

TRANSCRIPTION

Center Announcer: Welcome to the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center Equity Spotlight Podcast Series. This podcast series will feature the Center’s Equity Fellows, national scholars from North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio who are working to advance equitable practices within school systems.

Each episode will focus on a topic relevant to ensuring equitable access and participation and quality education for historically marginalized students specifically in the areas of race, sex, national origin, and religion, and at the intersection of socioeconomic status.

Lauren

Johnson:

Welcome to our podcast on *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*. We are recording on the campus of Michigan State University, which, like all our institutions and lives exists on Indigenous land. These are the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe peoples and we are grateful to be here.

My name is Lauren Elizabeth Johnson, and I am an educator from New Orleans, and I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum Instruction and Teacher Education at Michigan State University.

Today, we also have Lorena Geramán. Lorena is a 12th year Dominican American educator, currently working in Austin, TX and formerly a teacher in Lawrence Public Schools in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

Davena Jackson is pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education (CITE) at Michigan State University, and taught English Language Arts for a combined 23 years in Detroit and the metropolitan area.

Django Paris is associate professor of Language and Literacy in the department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. He recently published the book *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* with co-editor H. Samy Alim. In January 2018, Dr. Paris will be joining the faculty of the University of Washington, Seattle as Director of the Banks Center for Educational Justice.

Dr. Django Paris, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Michigan

Dr. Paris:

Thank you all, for being here today. So our first question is: What is culturally sustaining pedagogies and why does it matter?

Um,so we've been at this work for since about 2012, but really culturally sustaining pedagogies link up with the work of educators and communities across the centuries. I think most simply, um, CSP is an approach to teaching and learning that joins the strengths of communities in order to sustain them.

So that's like a very simple way of thinking about it. Um, as we define it in some of our writing and in the book culturally sustaining pedagogies seeks to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation and revitalization. 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 deficit. So that means that CSP explicitly calls for schooling to be a site of sustaining rather than eradicating the cultural ways of being of communities of color. So CSP builds on a long tradition of asset pedagogies, which have pushed against pervasive beliefs in white superiority and the deficit approaches and racism that they engender to prove that our practices in ways of being as communities of color are not pathological and must be included meaningfully in classroom learning. So, uh, there has been a lot over the last several decades, and again, in some ways really centuries on work that, that's called either resource pedagogies or strength pedagogies, strength-based pedagogies or asset pedagogies. And so, CSP builds on that long-term work, uh, most specifically, the work on the funds of knowledge and that would be the work of Louis Moll and Norma Gonzalez and their colleagues and also the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, her seminal contributions on-going work on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

And so we see, uh, culturally sustaining pedagogies as joining this crucial work of all of this pedagogical movement to further push for an education that sustains our young people, right, our families, and our life ways as Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asia- Pacific Islander communities in what's most commonly referred to as the U.S. Nation State. Um, but we also, um, have worked with educators in South

Dr. Django Paris, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Michigan

Africa. And it's our contention that CSP, uh, really carries across communities and can be used, certainly used globally.

Um, sometimes people ask why culturally sustaining pedagogy? But one thing to remember is that in 1970 the U.S. public schools were 80 percent White. Today, in 2017, they're over 50 percent students of color, right.

So this is an extraordinary demographic shift, and yet schooling in the U.S. continues to be centered largely on White, middle class, monolingual monocultural, and Cis-hetero, patriarchal-ableist norms of achievement, right. And so, at the same time as this extraordinary demographic shifts, um, we're experiencing a severe backlash, um, uh, that's in effect against this shifting present and future. And so, on-going beliefs in White superiority, in particular, pervade social, political, and, um, and educational landscapes. So to end, CSP asks all educators to join this, um, new majority of color mainstream, to resist on-going institutional racism as it plays out, um, in schools. That could be through curriculum, instruction, policy—um, multiple levels—and for all of us to work toward to sustaining the languages, literacies, and life ways, and, uh, the very lives of communities.

