Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice Author(s): Django Paris Source: Educational Researcher, Vol. 41, No. 3 (APRIL 2012), pp. 93-97 Published by: American Educational Research Association Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41477769 Accessed: 10-02-2018 02:15 UTC

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## Reviews/Essays i | i Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice

## Django Paris'

Seventeen years ago Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) published the landmark article "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, giving a coherent theoretical statement for resource pedagogies that had been building throughout the 1 970s and 1 980s. I, like countless teachers and university-based researchers, have been inspired by what it means to make teaching and learning relevant and responsive to the languages, literacies, and cultural practices of students across categories of difference and (in)equality. Recently, however, I have begun to question if the terms "relevant" and "responsive" are really descriptive of much of the teaching and research founded upon them and, more importantly, if they go fer enough in their orientation to the languages and literacies and other cultural practices of communities marginalized by systemic inequalities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society. In this essay, I offer the term and stance of culturally sustaining pedagogy as an alternative that, I believe, embodies some of the best research and practice in the resource pedagogy tradition and as a term that supports the value of our multiethnic and multilingual present and future. Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster - to sustain - linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. In the fece of current policies and practices that have the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society, research and practice need equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality Keywords: bilingual/bicultural; cultural analysis; diversity; equity;

instructional practices; multiculturalism; social justice

It Relevant published was now Pedagogy, the 17 landmark years In ago that article that article, Gloria Toward Ladson-Billings Ladson-Billings a Theory of (1994) Culturally (1995) was

and many, many others. This work through the 1970s and into the 1990s, it would turn out, had grown to a critical mass by 1995 and the mid-1990s was a windfall moment in educational

research at the intersection of language, literacy, and culture with African American, Latina/o, Indigenous American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander American students (Ball, 1995; Garcia, 1993; Lee, 1995; McCarty & Zepeda, 1995; Moll & Gonzales, 1994; Valdês, 1996). This windfall moment in the

mid-1990s amassed evidence for resource pedagogies in working with students of color marginalized by systemic inequalities based on race, ethnicity, and language.1 Ball and I (Paris & Ball, 2009) have called this moment the golden age of resource peda- gogy research. This research sought to provide pedagogical and curricular interventions and innovations that would move teach-

ing and learning ever further from the deficit approaches that echoed across the decades.

Deficit approaches to teaching and learning, firmly in place prior to and during the 1960s and 1970s, viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and com- munities of color as deficiencies to be overcome in learning the demanded and legitimized dominant language, literacy, and cul- tural ways of schooling (see Lee, 2007, Paris & Ball, 2009, Smitherman, 1977, and Valdês, 1996, for further discussion of the deficit to resource paradigm trajectory in research and prac- tice). The dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices demanded by school fell in line with White, middle-class norms and positioned languages and literacies that fell outside those norms as less-than and unworthy of a place in U.S. schools and society. Simply put, the goal of deficit approaches was to eradi- cate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices. Examples of deficit approaches abound throughout the 20th cen- tury. From federal "Indian schools" with their goal of forcibly stripping Native languages and cultures from Indigenous American students and communities (reviewed and critiqued in

published the landmark article Toward a Theory of Culturally

Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006), to the "culture of poverty" Relevant Pedagogy, In that article, Ladson-Billings (1994) was research of the 1960s and 1970s (Jensen, 1969, is an infamous working from her own seminal research with successful teachers example of such research) with the view that the home cultures of African American students. She was also giving a coherent and communities of poor students of color were bankrupt of any theoretical statement for research and teaching that had been language and cultural practices of value in schools and society building throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the work of social (see Laboy, 1972, for an early critique of culture of poverty

language and literacy scholars like Labov (1972), Cazden and Leggett (1976), Smitherman (1977), Heath (1983), Moll (1992), 'Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

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would lose their heritage and community cultural and speakers).

