Building on Linguistic Strengths: Tenets of a Culturally Sustaining Teacher

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This article showcases culturally sustaining pedagogical beliefs and instructional practices that impact how literacy teachers recognize and build on bi/multilingual learners' full linguistic and cultural resources.

Savannah (all names pseudonyms), a preservice teacher participating in a field-based reading assessment course, was working alongside Camila at an elementary school. Camila, a student who typically read, wrote, and spoke in Spanish in her classroom, was building literacy in both English and Spanish. We wrote the following notes in our observation log as Savannah introduced a new poem to Camila in Spanish, "El Sol." Savannah chose the poem because her previous observations suggested it would be accessible to Camila as a reader:

> *Savannah takes out the poem, "El Sol" from her notebook and enthusiastically asks Camila to read the poem. Camila pushes it away, saying she can't read it. Savannah quickly pivots when Camila says she cannot read the poem and begins reading it in Spanish. This is hard for Savannah, a monolingual English speaker. As Savannah draws on Camila's Spanish linguistic resources, Camila becomes a collaborative reader, repeating words to Savannah such as "parque" with the correct pronunciation. Savannah continues by asking Camila to find the word "sol" inside the poem. When Camila had trouble locating the word, Savannah prompts her to compose it. Camila writes "los." Savannah then uses this as a learning opportunity to teach directionality, recognizing that Camila had correctly identified the sounds and letters in the word "sol."*

What is remarkable about this vignette is that Savannah successfully connected with her student across a language barrier that she previously worried deeply about. As her teacher educators, we watched for moments like this so we could point out to Savannah, and her classmates, that regardless of a teacher's language, they can make connections with students, learn their language, learn about them, and be impactful literacy teachers by embracing language differences.

Savannah pivoted to respecting Camila's wish not to read, being a collaborator, and providing opportunities for her to show what she knows. She drew on Camila's

cultural knowledge and her bilingualism to read the poem, and used art as a response tool to find out more about Camila's vocabulary knowledge. When choosing to focus on phonics, Savannah chose a Spanish word to decode and analyze, privileging the language that Camila usually reads in. All of these moves were characteristic of a teacher who not only draws on students' culture and language as assets, but also sustains those resources as part of literacy teaching.

This activity occurred within a reading assessment course housed at a local elementary school; the course focused on developing culturally sustaining approaches to reading assessment and instruction. As part of the course, preservice teachers were paired with elementary, bi/multilingual students for biweekly literacy mentorship. Throughout the semester, we noticed how Savannah and two other mentors—Angelina and Daniela—approached their work with emergent bilingual students through a culturally sustaining lens. We use the term *mentor* to highlight the positive relationships and reflection necessary to work within communities and deemphasize student remediation indicated by the common title, *tutor* (Hoffman et al., 2019). Rather than see language differences as an

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obstacle, mentors reframed their experiences with their reading mentees as learning opportunities.

Today's classrooms in the United States reflect the growing diversity in American public schools. Across the United States, the student population that identifies as speaking one or more languages continues to increase. Spanish was the home language of 3.7 million bi/multi-lingual public school students in the fall of 2017, representing 74.8% of all bi/multilingual students. Arabic and Chinese were the next most commonly reported home languages (NCES, 2020). In 2017, approximately 52% of the nation's school-age population was comprised of students of color, whereas 87% of the teachers were White. Because all teachers are responsible for teaching every student within their care, teachers must approach instruction in ways that respond to and sustain the diversity of students' languages and language practices (Paris & Alim, 2017).

In this article, we consider the possibility that scholars (Christ & Sharma, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017) pose: Classrooms might be places where children explore, with the support of their teachers, language and literacy learning opportunities that are not only meaningful but also culturally relevant and sustaining. We begin by outlining four tenets of culturally sustaining

literacy teachers: Building cultural competence; maintaining high expectations; fostering critical consciousness; and sustaining pluralism. We then share stories of how mentors taught us what it means to be organic, spontaneous, and responsive literacy educators.

PAUSE AND PONDER

- What cultural and linguistic knowledge do your students draw from in your classroom?

- How do you approach working with multilingual students in your classroom?

- How might your own cultural beliefs and biases impact the children you work with?

