* conception, which is characterized by the reciprocity of insights, relates to the constructs of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and students' funds of knowledge (González & Moll, 2002). The construct of community cultural wealth describes the knowledges and skills minoritized communities possess that resist forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005). Funds of knowledge are knowledge bases that are connected to students' cultural practices and daily experiences (González & Moll, 2002). An instructor operating from the *existentialist* conception values students' existing knowledge and skills and sees the benefit of having these knowledge and skills shared among students. When an instructor values all types of knowledge and skills, the instructor challenges the dominant ideology that so often silences or ignores minoritized students (Bernal, 2002; Hurtado et al., 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2000). The *essentialist* and

functionalist conceptions assume that the notions of White, middle class cultures are the standards valued in higher education (Bourdieu et al., 1977). An instructor adhering to either the *essentialist* or *functionalist* conception may adopt approaches and practices that communicate to students the need to conform to the existing system (Yosso, 2005).

Instructor Actions

The *existentialist* conception introduces a new way of understanding the role an instructor has in the teaching and learning of diverse students. The instructors with the *existentialist* conception in our data set expressed a sense of moral obligation to teach about the impact diversity has on students, the discipline, and society. We conjecture that the instructors who use the *proactive usage* approach as reported by Pasque et al. (2013) may be operating from the *existentialist* conception as intentional conflict was purposefully organized in a transformative learning moment for students. The student-centered pedagogical approach known as culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) has often been described as the gold standard for teaching diverse students (Richards et al., 2007). Proponents of CRP suggest that instructors need to use the cultural characteristics of students to make information relevant in order to effectively teach diverse students (Gay, 2002). In agreement with the critiques made by Sleeter (2012) about CRP, we argue that CRP in practice is underpinned by the *functionalist* conception as it foregrounds student identities as barriers to learning. Similar to approaches such as Gordon's (2010) *compensate* category and Pasque et al.'s (2013) *take control* and *reactive usage*, CRP is a form of othering that highlights how minoritized students' cultures are not mainstream and need to be accommodated.

In our data, we identified the presence of the color-evasiveness ideology (Annamma et al., 2016) in the *essentialist* conception, which we conjecture serves as the underpinning for a

meritocratic approach that makes way for practices that segregate students by ability (Oakes, 1986). The meritocratic approach disguises discipline content and higher education as completely objective and implies that a failure to grasp the knowledge or navigate the space is due to the individual's own deficit (Cole & Bruner, 1971; Rogoff, 2003). Gordon's (2010) *ignore* approach, as well as Pasque et al.'s (2013) *not in my classroom* and *let's not make a scene* approaches, align with the *essentialist* conception assumption that student identities are permanent and irrelevant to learning.

Legitimized Membership

Finally, we assert that our findings highlight an often unnoticed, but important feature, of the instructor-student relationship, which is how instructors position students in relation to higher education. The construct of Legitimized Membership was first used in the context of political sociology to describe the goal state of asylum seekers in host countries (Squire & Darling, 2013). Legitimacy is established when a newcomer's cultural knowledge and experiences are viewed as valuable contributions to a community; however, asylum seekers often experience the perpetual feeling of being a guest (Tedesco & Bagelman, 2017). Newcomers are granted institutionalized rights by the host community, but the act of granting insinuates the act of asking for permission. Newcomers are positioned as inferior, or guests, of the host community. While newcomers may have access to spaces and services with these rights, the historical and social norms may still favor the dominant narrative of the host community making the newcomers' experiences and struggles invisible and preventing them from ever establishing legitimacy (Barnett, 2005; Vraști & Dayal, 2016). The idea of rightful presence critiques this power dynamic and suggests that legitimacy occurs when a newcomer's experiences are made present and are used to restructure the environment and reauthor their rights (Barton & Tan, 2020).

Barton and Tan (2019) were the first to apply these constructs to provide a social justice lens in which to investigate teaching and learning. Their study context focused specifically on practices in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics classrooms that helped to make present the lives and experiences of students who have been historically marginalized in schooling and society. We leverage this framework as a lens to examine the different ways instructors interpret students' positions in relation to the higher education space. We conjecture that an instructor operating from the *essentialist* conception may mobilize the *hidden curriculum*, which are the unwritten and unofficial norms, expectations, values, and perspectives implied by the school context and learned by students in order to inform their interactions with others (McCabe & Trevino, 1995; Sambell & McDowell, 1998; Semper & Blasco, 2018). Portelli (1993) argued that the hidden curriculum perpetuates and exacerbates the inequities that already exist within higher education because the academic sphere becomes even more challenging to navigate for students who are unaware of them. An instructor with the *essentialist* conception may assume that since students have access to institutional resources and facilities, the onus is on them to learn the hidden curriculum embedded within these spaces. An instructor with the *functionalist* conception may perceive themselves as hosts with a responsibility to make the hidden curriculum explicit for students. An instructor with the *existentialist* conception seeks to establish the legitimacy of students. Barton and Tan (2020) propose that instructors working towards rightful presence in teaching and learning need to reconsider and restructure their understanding of what knowledge is, who has it, and who can speak about it.