linguistic practices if they were to succeed in American schooling. Later, during the 1970s and 1980s, difference approaches Let me note here that my use of "heritage and community" prac- marked a progression to viewing the languages, literacies, and tices is based in contemporary understandings of culture as cultural ways of being of students and communities of color as dynamic, shifting, and ever changing. Although the heritage prac- equal to, but different from, the ways demanded and legitimated tices of many communities of color (e.g., Indigenous American in school teaching and learning. Still, the goal here was to bridge Languages and cultural ways of knowing, African American toward the dominant with little attention to maintaining the Language and cultural ways of knowing) have historically been and heritage and community practices of students and families. continue to be the target of deficit approaches, contemporary lin-

Resource pedagogies , which were built from the previously cited

guistic, pedagogical, and cultural research has pushed against the seminal pedagogical and curricular work resisting deficit thinktendency of researchers and practitioners to assume unidirectional ing throughout the 1970s and 1980s, repositioned the linguistic, correspondence between race, ethnicity, language, and cultural cultural, and literate practices of poor communities - particuways of being (Alim & Reyes, 2011; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; larly poor communities of color - as resources to honor, explore, Irizarry, 2007; Paris, 2011). Such assumptions about direct and and extend in accessing Dominant American English (DAE) lanuniversal correlations have led to the unfortunate simplification of guage and literacy skills and other White, middle-class dominant resource pedagogies as solely about considering heritage and tradi- cultural norms of acting and being that are demanded in schools. tional practices in teaching and not also about considering the Resource pedagogies found their most lasting theoretical shifting and changing practices of students and their communities. framework in the work of Moll and Gonzalez (1994) with their I will return to this point shortly. formulation of fiends of knowledge. Building on their work with

This very brief description of some major conceptual moves classroom teachers as ethnographic researchers in the homes and in educational research and, to a lesser extent, practice with stu- communities of Mexican American and Mexicana/o students in dents of color marginalized by systemic inequalities brings me Tucson, Arizona, Moll and Gonzalez "use the term 'funds of back to Ladson-Billings's (1995) landmark article and her formu- knowledge' to refer to historically accumulated and culturally lation of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). CRP and, less so, developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household culturally responsive pedagogy (Cazden & Leggett, 1976; Gay, or individual functioning and well-being" (133). They provide 2000), have become ubiquitous in educational research circles evidence, as have many researchers and practitioners after them, and in teacher education programs.2 This speaks, I think, to the that teachers and students can successfully use such knowledge lasting conceptual value of the terms and approaches and, as well, and skills in formal classroom learning. Another lasting theoretito the decades of cultural and educational justice research that cal framework supporting resource pedagogies has been the third preceded and followed them. I, like countless teachers and uni- space concept forwarded by Gutiérrez and her collaborators versity-based researchers, have been inspired by what it means to (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999). In her recent make teaching and learning relevant and responsive to the lan- critical work revisiting and extending the third space concept, guages, literacies, and cultural practices of students across catego- Gutiérrez (2008) draws on her research in Los Angeles with sturies of difference and (in)equality. dents from migrant farmworker families to describe a "curricu-

Recently, however, I have begun to question if these terms are lum and its pedagogy [that] are grounded in the historical and really descriptive of much of the teaching and research founded current particulars of students' everyday lives, while at the same on them and, more importantly, if they go far enough in their time oriented toward an imagined possible future" (154). In this orientation to the languages and literacies and other cultural way, she argues that such teaching and learning is not simply practices of students and communities to ensure the valuing and about building bridges for students between the often disparate maintenance of our increasingly multiethnic and multilingual knowledges of home, community, and school spaces but that society. In her 1995 formulation, Ladson-Billings called for "a teachers and students must bring together and extend the various culturally relevant pedagogy that would propose to do three activities and practices of these domains in a forward-looking things - produce students who can achieve academically, pro- third space. These two frameworks and the now decades of pedaduce students who can but understand and critique the exist- home and community practices, histories, and activities of stuing social order" (474). By "cultural competence," Ladson- dents and communities of color with dominant school ones in Billings was speaking of supporting students in maintaining their meaningful ways that do not devalue either in the process of community and heritage ways with language and other cultural school learning and access.