Tenets of Culturally Sustaining Teaching

Discussions around what culturally relevant or sustaining teachers do in elementary literacy classrooms are not new. There is a long history of researchers and educators consciously decentering Whiteness and English-dominant practices by articulating culturally sustaining beliefs and instructional practices (Paris & Alim, 2017). We draw on Christ & Sharma's (2018) synthesis of both culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) pedagogies by outlining four tenets of a culturally sustaining teacher (see Table 1).

First, culturally sustaining teachers build their own cultural competence to help support students' identity formation (Christ & Sharma, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Beyond asking teachers to learn about their students' lives, this tenet pushes educators to constantly engage in their own cultural knowledge development and maintain

Table 1
Tenets of a Culturally Sustaining Teacher

Tenet	Definition	Example in the Literacy Classroom
Build Cultural Competence	Engage with sociocultural knowledge and critically reflect on the way your cultural beliefs and biases position you in the classroom.	Familiarize yourself with specific linguistic knowledge and practices of the communities you work with.
Maintain High Expectations	Expect academic success from all students by starting with students' strengths and continuing to scaffold their learning.	Begin with students' linguistic strengths by drawing on multimodal and translanguaging literacy practices.
Foster Critical Consciousness	Provide opportunities for students to engage with and address social inequities that present in their lives.	Discuss the power structures of languages inside the classroom and push back against English-dominant narratives.
Sustain Pluralism	Work to normalize a pluralistic approach to teaching and learning that embraces multiple languages, literacies, and cultures.	Create literacy curricula to center linguistic and cultural pluralism that can be used across the entire school year.

a critical awareness of how their cultural identities position them in relation to others. Building one's cultural competence can help teachers "perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1).

As teachers develop their cultural competence, they begin to position themselves as learners inside and outside of the classroom. For a literacy teacher, this often means learning the literacy practices of a community, including specific vocabulary, orthography, and phonology (Toppel, 2015) that support students' literacy development, as Savannah did by using a Spanish poem to address phonemic awareness and phonics. In this article, we conceptualize literacies as socially situated and culturally contextualized practices that span languages and modalities (Pérez, 1998).

Second, culturally sustaining teachers maintain high expectations of all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Rather than expecting less progress from students based on racial or ethnic background, linguistic abilities, socioeconomic status, or dis/abilities, these teachers hold students to high expectations by using their strengths as starting points and finding ways to scaffold their learning. For this reason, we use the term "emergent bilingual" (García, 2009) as it emphasizes students' linguistic strengths rather than suggesting a limitation or lack of English proficiency.

One way that literacy teachers can draw on emergent bilingual students' linguistic strengths in the classroom is through the practice of translanguaging, a process in which bilingual students draw on their entire repertoire of linguistic knowledge to make meaning (García et al., 2017). In practice, translanguaging is a fluid act where students move in and out of different formal languages (i.e., Spanish and English) to communicate and make meaning. Another way to maintain high expectations for all bi/multilingual students is to draw on their linguistic strengths through multimodal literacy practices that incorporate gestures, images, and sounds as ways to scaffold the practice of reading. Both translanguaging and multimodal literacies can serve as scaffolds for students to access grade-level texts and curricula.

The third tenet calls for teachers to provide opportunities for their students to learn about and address social inequities to foster their critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Fighting for social justice inside school spaces that have historically caused violence to students outside of the dominant group is an essential aspect of culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017). In literacy classrooms, teachers can foster critical consciousness through the use of powerful, multicultural literature (Osorio, 2020) and active engagement with critical literacies (Labadie et al., 2012; Lau, 2012). Furthermore, fighting for social justice might take the form of restorying

harmful narratives (Worthy & Patterson, 2001). For example, Camila, Savannah's student, had internalized a harmful narrative of not considering herself as a reader. During their time together, Savannah actively worked toward restorying as she found ways to bring Camila into the lesson as a collaborative reader.

We have added a fourth tenet to Christ & Sharma's (2018) framework, as there is an important distinction that Paris & Alim (2017) make concerning culturally sustaining pedagogies. Paris and Alim note that it is entirely possible to be a culturally relevant teacher without ensuring that these pedagogies continue to last throughout and across school years. Rather than fulfilling a checkbox, culturally sustaining teachers continuously work at enacting pedagogies that sustain students' cultures across the curriculum and school year, rather than implementing one-time units. While the beginning story of Savannah and Camila was taken from one lesson, we were inspired by the fact that Savannah continued to bring Camila's cultural and linguistic strengths to each weekly lesson.

