Culturally Sustaining Education: Teaching, Learning & Justice Movements

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Who we are, our experiences in and beyond schools are crucial to who we are as educators—what we see, what we miss, what and who we value, what we need to (un)learn to teach and lead for justice...
What brings you to your commitment to education, to sustaining communities through education?

(Stories, experiences in schools, families, and communities...)
The Forgetting Tree

A Rememory

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#InequalityIs a schooling system serving a students of color majority remaining centered on White, middleclass, monolingual norms of success
Our Changing Schools

In 1970, 80% of public school students were White; today over 50% are Students of Color.
The New Mainstream

Students of Color characterized by multilingualism, multiculturalism, intersecting gender identities and dis/abilities, and the desire to strive toward equality in an unequal and shifting racially and culturally diverse society
Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation.

CSP positions dynamic cultural, intersectional dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of learning as additive, rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. CSP exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling.
Deficit Approaches: Student languages, literacies, histories, and cultural ways are a *deficit*, show deficiency, the goal is to correct the deficiency with better white middleclass (patriarchal, cishetero, ableist...) normed language, literacy, and culture

Difference Approaches: Student languages, literacies, histories, and cultural ways are equal, but *different*, though the goal remains largely to get students to use white middleclass (etc.) normed language, literacy, and cultural practices

Asset/Strength Approaches: Student languages, literacies, histories, and cultural ways are a *strength, or asset* that should be sustained as students build critical understanding of power alongside proficiency in dominant cultural skills
Take a moment to jot down how Native, Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander communities were positioned in your own education and how we/they are positioned in your school now...
(deficit/damage and/or asset/strength)

*This is a sort of curriculum audit of your setting (languages, literacies, histories, practices not included, merely included or centered and sustained? Knowledge sources?)
The goals of CSP are even more urgent, especially when coupled with the emergence of recent research from Arizona (Cabrera et al, 2015) to California (Dee & Penner, 2016) that shows that students of color have more success across subjects in school (even on dominant, narrow measures of achievement) when given the opportunity to enroll in ethnic studies courses that center their experiences.
How are we, through our work as teachers, researchers, teacher educators, and students disrupting pervasive deficit-centered policies and practices and offering evidence of culturally sustaining ones?
“Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exists in society. The teachers I studied work in opposition to the system that employs them.”
CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGIES
Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World

Django Paris • H. Samy Alim
Editors
Key Features of Settings Enacting CSP

1) A critical centering on dynamic community languages, valued practices, and knowledges

2) Student and community agency and input (community accountability)

3) Historicized content and instruction

4) A capacity to contend with internalized oppressions

5) An ability to curricularize these four features in learning settings
For white educators (and educators of color invested in whiteness) this means divesting from whiteness and the ways whiteness castes white normed practices and bodies as superior—which means educators must be willing to give something up. What are you willing to give up? What unjust power (often called unearned benefits and privilege), what spaces are you willing to relinquish to make necessary space for centering others, other lifeways in your classrooms and schools?
To be and become culturally sustaining educators we must be willing give up the false and damaging belief that who we are (and the unjust power that may come with our identities), that what our norms and beliefs are, somehow deserve more attention in school. This is particularly important the more positions of power we occupy in terms of race, gender, sexuality, dis/ability and so on.
What is the role of culturally sustaining education in current movements for racial and cultural justice?
Defenders of the Water School Video
How have Indigenous communities sustained their lifeways through education in a nation-state that has continually and violently attempted to erase Indigenous communities and lifeways? How can others stand in solidarity with such education?
This latest wave of policies and the beliefs that undergird them remind us that if we are to create and sustain a just, pluralist society, joining young people and families in the ongoing work of educational justice is key...

Given this context I offer that we must understand all education as happening in movement spaces.
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...as Jeff Chang (2014) has written, cultural change precedes political change.