practices in the process of gaining access to dominant ones. In her It is important to recognize that access to the opportunities third tenet, Ladson-Billings also called for the development of an afforded by proficiency in the dominant academic and social ways explicitly critical and praxis-oriented stance in students. We must with oral and written language and other cultural practices were ask ourselves if the research and practice being produced under goals of deficit and difference approaches too, though deficit the umbrella of cultural relevance and responsiveness is, indeed, approaches expected the eradication of heritage and community ensuring maintenance of the languages and cultures of African forms of communication and knowledge and difference approaches American, Latina/o, Indigenous American, Asian American, expected to focus attention solely on the legitimated school ways. Pacific Islander American, and other longstanding and newcomer The result of both deficit and difference approaches was the explicit communities in our classrooms. Furthermore, we must ask if a (with deficit) and implicit (with difference) expected outcome that critical stance toward and critical action against unequal power "94] I EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHEIT

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the relations is resulting from such research and practice. Finally, we many and one to remain vibrant. Such educational and culmust ask ourselves if the very terms "relevant" and "responsive" tural values of pluralism in linguistic and cultural practices have are descriptive of what we are after in teaching and learning in a been supported by the Unites States in word - though rarely in pluralistic society. deed when immigrant communities and communities of color In his recent conceptual and pedagogical work around centerare involved - since its founding (Heath, 1992). ing teaching and learning in Hip Hop cultures, Alim (2007) Let me return to my earlier point about the dynamic, shifting, makes an "ideological distinction between a curriculum that is and ever-changing nature of cultural practices. In thinking about based in the cultural-linguistic reality of students, and one that is sustaining and extending the cultural practices and ways of culturally appropriate, culturally responsive , culturally relevant , or knowing of students marginalized by systemic inequalities based whatever other term we have produced to describe classroom on race, ethnicity, and language, it is important that we do not practices that use the language and culture of the students to essentialize and are not overdeterministic in our linkages of lanteach them part of the acceptable' curricular cannon" (27). With guage and other cultural practices to certain racial and ethnic Alim, then, I question the usefulness of "responsive" and "relegroups in approaching what it is we are seeking to sustain. A vant" - like the term "tolerance" in multicultural education and recent line of inquiry has sought to both solidify and disrupt training, neither term goes far enough. Relevance and responsivetraditional assumptions about linguistic and cultural ownership ness do not guarantee in stance or meaning that one goal of and practice, looking at how young people importantly both an educational program is to maintain heritage ways and to value rehearse traditional versions of ethnic and linguistic difference cultural and linguistic sharing across difference, to sustain and and offer new visions of ethnic and linguistic difference (Alim & support bi- and multilingualism and bi- and multiculturalism. Reyes, 2011; Irizarry, 2007; Kirkland, 2011; Paris, 2009, 2011). They do not explicitly enough support the linguistic and cultural This work has looked at, for instance, the important ways African dexterity and plurality (Paris, 2009, 2011) necessary for success American students navigate identities through African American and access in our demographically changing U.S. and global Language (AAL) and Hip Hop cultures, and also how other schools and communities.3 young people of color, like Latina/o and Pacific Islander youth in Although it is clear that Ladson-Billings (1995) was laying out the U.S. and youth across racial and national boundaries globally, the ground for maintenance and cultural critique, the term and participate heavily in AAL, Hip Hop cultures, and other cultural stance of "relevance" or "responsiveness" does little to explicitly practices originating in and associated with African American support this goal. It is quite possible to be relevant to something and Caribbean American culture (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook, or responsive to it without ensuring its continuing presence in a 2009; Paris, 2011). Irizarry's (2007, 2011) work has explicitly student's repertoires of practice (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), and so looked to extend conversations about culturally relevant and its presence in our classrooms and communities. We need a new responsive pedagogy by investigating how successful teachers of term and a new approach that will not only more accurately Latina/o students enact cultural connectedness through underembody some of the best past and present research and practice standing and embracing the cultural fluidity Latina/o youth but will also offer pre-service and in-service teachers a way of engage in, which includes traditional heritage language and culboth naming and conceptualizing the need to meaningfully value tural practices as well as AAL and Hip Hop. Finally, my own and maintain the practices of their students in the process of work (201 1) has also looked at the ways African American and extending their students' repertoires of practice to include domi-Pacific Islander youth in changing urban communities share in nant language, literacies, and other cultural practices. the Spanish language with their Latina/o peers. So although it is I offer the term culturally sustaining pedagogy as an alternative crucial that we look to sustain African American. Latina/o. Asian that I believe embodies some of the best past and present research American Pacific Islander American and Indigenous American and practice in the resource pedagogy tradition and as a term that languages and cultures in our pedagogies, we must be open to supports the value of our multiethnic and multilingual present sustaining them in both the traditional and evolving ways they and future. The term culturally sustaining requires that our pedaare lived and used by contemporary young people. gogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural expeAs we consider the need for culturally sustaining pedagogies, riences and practices of young people - it requires that they we must once again ask ourselves that age-old question: What is support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic the purpose of schooling in a pluralistic society? It is brutally clear competence of their communities while simultaneously offering that current policies are not interested in sustaining the languages access to dominant cultural competence. Culturally sustaining and cultures of longstanding and newcomer communities of pedagogy, then, has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualcolor in the United States. English-only policies; narrow, deconism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students textualized language and literacy programs in poor communities and teachers. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perof color; and even one state's explicit ban on studying the histopetuate and foster - to sustain - linguistic, literate, and cultural ries, literatures, and struggles of particular ethnic groups (see pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. A plu-Arizona House Bill 228 1)4 are examples of the return of everralistic society, we must remember, needs both within-group culmore explicit deficit perspectives, polices, and pedagogies (Nieto, tural practices (in the case of language, say, Spanish or African 201 1; Paris, in press). This climate, and the policies and teaching American Language or Navajo or Samoan) and common, acrosspractices resulting from it, has the quite explicit goal of creating group cultural practices (in the case of language in most institua monocultural and monolingual society based on White, midtional settings in the United States, Dominant American English) dle-class norms of language and cultural being. Such a climate to exist and thrive (Paris, 201 1). A pluralistic society needs both has created the need for equally explicit resistances that embrace APRIL 20 1 2 |[95~