Working Alongside Emergent Bilinguals

We draw on the work of three preservice teachers who mentored emergent bilingual students in an elementary school setting. Each preservice teacher had varying levels of Spanish proficiency. Angelina described herself as fluent in English and developing as an emergent bilingual with Spanish. Savannah identifies as a monolingual English speaker. Destiny identified as fluent in English and described herself as a Spanish speaker with strong comprehension, but emergent speaking ability.

Huerta Elementary School is located in a Spanish–English bilingual community in a large city in the Southwest. Of the 625 students enrolled, 86% identified as Hispanic, 5% as Asian, 4% as African American, 3% as White, and 1% as American Indian, Pacific Islander, or two or more races. Based on state assessment data, 85% of the students were labeled English learners. Bilingual students at Huerta Elementary participate in a one-way Spanish dual-language program, which includes instruction (e.g., phonics, guided reading) in both English and Spanish to help students excel academically while becoming bilingual and biliterate (García et al., 2017).

As part of their literacy practicum experience, the preservice teachers were paired with an emergent bilingual in first or second grade for one-on-one literacy mentorship twice a week. Savannah worked with Camila, Angelina with Javier, and Destiny with Marisol. The mentorship pairs worked in the hallway, outside of the classroom, and outside of the standard curriculum. This space opened opportunities for the mentors to design activities

and read-alouds focused on building students' phonemic awareness and reading comprehension in English and Spanish. These literacy activities built on the emergent bilingual students' linguistic strengths, such as understanding the nuance in vocabulary words as they selected a specific word in Spanish or English based on a given context or audience (Martínez et al., 2019).

In the following sections, we draw examples from a larger study focused on culturally sustaining pedagogies in preservice teacher education (Nash et al., 2021) to illustrate what culturally sustaining pedagogies could look and sound like in a multilingual, elementary setting. By sharing these examples, we seek to provide models that teachers can draw upon as they begin the process of recognizing and building on students' bi/multilingual practices in the classroom.

Tenet 1: Building Cultural Competence in Action

As teachers begin to build cultural competence when working with bi/multilingual students, they must start from a place of learning. By positioning themselves as learners (Osorio, 2020), teachers can open space for learning across multiple languages. This learning can be approached from different angles. Some researchers call for teachers to learn a second language to empathize with their bi/multilingual students and inform their curriculum design (Toppel, 2015). Others call for professional development focused on building cultural and linguistic knowledge of students' communities (Paris, 2016) by spending time in community settings to observe specific vocabulary and communicative practices (Heath, 1983). In either case, teachers actively learn and build knowledge about the cultural and linguistic practices students bring with them to the classroom.

While watching the mentors working with emergent bilingual students, we were reminded that positioning oneself as a learner while working alongside students can be a powerful first step toward becoming a culturally sustaining teacher. The mentors did not claim a high level of proficiency in Spanish; Angelina brought a basic understanding of Spanish but sought to practice and learn more Spanish, while Savannah spoke little to no Spanish at the outset of the semester.

Angelina, who referred to herself as a growing bilingual, engaged in bilingual conversations with her student, Javier, that built a foundation of support for both teacher and student: "We got to support each other in that way and we often flipped back and forth between languages… One of us could start a conversation in one language and the other could reply in the other language." We noticed in these moments of translanguaging that both Angelina and Javier chose to switch between languages based on the context of the lesson. For example, when Angelina introduced a text, she used English, but when she stopped to ask a comprehension question (e.g., "¿Qué pasó?/What happened?"), she moved into Spanish. Together, Angelina and Javier engaged in translanguaging to support each other's emerging proficiencies in Spanish and English, respectively. We see the pair's translanguaging practices as a foundation for building metalinguistic awareness that models for students the power to choose between and draw on both languages in different contexts (Martínez et al., 2019).

Savannah's approach to her position as a language learner was different from that of the other mentors. From the start, Savannah was acutely aware of the language barrier between her and her student, Camila:

> At the beginning, I felt really embarrassed that I didn't know Spanish and I just felt not equipped to be there. I felt like I wasn't serving her. And so I was like, I need to figure out a way to be a good teacher.

