

Book Review

***Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*, by Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (Editors). New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2017, 304 pages.**

In *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*, Django Paris and H. Samy Alim assemble nearly two dozen educators and researchers who exemplify teaching in an increasingly culturally pluralistic world and in a manner that values, rather than devalues, the varied ways of thinking, knowing, speaking, learning, and being of minoritized students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The book has many strengths, including: (1) its detailed conceptualization and definition of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP) that build on Gloria Ladson-Billings' groundbreaking Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) from two decades earlier; and (2) the poignant ethnographic case studies carried out in a myriad of multicultural settings, underscoring how individual teachers have incorporated CSP in their work and the impact thereof. Notably, according to Paris and Alim (2017), "CSP explicitly calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color" (p. 5). This goes far beyond CRP, which, per Ladson-Billings (1995), "not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469).

Beginning with a critically reflective introduction, co-editors Paris and Alim break down the concept of CSP, which "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation" (p. 1). Explaining its importance within the context of the public school landscape where there are more students of color than ever before, they conceptualize its framework within the Academy: providing current and historical context, affordances, and shortcomings, and an accessible pathway for educators to understand its place within schools. Through this context, the authors posit, the "White gaze" still influences the experiences of these students who do not have curricula that align with their experiences. Arguing that educational practices must center on the complexity of students of color rather than the white, middle-class norms that currently determine the direction of schools, the authors inspire readers "to envision a world where we owed no explanations to White people about the value of our children's culture, language, and learning potential" (p. 3). Ultimately, Paris' and Alim's introduction sets the stage for a group of experienced researchers to provide different frames of references around educational spaces that are attempting to enact CSP in contextualized and meaningful ways.

Perhaps one of the most compelling facets of this book derives from its commitment to demonstrate how CSP can be utilized to value the myriad of student perspectives. In several of Part One's six chapters, teachers work alongside their students to co-construct spaces. This "validates [students'] ways of knowing... [I]t also locates students at the center of classrooms through asset-based, humanizing perspectives that lead to pluralism" (p. 38). For example, the reader is inspired by Mary Bucholtz's story of Isabel, who, in a world that is working to erase her

language and cultural identity, utilized “Spanglish” (a way of creatively speaking English and Spanish tied to her cultural and linguistic practices) to capture who she is and that defies the hegemonic structures around English-only spaces. Likewise, in “For Us, By Us,” the reader is able to discern how teachers can co-construct curricula with students. In doing so, it’s possible to envision how students can have agency over the content and the pedagogical process, reinforcing prior scholarship and work done in Youth Participatory Action research literature. Overall, the reader perceives how educational opportunities informed by CSP can provide students of color the necessary skills and invaluable connection to their own worlds.

In order to be able to value students’ perspectives in a sustaining manner, the book emphasizes and illustrates the need for creating classroom spaces that can challenge the status quo of the “White gaze.” This line of thinking becomes accessible as the authors work to illustrate classrooms that are actively engaged in CSP. For example, the reader is given a window into how educators within Indigenous communities work to create “autonomy for and flexibility for teaching values that instill cultural identity through language-based methods” (p. 68). This not only allows for belonging for students but also acknowledges the ongoing tensions within this framework, such as standardized testing that is aligned to middle-class norms. Other pedagogical decisions explored in the book include concepts like “sacred spaces” where Indigenous students can create a “dialogic space to share [their] truths *and* to listen and learn the truths of others” (p. 100). This is exemplified by students, even non-Indigenous ones, who, in small groups, pass a feather around as they share their most vulnerable stories across racial lines. Additionally, the reader is given an opportunity to see a white male performing-arts teacher shaping school culture through his ability to create unique spaces and how his listening skills around students’ interests affect his ongoing pedagogical decisions. These chapters help us deeply understand the power of dialogic spaces and strong pedagogy within the framework of successful CSP.

The eight chapters of Part Two shift from the ethnographic perspectives of the classroom to exploring the theories of practice that inform much of the difficult work of CSP. As mentioned earlier, Gloria Ladson-Billings revisits her definition of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), reassessing what she believes is missing from its initial conception and making suggestions on how CSP can carry on the work of CRP (p. 141). Grounding CSP historically, she examines the failure in CRP’s implementation, highlighting how limited perspectives on culture have led to CRP being “misunderstood” (p. 145), critical consciousness being ignored, and how current standardized testing cannot easily measure CRP. She also mentions that youth culture is noticeably absent, citing her struggles and work to address this shortcoming in a teacher preparation program. She discusses her hopes of how younger scholars are working to reshape this work into Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy based on this knowledge, which leads to an affirming pathway forward.