**Lauren
Johnson**

So then, Lorena, can you, um, speak to how you've taken up CSP in your teaching?

**Lorena
German:**

Uh, CSP is not necessarily a lesson plan, but that it's more of framework and position. And so how do I as a teacher use CSP, right? And so, it's essentially a way of teaching for me. It answers the question of why I teach. And so that then informs what I teach.

How does my teaching sustain the people and the voices and the communities that have historically been marginalized, ostracized, even vilified by schooling? I teach young people before I teach any content area. And so, what that means is that my teaching has to reflect their identities, their cultures—every part of their being has to be present. That's how I sustain them.

Dr. Django Paris, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Michigan

Now I currently, work, um, and teach at a, uh, predominantly white middle and high school, which is a very different demographic than where I used to teach, which was a large, public, inner-city high school that was predominantly Latinos. How I taught there, um, is different than how I teach here, but the approach is the same. And so, um, you know I have to think about what are the political implications of my approach of using CSP in either context. And so that's kinda how I get to what I teach. So I am an English teacher or a literacy teacher. And so, there are numerous ways that I take up CSP. Whenever I am teaching, um, and working with young people on literature that we explore the social and political context of that publication. And then also making them think critically about, like, in this moment in this classroom what does it mean that we're reading it right now us that I am teaching it and you are consuming it, right? So, when I am teaching, for example, American-born Chinese we talk about not just the text itself, but what are the issues that it raises. So this idea of the Model Minority Myth—Does this Model Minority Myth play a role in our school community? So in that way CSP is sustaining and granting a space for voices that are present in our community but also marginalized and often ignored.

Dr. Paris:

One thing that I've really learned from your enactments of CSP is the way that you, um, imbed that study, uh, in the context of current social movements—in thinking about CSP. And-and Alim and I have tried to think about what does it mean in the context of Black Lives Matter, or in the context of Standing Rock. Um, to think about the-the themes of injustice and justice that flow through our living, but also flow through the reading and writing that we do.

**Lauren
Johnson:**

Davena would you like to add on kind of how have you see it [CSP] or how have you taken it up in your own teaching?

**Davena
Jackson:**

Um, for me, CSP, I- you know, I approach it from a very personal experience. Having attended school in the '80s and in the '90s, I guess what I am most hurt by is that the same ways in which how students are marginalized, how their languages are demonized happened to me.

Dr. Django Paris, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Michigan

So, um, you know, I approach all learning in my classroom from the standpoint of: I don't want the kinds of experiences to happen to you that happened to me. So when we began to talk about, for example, um, African American Language, letting my students know that, um, they see my classroom as a collaboration, right—we are all working with and learning from each other, which is, um, very important when you think about CSP. So, early on, I let the students know that I am fostering an environment where not only am I going to affirm and sustain your experiences, but-but we're all going to learn from each other, right. And so, their cultural identities, languages, and experiences are really important. And so—

Dr. Paris: They-they-they feel fundamentally, foundationally valued for who they are.

Davena Jackson: Yes.

Dr. Paris: And that's a place where we can start to learn together.

Davena Jackson: Yeah.

Dr. Paris: And when we feel fundamentally devalued, it's not going to happen

Davena Jackson: Right. Right. And so, once I set up that for students, then we just go right into the curriculum. For one particular unit, we were focusing on African American Language, teaching the students the history, uh, the ways in which how AAL is demonized. And the students had the opportunity to create cartoons and to really think about how, like, they actually see their own language, and in thinking about how they see their own language, which was impacted by White supremacist thinking. And, so, with that being said, culturally sustaining pedagogies has helped me as a classroom teacher over the years to know that it's okay to be you and who you are. And also learn all of these other things that you need to learn to navigate, um, society.