Savannah's understanding of literacy practices expanded as she came to realize the many ways people connect without relying solely on verbal communication. Savannah jumped right into figuring out a way to build a connection with her student by positioning herself as a learner.

Almost every meeting, Savannah and Camila collected words in Spanish and English in their collaborative writing journal. Words such as *pan/bread*, *círculo/circle*, *cariño/honey*, and *oración/sentence* filled both sides of the pages. To Savannah, it felt "icky" to expect Camila to learn English without modeling this same effort in learning Spanish. Through this collective writing experience, the pair worked collaboratively to build on each other's linguistic strengths and support the other in new learnings.

Similarly, the way that Savannah created conversational structures with her student positioned Savannah as a learner and her student as an expert. During mentoring sessions, Savannah would ask Camila questions like, "How do you say that in Spanish?" or "Do you say it *mano* or *maño*?" At times, Savannah made this positioning explicit. For example, as they dug into a bilingual text for the first time, Savannah told Camila, "I'll try my best and you can help me learn." By asking Camila these questions, Savannah invited Camila to analyze the language in these interactions, a foundational metalinguistic skill that benefits emergent bilinguals (Jiménez et al., 2015), positioning Camila as a collaborator. Teachers must make metalinguistic learning opportunities explicit to avoid adding additional burden to students with the sole purpose of teaching the teacher.

These examples illustrate a continuum based on the mentors' linguistic competency in Spanish. Identifying as

an emergent bilingual, Angelina was able to draw on her Spanish language proficiency to learn from her student in conversation and through Spanish texts, whereas Savannah positioned herself as a learner alongside her student.

Tenet 2: Maintaining High Expectations in Action

Teachers working to hold students to high expectations find ways to draw upon students' existing interests, languages, and literacies as content around which to design curricula. In this way, they provide diverse groups of students with ways to connect with curricula, rather than maintain invisible expectations that place students more culturally aligned with White, English-only cultural features of schooling in more valued hierarchical positions (Nash et al., 2021). In this section, we focus specifically on how these mentors worked to decenter cultural assumptions, maintain high expectations, and provide support for student learning by recognizing and building upon students' multimodal literacies—those that use varied modes such as image, sound, and touch alongside printed text (Kress, 2003).

Multimodal resources provided tools with which mentors and students worked across languages as they engaged in rich, involved literacy practices. These resources included materials such as picturebooks, crayons, construction paper, and glue; digital resources such as images, songs, videos, and programs that helped with the pronunciation of unfamiliar words in both languages; and finally, their own embodied multimodal resources: their voices and gestures.

All three mentors used multimodal resources to communicate in multiple languages, whether they shared a language in common or not. Savannah used gestures to communicate with Camila, adding words, often through singing, to connect embodied experiences and new vocabulary. In one session, the pair pretended they were in a boat and mimicked a rocking motion while they read a poem to show how poems can inspire embodied feelings. Savannah also used hand signs to help create connections between body and words: "I taught (Camila) the ASL sign for 'feel.' We did the sign every time the word was mentioned in the book. I liked how it added a physical element to feeling…it occurs in your heart, it's tender."

Each day, the pair also had a laptop beside them, which Savannah used to pull up images of words, explore maps with Camila, translate words across languages, and learn the pronunciations of words. Savannah regularly referred to the drawings Camila made, often concerning the picturebooks they read together, asking questions about how to say different words in Spanish, highlighting Camila's Spanish literacy and oracy, and using her own learning as a springboard to teach Camila new vocabulary in English based on the illustrations she had already created.

Illustrations and multimodal compositions were not unique to this pair. All three mentoring pairs used drawings and other forms of multimodal composition as means of continuing literate practices. In Angelina's mentorship, Javier built upon his artistic strengths by creating a collection of three-dimensional objects based on the picturebooks they read together. Angelina paid close attention to Javier's engagement with multimodal text and followed initial observations by incorporating multimodal elements across the semester:

> I was touching the page because it almost looks 3D like there are the little printed pieces of tape that look like it's been taped together, and I remember him doing the exact same thing. He wanted to feel the collage and he even asked, "how did they make this?"