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society cultural pluralism and cultural equality. Without such resistances

and linguistic plurality as consciousness about why and how to

students will continue the age-old American saga of being asked

use such dexterity in social and cultural interactions.

to lose their heritage and community ways with language, liter-

4In January 2012, Arizona House Bill 2281, popularly known as the

acy, and culture in order to achieve in U.S. schools. And this saga of linguistic and cultural loss has had and continues to have dev- astating effects for the access and achievement of students and communities of color in U.S. public schools. There is much

"Ethnic Studies Ban," was invoked by the State Board of Education and the local School Board to close the academically successful Mexican American Studies program in Tucson Unified School District (TUSD). This closing included the removal of, among other texts, Latina/o and Indigenous American literature and history from classrooms and the recent research that embodies the culturally sustaining pedago-

explicit instruction to teachers in the program not to use remaining gies we need (Alim, 2007; Cammarota, 2007; Chang & Lee, canonical texts in ways that focused on themes of race and oppression. I 2012; Hill, 2009; Irizarry, 201 1; Kinloch, 2010; McCarty, 2002; should note that having met and presented with teachers and students McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006; Morrell, 2004; Souto-

in the program and having viewed and read interviews and presentations Manning, 2010; Winn, 2011; are just a few important examples).

by teachers and students in the program that TUSD s Mexican American

This research and the pedagogical, curricular, and teacher learn-

Studies program represents, in my opinion, the enactment of robust

ing innovations it forwards is interested not in relevance or

culturally sustaining pedagogies.

responsiveness, but in sustaining and extending the richness of our pluralist society. Such richness includes all of the languages, REFERENCES

literacies, and cultural ways of being that our students and com-

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guistic flows: Hip hop cultures , youth identities, and the politics of lan-

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Education, 40, 87-96.

marginalized students of color." Although "marginalized" implies Cazden, a C., mar-

& Leggett, E. (1976), Culturally responsive education; A ginalizing and is more specific, accurate, and egalitarian than "minority

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