Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World

by Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (Editors)

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Educational environments that exist in pluralistic societies today prove to offer students little purpose to attend school and limited support in becoming successful. The lack of understanding the needs of students, along with preconceived notions of cultures and identities of communities of colour have resulted in a partial eradication of student cultures, and the creation of vulnerable, stigmatized, and marginalized student populations. The “divide that exists between many educational institutions and the students they are supposed to serve” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 95) only continues to grow because students do not feel that their identities are affirmed through the curriculum taught; it is irrelevant, impractical and exclusionary to their backgrounds, experiences, and lives. Identifying the various challenges that students of colour are faced with in schools is the first step towards finding a possible solution to address those issues and concerns. Several educators and researchers, under the editorial guide of Paris and Alim (2017), tackle the history of pathologizing students — the silencing and ignoring their voices, the overrepresentation of white teachers in the classroom, and the numerous discourses related to teaching and diversity — to offer a possible solution through the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World begins with the editors explaining the way in which the book came together and identifying the contributors to the volume. Following this, the introductory chapter provides a definition of CSP, explains its meaning and importance, and identifies the goal of the book, which according to the editors involves

thinking through the implications of CSP, pushing its theoretical boundaries, growing its practice through case study and critique, and bringing theory and practice together to...
offer a way forward toward reaching our goal of developing a more pluralistic and just future (p. 12).

In this first chapter, Paris and Alim discuss what the purpose of schooling is, and whether this question warrants a different response when discussing the purpose of schooling in pluralistic societies. The authors address the question by pointing out that students and their families are put in situations where in order to succeed in school, they have to either deny or lose their cultures, histories, languages, and literatures. Furthermore, the authors suggest that there is a need for change in both the position and terminology related to pedagogical theory and practice. They offer CSP as a solution, as CSP implementation seeks to accept, support, and sustain pluralism on cultural, literate, and linguistic levels.

The two main parts of the book include: (a) research on ways in which to enact CSP through students, teachers and schools (chapters 2-7); and (b) ways to envision CSP through theories of practice (chapters 8-15). Taking into account the conversations and observations that the authors had with teachers and students as well as the data collected from the research projects and ethnographic studies they planned, they identify the various challenges they encountered and offer information of the successes achieved. The information collected also supports the authors’ suggestions that educators and researchers should come together to find ways in which collaboration between families, communities and educators will provide avenues to (re)construct and co-construct spaces in which languages can be viewed as dynamic, shifting, and evolving. The authors further suggest that educators using CSP cannot, and should not, sustain only the aspects of students’ lives that are safe or easily addressable in schooling spaces, but that they should build on the students’ evolving identities in order to prepare youth to recognize, accept, and challenge social injustices. In addition, the main goal of these sections of the book are to offer ideas on how to create a variety of opportunities and provide avenues through which CSP can be integrated in classroom and schools, as well as illustrate what CSP looks like and the forms it takes in different spaces.

* Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World is a valuable resource on CSP for educators and youth workers who work with students and youth of colour. The book continues the discussion of the benefits of CSP, the challenges of implementing it in educational settings, and explains the ways in which they differ from the deficit-model approaches that have been employed in classrooms over the years. The book further provides examples of teaching that aid in sustaining language, literacies, and cultural practices of students of colour and their communities, while empowering youth and giving them a space for their voices to be heard. Several of the chapters identify the characteristics of specific cultural groups and immigrant students as well as their particular needs through present examples, grounded in theory on how teachers can support these students. Various quotes from research participants are included to further support the claims made and the ideas provided; these voices strengthen the claims made and the suggestions offered. * Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World aims to de-centralize whiteness within the classroom without ignoring issues, but by reframing issues related to access and equity. It
further critiques previously recognized and accepted asset pedagogies and attempts to reposition people and practices as resources and assets. *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* promotes schooling as a process to sustain different cultural ways of being, teaching students to be resilient and to persevere, and to empower youth to accept and honour their cultural backgrounds.

**References:**