Following Javier's engagement with the multimodal text, Angelina brought him construction paper, glue, tape, and markers that he used to extend and play with the story world, engaging in a form of literacy that had not previously been recognized or celebrated in his school experiences. In this way, Angelina's approach to Javier's abilities allowed his strengths to be noticed, named, and built upon in the literacy curriculum. Angelina helped Javier connect these multimodal literacies to alphabetic text in both Spanish and English as they labeled his creations in both languages.

These examples highlight the role of multimodal resources in facilitating collaborative learning between students and teachers. Teachers seeking to support high expectations for their students could draw from these findings by incorporating a diverse array of texts and tools, using shared experiences in the material world as foundations for building with and across multiple languages. Recognizing students' multimodal literacies allows a shared foundation upon which literacy learning is built and serves as a scaffold to engage with grade-level texts.

Tenet 3: Fostering Critical Consciousness in Action

To expand students' worldviews and engage with critical literacies (Labadie et al., 2012; Lau, 2012), educators often use multicultural, multilingual picturebooks as a means to develop and amplify students' critical consciousness. Throughout the semester, the mentors selected bilingual picturebooks to read with their mentees, such as *Drawn Together* (Lê & Santat, 2018) and *Estrellita en la Ciudad Grande/Estrellita in the Big City* (Caraballo & Torrecilla, 2008) to center the linguistic knowledge of their students and to disrupt the English-dominant hierarchy. In addition, the mentors intentionally selected bilingual leveled texts

as a way to informally assess their students' skills and strategies in both languages.

Another way teachers can support their bi/multilingual students with opportunities to develop critical consciousness is by pushing back against deficit narratives that students may have previously encountered. Too often, bi/multilingual learners have encountered narratives that are both inaccurate and extremely harmful (García, 2009). Educators can work to restory these narratives by drawing from a strengths-based perspective (Worthy & Patterson, 2001). Teachers must actively reframe damaging narratives and misconceptions lest they invade their students' identities.

Early in the reading mentorships, all three preservice teachers noticed how the elementary students saw themselves as readers and writers. Time and time again, the students referred to themselves as non-readers. After several weeks of building relationships with their students, the mentors picked up on these cues and sought to reframe these deficit notions. The elementary students' lack of confidence was not limited to their perceived reading abilities. Savannah noted that her mentee, Camila, preferred to read and converse in English, although her native language was Spanish. When questioned by Savannah about her language preferences, Camila stated that she wanted to speak in English to become proficient in it as a reader and writer. Although we do not know where Camila's thinking about her native language originated, it is not uncommon for bi/multilingual learners to set aside their native language in favor of English, which represents the language of power in the United States (Flores, 2016). Despite English's perceived utility, Savannah intentionally chose to build on Camila's linguistic repertoire of Spanish and emphasize that it is a strength to speak two languages. Through carefully selected bilingual read-alouds and intentionally planned literacy activities, Camila shifted her stance on her heritage language. Toward the end of the semester, Camila expressed confidence in herself as a bilingual reader and writer, evidence of her growing acceptance of her multilingual literate identity.

Similarly, Daniela's mentee, Maribel, conveyed a desire to read, write, and speak primarily in English. Recalling her own experiences as a young Latina student who was instructed solely in English, Daniela wanted to shift the narrative for Maribel:

> I would tell her, "It's important that you know Spanish." I feel like she had this idea that it was bad for her to know Spanish. And so I told her, "No, we want to encourage you to still use your Spanish and English together." When I had her write, I asked if she could do it both in Spanish and in English.

Drawing from personal experience, Daniela intentionally chose to highlight her mentee's expertise in Spanish.

Daniela viewed it as valuable and worthy of sustaining throughout their mentoring relationship.

As these examples illustrate, literacy, language, and identity are deeply intertwined. We cannot separate the reader and writer from their languages. By integrating their students' full language and semiotic resources (García et al., 2017) into curricular resources and subsequent conversations, teachers can co-create meaningful, rich learning opportunities. Additionally, by noticing and naming the literate practices they see, teachers can gently shift potential deficit thinking their students may have about who they are as readers and writers. In the next section, we build on the reading partnerships' experiences to propose an additional tenet of culturally sustaining teaching.