Dr. Django Paris, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Michigan

Dr. Paris:

It strikes me Davena as you're talking there that for many of us as-as teachers of color, um, as teachers who might hold identities, as you know queer or trans folks, um, uh, you know in terms of ability/disability, um, in terms of our language use, um, that CSP sustains us as well, right. And so, um, I wanted to, too, to just pick up on a couple of things that you said Davena, if I could?

Um, but that we found basically four—four you could think of them as facets of culturally sustaining learning settings. And they are: a critical centering on dynamic community languages and valued knowledges, right, one; two, student and community agency and input. And so, the first one, um, centering.

That means that things aren't marginalized to the side. Oh, we're just going to talk about African American Language then it's not going to matter again, right. But that it's centered and pervasive. The second one is student and community agency and input, right. And so, as educators we know that there are lots of forms of accountability that, um, uh, we're required to attend to.

Unfortunately, one of them is usually not being accountable to the communities of students and families that we're working with. And so, in robust CSP contexts, there is that collaboration there is that dialogue. And you can't know what you need to sustain unless you're in dialogue with communities and families, right.

Another one is to historicize content and instruction, which I think Lorena talked a little about.

Um, and that is linking content up with the past, present, and future of communities. And number four is the capacity to contend with internalized oppressions. And so, if you've been part of a society and a schooling system that has continually devalued your ways with language and life, then and your communities and-and you've seen through sort of pain and damage only, um, it's often the case that you can start to and that we can start to see our own selves and languages as less valuable. Spend some time thinking about that and working through it so that we can affirm.

Dr. Django Paris, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Michigan

Lorena

German:

And-and that's why I think that CSP allows us to be more effective teachers. Because you're right. The standards that are expected of us, whatever those standards are that they're dictated by school, or the district or the state have never, never, have required us to dismantle white supremacy in our teaching. Whereas CSP now allows us to do that. To actually, sustain these communities but go beyond and really begin to undo the harm that schooling has done for so long.

And so that, in doing that work is really what sustains me more than trying to force myself or my students, for example, to go into sixteenth or seventeenth century, a Shakespearean text, and figure it out—what is the commonality or how is this universal?

Dr. Paris:

I did want to make one point, too. So we're sitting around here as English teachers as literacy teachers and that sometimes people say okay then that's a place where CSP can be.

But what about Math, what about Science and this and that? Because CSP is an approach to sustaining communities the way relate to and use number and the natural world in order to sustain our communities has always been part of all communities.

And so, there isn't a content area where we can't and haven't been over time sustained and also damaged through the way schooling approaches the subject matter. And so, I think that it's really important to remember. And one other point is that in that idea of revitalization, that sometimes it's about forging new or novel approaches within context but often time's it's also about retrieving community-rooted ways of teaching and learning that have been pushed out schools. Communities have known how to teach and to sustain its schools that haven't done a good job.

Lauren

Johnson:

Thank you. I did want to just go ahead and give us an opportunity to add any closing thoughts. And in that because we have been talking about you're saying effective, how CSP allows for that effective, but

Dr. Django Paris, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Michigan

also the affective in thinking about youth and students, and community members. Any feedback?

**Davena
Jackson:**

A couple of years ago, I did a pilot study at a middle school and couple of the students had said, “You know DJ, even in my math class when my teacher will ask me to solve a problem and when I get up before the class to solve it the teacher corrects my English. Um, you know, and at that point I began to shut down.” It’s about love and care and maintenance of students’ identities and literacies. And some people may look at this and say that it’s not about liking the students. Well, in some ways, it is. Well, in some cases, it is!

Dr. Paris:

Well, actually, it is.

**Davena
Jackson:**

It is!

Dr. Paris:

If you don’t, you might want to find a different line of work. This sort of valuing of young people and communities is going to take divestment. So for white teachers or teachers of color invested in whiteness that means divesting from unjust power and privilege and creating space for others. It’s an on-going process for all of us. The more positions that we occupy the more we have to divest from in order to create space to sustain.