

Sustenance, Survival, and Resistance

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Django Paris and H. Samy Alim's *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Social Justice in a Changing World* (2017) presents essays written by Paris and Alim and other educators who work with youth from Xicanx, Latinx, Indigenous, African-American, and im/migrant communities in various programs, courses, and schools. Exploring the question, "what is the purpose of schooling in pluralistic societies?" (p.1), the authors decenter the norms and agendas of White culture and reframe questions about schooling around youth from communities of color.

Through the discussions of culturally sustaining pedagogies, a pivotal question in the book is, "what are we sustaining?" Though responses in the essays are complex and multifaceted, three intertwined strands we discussed in class are:

1. The cultural wealth and practices of communities

Though fluid and continually evolving, this cultural wealth is anchored in long-standing ways of knowing, learning, and being in the world and, in turn, sustains communities faced with colonial aggression.

One example several classmates highlighted was Indigenous "Elder pedagogies" which are rooted in the sacred and secular wisdom of the people and embodied by the Elders, and which sustain and situate younger generations in "the relational, intergenerational circle" that "ensure the collective survival, continuance, and transformation" of the people (Holmes and González, p.220).

2. The cultural and linguistic practices of students

Paris and Alim argue educators must "attend to the emerging, intersectional and dynamic ways in which [cultural practices] are lived and used by young people" (p.9). One example we discussed was Hip Hop pedagogies - not merely to superficially engage youth - but to understand, honor, and learn from youth and their cultural expressions while also teaching them to problematize the discourse of exclusion embedded in Hip Hop.

An important point here, which Ladson-Billings's essay underscores, is the call for teachers to not be the expert, but to be open to learning and being led by the students' needs as well as their expertise; thus, dismantling the normalized student-teacher relationship, students and teachers co-construct the space, the materials, and the terms of learning.

3. The ability to resist and interrogate the dominant culture

In the context of schooling, through Eurocentric and assimilationist curricula, practices and policies, the dominant culture sets the norms by which youth from non-dominant cultures are evaluated and routinely found deficient.

We discussed youth languaging which is linguistically innovative and often reflects the hybrid, multilingual identities of youth. From the vantage point of "the White gaze", or the lens of raciolinguistic ideology as Rosa and Flores conceptualize it, "non-standard" language use is seen as inappropriate and a deficit that needs to be corrected. Why? Not because the language is wrong, flawed or in need of fixing; rather, the perception is "anchored in... ideologies that conflate certain racialized persons with linguistic deficiency irrespective of their empirical

linguistic practices” (p.177). Deconstructing the ideology, however, teachers and students may adopt a different lens that frames youth languaging as a demonstration of linguistic flexibility, competence, and dexterity. As a teacher of English Language Learners, I realize there is a tendency in the profession and in my own practice to emphasize Dominant American English and “correct deficits” in student writing, so this struck home for me and is a call for critical self-reflection.

Vis-à-vis the urgency of a transformative critical consciousness, at the beginning of class and in response to the previous week’s two deadly hate crimes at a [Kroger store](#) in Louisville and a [synagogue](#) in Pittsburg, Rachel asked us to reflect on a [tweet](#) by Django Paris:



Django Paris
@django_paris

Follow

“What knowledges must we sustain in order to overcome & survive when faced with a power that seeks to sustain itself above & beyond— and sometimes shot through— our very bodies? CSP... is centrally about love...”
Recommmiting today to what [@HSamyAlim](#) & I share in Ch 1 of CSP ❤️👊

As the tweet painfully reminds us, CSP is not only about pedagogies that affirm and build on youth’s agency; it is literally about survival: survival of communities, cultural knowledge, and language – yes – but also the survival of living bodies subject to state-sanctioned violence in the form of police brutality or to hate crime and terrorism, as the tweet alludes to. Many classmates expressed despair over current events, a despair which I share.

However, a prevailing tone throughout all the essays in the book is one of possibility and resiliency. Examples include the survivance of cultures through enslavement, genocide, and other colonialist forms of oppression, but also individual narratives of maintaining hope, desire, love, and joy. Wong and Peña emphasize the necessity of considering “the joy that lives besides pain”, and, integral to CSP, “We need to work toward developing a literacy of joy and pleasure that lives beside a proactive attentiveness to discomfort and pain” (p.133). I want to end on this note because I think such a dual literacy is the essence of sustenance and a catalyst for social transformation. -GPF