One powerful aspect of the book is how it grounds theory in the lived experiences of marginalized people. H. Samy Alim’s and Adam Haupt’s “Reviving Soul(s) with Afrikaaps” is an exemplification of this. Setting their study in Cape Town, South Africa, the authors examine how “activist-pedagogues” (p. 168) have “upended establishment discourses (flipped the script)” (p. 169) through the revolutionary “Hip Hop theatrical production and documentary *Afrikaaps*” (p. 159), which foregrounds the creole origins of Afrikaans, dismantling the revisionist history that hands ownership of the language to whites. The theatrical production reclaims Afrikaans and subverts it while simultaneously elevating and even essentializing “Kaaps or Afrikaaps” (p. 163),

a minoritized derivative spoken by nonwhites. Demonstrating their thirst for self-knowledge, the curious Hip Hop artists studied by the authors explore their history through the music-making process known as “sampling” or “diggin’ in the crates” (p. 160). During sampling, Hip Hop artists borrow from various media sources, usually involving revisiting the works of their antecedents to create new music. Contrary to hegemonic notions that view languages spoken by nonwhites as inferior and their speakers as uneducated, Alim and Haupt foreground “Afrikaaps” as a complex and effective mode of communication and their speakers as sophisticated intellectuals in their own right who use “organic forms of culturally sustaining pedagogies” (p. 159) to exercise agency.

Several other articles in the book illustrate the potential consequentiality of CSP. In “Do you hear what I hear?” Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores highlight the detrimental byproducts of well-intentioned “asset-based pedagogies” (p. 175), which embrace “Latinx students’ cultural and linguistic practices only insofar as they contribute to the learning” of “academic language” (p. 175), thereby inadvertently fostering stigmatization and deficitization. The authors argue that “linguistic appropriateness” (p. 176) leads to the “racialization of language” (p. 179) and “linguistic profiling” (p. 176), as well as the consequent labeling of some languages as “linguistically deviant” (p. 177) by “hegemonic Whiteness” (p. 177). Rather than continuing with “asset-based approaches to language education” that call for the assimilation and subjugation of Latinx learners’ ways of speaking, knowing, and being, Rosa’s and Flores’s call to action invites the use of CSP to “engage with, confront, and ultimately dismantle the racialized hierarchies of U.S. society” (p. 186).

Likewise, Stacey J. Lee and Daniel Walsh underscore how beneficial “socially just, culturally sustaining pedagogy” (p. 192), or SJCSPP, can be for immigrant youth, especially those from low-income families, in the U.S. education system. Situating their work within the principles of social justice and equity, Lee, a university educator, observed how Walsh, a high school educator in New York’s International Network of Public Schools, alleviated the tremendous challenges—such as language barriers, high-stakes testing, poverty, etc.—faced by his diverse immigrant students by inviting them to share aspects of their lived experiences, histories, and cultures in the classroom. By using the students’ existing knowledge as a jumping-off point, Walsh was able to “build their linguistic and cultural flexibility” (p. 195) and penetrate otherwise impervious subjects in units ranging from a “Native American perspective on Thanksgiving” (p. 195) to immigration and globalization. In essence, Lee and Walsh argue that SJCSPP was instrumental in helping the immigrant students to infiltrate the metaphorically walled American education system.

Part of the book’s strength lies in the breadth and depth of the ways of knowing and being that are showcased and how the authors’ research activism mandates the reader to comprehend the need for CSP. Amanda Holmes’ and Norma Gonzalez’s deeply moving and poetic “Finding Sustenance” presents CSP from the fresh perspective of “Elder epistemologies and pedagogies” (p. 210), timeless ways of being and knowing that must be sustained. Michael Dominguez calls for a “decolonial teacher education” (p. 225) that eradicates age-old mental models of the “White gaze” and reflects the ever-changing demographics in schools. Meanwhile, Kris D. Gutierrez and Patrick Johnson call for systems of teaching and learning that welcome ambiguity. Since “young people are already practicing holding multiple texts and ideas simultaneously” (p. 257), the researchers argue, why not support and encourage them to embrace the ambivalence inherent in cultural diversity? The heterogeneity of conceptualizations and

exemplifications in the book cumulatively underline the multidimensionality as well as the manifold affordances of CSP.

Considering that the studies in the book are carried out by experienced educators and researchers well-versed in CSP, several questions emerge. How might CSP be extended to teachers who are unfamiliar with the concept, especially those in predominantly white communities? More broadly, how might CSP be extended to all teachers in a given school or school district, rather than only to individual interested (and often progressive) teachers? Also, what is the role of principals in supporting school culture that fosters CSP? Furthermore, given that the hegemonic “White gaze” is entrenched in the education system, what steps can be taken to bring about systemic change across schools, districts, and states? What is the role of white allies? While the authors lay a solid foundation for CSP, the questions above point to the tremendous amount of work as well as the possibilities that lie ahead.

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References

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.