
What applied linguistics research can offer to help individuals of minoritized backgrounds succeed in leadership positions in US public higher education

Fabiola Ehlers-Zavala*¹

¹Colorado State University [Fort Collins] – États-Unis

Résumé

Diversity goals in US institutions of higher education are oftentimes at the core of institutional priorities. This is the case of a subset of universities known as land grant institutions—a university concept that dates back to Abraham Lincoln. Land grant institutions in the US are “the most creative and valuable universities” in the country (Magrath, 2018, para. 1). There are two main reasons for their importance. Following Magrath, one reason relates to what prompted their formation, “their heritage.” That is, land-grant institutions were formed to provide people with access a university education—which remains as probably one of the greatest accomplishments towards the development and growth of the US in the process of reaching its democratic ideal. The second reason relates to the need that the country has for working with local communities to address their problems or needs. Nevertheless, many land-grant universities in the US of stellar recognition for the accomplishments of their faculty continue to significantly lag behind when it comes to supporting individuals of minoritized backgrounds who aspire, or even assume, leadership roles. That is, even when some accomplish the goal of being selected to lead, individuals of minoritized backgrounds continue to struggle with how to successfully navigate environments that are fully dominated by colleagues of privileged backgrounds. Indeed, some individuals of minoritized background often struggle to navigate an environment that preaches one thing but does another.

Consequently, in the presentation of this paper, I offer an autoethnographic account of how the above can be true of a professional in applied linguistics with a significant record of professional accomplishments. Being a minoritized individual (first-generation, bilingual, bisexual female) functioning in a non-diverse context has been challenging. Fortunately, being an applied linguist has constituted a strategic asset as the related research has given me the tools and skills needed to reach a better place in my professional leadership journey. In this process, I have come to hypothesize that extending access to the work in applied linguistics to non-applied linguists of minoritized backgrounds can empower them to navigate their contexts and increase their chances for professional success. I will illustrate how insights from pragmatics research, ESP (diplomacy), second language writing research have offered me strategies to increase my chances of success. My presentation therefore is intended to support the main premise which is how applied linguistics can assist individuals of minoritized backgrounds to overcome the challenges encountered in the process of becoming successful leaders.

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*Intervenant

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