Limitations and Future Directions

While our study greatly contributes to the literature by offering explanatory insights into how instructors conceptualize diversity, we are aware of a few limitations. There is the concern

of reaching theoretical saturation, which arises from our use of phenomenography and its underlying assumptions that only a limited number of qualitatively different conceptions of a phenomenon exist (Cossham, 2017). Our participant pool consists of instructors who were involved in PD opportunities and were teaching at MSIs. We recognize that our sample has the potential to introduce a biased perspective; however, we believe the critical incident questions from our interview protocol served to alleviate this bias. We also note that the instructors in our study are from U.S. institutions of higher education. While theoretical saturation may have been attained for our specific context, we acknowledge that this may not be the case had we considered a more global perspective. Our results may prompt questions about how an instructor's conception of diversity aligns with their salient identities. While it is beyond the scope of our current study, it will be important to investigate the relationship between instructor identity and conceptions, as this may shed light on what types of experiences or interactions promote changes in conceptions. We recognize that more work needs to be done to determine how conceptions of diversity align with approaches and practices and how we can change such conceptions. Below, we offer suggestions for embedding our work in instructor PD.

Implications

The outcome space we provide here can serve as a tool for instructors to reflect on their own beliefs. Such processing offers ways to consider new dimensions of diversity and how it impacts the classroom from both instructor and student perspectives. While the existing literature describes a handful of PD interventions aimed at transforming instructional practices, our outcome space offers a framework to support instructor conceptual change. Given the relationship between conceptions and practices, we argue that PD that incorporates conceptual change can promote the adoption of more targeted practices to foster inclusive classroom

climates. While the findings we have articulated from our study do not directly suggest any modes or mechanisms for conceptual change, existing literature has several suggestions.

The first mechanism for conceptual change is micro-level and based in Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), a paradigm in which individuals grow through their relationships with others (Miller & Stiver 1997; Schwartz, 2019). RCT asserts that meaning and empowerment can be derived by instructors as they connect authentically with their students. In developing greater awareness and understanding of their students' backgrounds, instructors are positioned to recognize aspects of diversity during interactions and curriculum design. Eastman et al. (2019) conducted a case study of an engineering professor and documented the professor's changing understanding of race, privilege, and equity. They noted that the professor's interactions with minoritized students were essential experiences that promoted a change in perspective. While building relationships with students may be an informal practice undertaken by individual instructors, formal interventions can facilitate these interactions. For example, Carballo et al. (2019) reported on a training intervention in which faculty conceptions of disability and inclusive education were transformed towards a more positive understanding of how they could support their students with disabilities. They noted that an important feature of their intervention was that students with disabilities were invited to speak about their experiences at each session.

The second mechanism for conceptual change considers a macro-level perspective and utilizes the phenomenographic lens. The emphasis on "levels of awareness" in phenomenography provides a pedagogical framework known as the *Pedagogy of Learning* (Marton et al. 2004), which allows for "the object of learning to serve as a starting point to explore the conditions that make learning possible" (Wright & Osman, 2018, p. 264). If the goal is for instructors to have and enact upon a deeper understanding of the diversity that exists in

their classroom, they must be familiarized with the dimensions of variation in order to reflect on their own level of awareness and current conceptions and approaches to teaching and learning (Trigwell et al., 2005; Wright & Osman, 2018). The aspects and conceptions we have outlined in our outcome space should be explicitly presented to instructors as the object of learning. This presentation of contrasting conceptions may enable instructors to reflect on what conception of diversity they currently hold and what conception of diversity they desire to hold. The aspects provide instructors with different angles of diversity to which they should attend. These in turn can be connected to specific approaches and practices. Whether it is through individual reflection or a formalized PD opportunity, we invite instructors to recognize the power and impact their beliefs and actions have on students.

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Table 1

Outcome Space for Instructor Conceptions of Diversity

Aspects	Type I (Essentialist)	Type II (Functionalist)	Type III (Existentialist)
Student Identities: How an instructor interprets characteristics of students	Static: Student traits are permanent	Malleable: Student attributes can adapt to the learning environment	Experiential: Students' lived experiences are inseparable from the learners they are
<i>Dimension of Variation</i> <i>Awareness that:</i>		<i>Student characteristics can change</i>	<i>Focus on student life outside of the learning environment</i>
Intelligence Mindset: How an instructor perceives student intelligence	Fixed: Intelligence is an innate quality that cannot be changed	Deficit: Expertise in a discipline can be developed over time with resources	Asset: Different experiences can be leveraged as intelligence in learning
<i>Dimension of Variation</i> <i>Awareness that:</i>		<i>Student intelligence is malleable</i>	<i>Intelligence includes the collections of knowledge and skills based in students' lived experiences and cultural practices</i>
Student Engagement: How an instructor perceives the impact student diversity has on student engagement	Irrelevant or impediment: Student diversity does not contribute to learning and may hinder engagement	Supporting weaknesses: Students who are more successful can help students who are struggling	Reciprocity: Students can learn from one another's perspectives and unique experiences
<i>Dimension of Variation</i> <i>Awareness that:</i>		<i>Learning impediments from diversity can be overcome</i>	<i>Diversity enhances learning</i>
Instructor Actions: How an instructor perceives their role in teaching diverse students	Equal treatment: Students are regarded equally to maintain fairness	Accommodation: Student deficits should be attended to	Intentional implementation: Student diversity should be a topic of thinking and conversations
<i>Dimension of Variation</i> <i>Awareness that:</i>		<i>An instructor should recognize different student circumstances</i>	<i>An instructor should teach about diversity and its impact in society</i>
Legitimized Membership: How an instructor positions students relative to the implicit classroom norms and structures	Outsiders: Students who cannot conform to instructor expectations do not belong in the learning environment	Guests: An instructor must scaffold the learning environment to help students meet expectations	Rightful presence: An instructor centers student knowledge, experiences, and stories
<i>Dimension of Variation</i> <i>Awareness that:</i>		<i>An instructor has a responsibility to students</i>	<i>Power is equally distributed among students and instructor</i>