

Culturally & Linguistically Sustaining Pedagogies/Practices

Culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies and practices exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling. As such, CLSP explicitly calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining—rather than eradicating—the linguistic and cultural ways of being of communities of color.

Culturally [& Linguistically] Sustaining Pedagogies

BY EMILY MACHADO | May 31, 2017

(Adapted by Francisca Sánchez)*

Classrooms are more diverse than ever before. In our interconnected world, students bring a range of languages, literacies, and cultural practices into their schools. As educators, we've often thought about culture [and language] as something associated with a student's ethnic heritage. However, a newer approach to teaching and learning called culturally [and linguistically] sustaining pedagogy challenges us to promote, celebrate, and even critique the multiple and shifting ways that students engage with culture [and language].

Django Paris, associate professor of language and literacy in the College of Education at Michigan State University, developed culturally [and linguistically] sustaining pedagogy to extend asset-based teaching approaches such as culturally relevant pedagogy for the 21st century. His approach challenges us to go beyond acceptance or tolerance of students' cultures [and languages] and to move instead toward explicitly supporting aspects of their languages, literacies, and cultural traditions. Culturally [and linguistically] sustaining pedagogy also encourages us to consider the term[s] "culture" [and "language"] in a broader sense, including concepts such as popular, youth, and local culture [and languages] alongside those associated with ethnicity.

Recently, educators have taken up culturally [and linguistically] sustaining pedagogy within particular academic content areas. My colleagues (Rebecca Woodard, Andrea Vaughan, and Rick Coppola) and I have examined what culturally [and linguistically] sustaining pedagogy might look like in literacy [and arts] classrooms in Chicago, IL. We've found a few practices that literacy [and arts] teachers might try as entry points to this work.

Seek out nontraditional texts.

In our research, literacy teachers sought out nontraditional read-alouds and mentor texts for writing. We've documented teachers going beyond canonical texts and incorporating videos, student writing, poetry, and more into culturally sustaining units. Teachers might also consider using blog posts, memes, podcasts, and other artifacts as reading material or writing models. In addition to potentially promoting students' cultures, languages, and literacies, these texts encourage broader ideas about what counts as reading and writing in schools.

This applies to arts teachers as well, who can seek out non-traditional and mentor arts texts and forms for exploration. These can include arts examples from non-Western cultures and communities that can help students see themselves, their communities, and their histories in what is valued and held up as having

artistic integrity in the classroom, and can also help build and encourage broader ideas about what counts as arts in schools.

Explore and model meshing languages. Language is a critical part of culture. Rather than require only “standard” English in the classroom, culturally [and linguistically] sustaining literacy teachers explore, model, and support the meshing and blending of language varieties. We’ve documented teachers speaking and writing in ways that blend languages, dialects, and formal and informal registers. In addition to helping students see themselves in the texts they write, this approach helps students note complex power dynamics surrounding language use.

Arts teachers can explore the use of students’ languages in all their varieties as vehicles for artistic creation, performance, and evaluation. Teachers can draw from the wide array of non-Western arts and arts forms to help students explore complex power dynamics surrounding language and language use, even in the arts.

Encourage students to explore alternative cultural [and linguistic] affiliations. Culturally [and linguistically] sustaining literacy teachers understand that students engage with a wide range of cultural [and linguistic] groups and encourage them to explore these affiliations. In our research, we’ve seen students explore Chicago culture, culinary culture, digital culture, and more. Teachers can ask students about spaces, places, and communities where they feel like cultural [or linguistic] “insiders” and can help them connect with these communities in person or online. This practice helps students and teachers understand the complexity of culture [and language] and the multiple affiliations of every student.

Clearly, this pertains to the arts as well. Simply by exploring the arts present in any community, teachers can bring diverse perspectives, histories, values, voices, and creative expressions into the classroom. By using these multicultural arts representations as a taking off point for discussion, exploration, reflection, and inspiration, arts teachers can help students explore their own multiple cultural and linguistic affiliations.

These suggestions just scratch the surface of what it means to teach literacy [and the arts] in ways that are culturally [and linguistically] sustaining. Teaching, like culture [and language], is complex. However, by approaching our practices with this cultural [and linguistic] complexity in mind, we may be able to see and understand our students’ languages, literacies, and cultural practices in deeper and more meaningful ways.

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See also *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* by Django Paris, Teachers College Press (May 5, 2017).

**I’ve adapted this brief article to more explicitly include LINGUISTIC alongside CULTURAL, and to reflect a focus on the arts. The sections in brackets and/or italics are my additions. Francisca Sánchez.*