Tenet 4: Sustaining Pluralism in Action

Our final tenet is for teachers to practice sustaining pluralism in the classroom. Many U.S. schools tout values of multilingualism and pluralism, but still send messages to students and their families that assimilation to English literacy is the goal of education. As culturally sustaining educators, we are actively trying to move away from this monolithic approach to schooling. Nondominant ways of being and knowing in education have typically been included as long as they were positioned as "subordinate or inferior" (hooks, 2003, p. 47). To disrupt this contingent inclusion, culturally sustaining educators embrace a pluralistic approach that explicitly values multiple cultures and languages and decenters English-dominant practices.

For the mentors, working toward a pluralistic practice with mentees did not come without struggle. Each mentor grappled with feelings of uncertainty throughout the semester, questioning whether disruptions to English-dominant teaching practices was the right thing to do. Angelina asked herself, "What if I'm not writing enough with him? What if I'm not teaching him enough about language and literacy?" Similarly, Savannah asked questions such as, "Should I try to get her to write/read more in Spanish? Or is that the opposite of the point here?" The mentors felt pressure to maintain the English-dominant norm while working with their students.

However, as the mentors continued working with students across the semester, they were able to position themselves as learners, engage in multimodal literacy practices, and push back against deficit narratives. The mentors were able to create new curriculum with first- and second-grade students that invited pluralistic practices to the center of their literacy experiences, disrupting these norms.

Sustaining pluralism was the most challenging tenet for preservice teachers to enact. While our mentors were not responsible for planning a year-long curriculum for a class of 20 students, we saw how they engaged in

centering pluralism multiple times across the semester. Their lesson plans each week included bilingual children's literature, poems, and jokes. Repeatedly throughout the semester, the mentors would ask students to respond to a text and the pair would engage in translanguaging.

Perhaps it was challenging because beyond their twice-a-week interactions, they were unable to build entire classrooms that reflected the students' literacies. Also, they had fewer opportunities to talk with parents and families and be collaborators in developing sustaining practices. Across a school year, we can imagine these teachers making sustaining literacy teaching a norm in the classroom by incorporating bilingual children's literature across content areas (Osorio, 2020) or promoting translanguaging in writing throughout the school day (Rowe, 2018).

Conclusion: Recognizing and Building on Students' Bi/Multilingual Practices

Our focus in this article was on four tenets of culturally sustaining pedagogy enacted within multilingual spaces. While we have taken note of the practical ways that the mentors both recognized and built on their emergent bilingual students' practices, we also understand that these teachers were in a unique setting that may not apply to all classroom teachers. However, we endeavor in this final section to connect what they were able to try out in this in-between space to more general contexts. Here we offer educators suggestions to bring these tenets into their classrooms.

When facilitating learning across multiple languages, teachers should build their own cultural competence, maintain high expectations for all students, foster critical consciousness, and sustain pluralism within their respective learning communities. Teachers who build their own cultural competence can position themselves as language learners, asking questions such as "Why did you choose this word?" or "How does this translation support your understanding of the text?", which, in turn, can provide opportunities for both students and teachers to collaboratively teach each other. This is an exceptionally powerful tool for monolingual teachers or teachers in English-only classrooms as it creates authentic spaces for translanguaging and increased metalinguistic awareness (Daniel et al., 2019).

To maintain high expectations for emergent bilinguals, teachers can draw on scaffolded supports such as movement, images, and sounds to draw on students' existing literacies. Additionally, being intentional about the identities that students take up in literacy classrooms can help teachers push back on deficit narratives and open spaces for students to build critical consciousness. Working to make these practices and dispositions classroom norms will help sustain the cultural and linguistic pluralism that has often been erased through schooling.

We recognize that many teachers will face tensions as they begin the important work of honoring students' linguistic and cultural strengths in the classroom. For example, while teachers intentionally make space for multiple languages in the classroom, many literacy assessment tools are only published in English. However, literacy educators have found ways to adapt formative reading assessments through the use of translanguaging and responsive assessment (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). While not every tension a teacher faces when enacting culturally sustaining literacy instruction is easily resolved, we are reminded by Paris (2016) that culturally sustaining pedagogy is an approach to the craft of teaching. We believe that teachers who take up these culturally sustaining dispositions and approaches to teaching will

TAKE ACTION!

1. Build Cultural Competence
   a. Create an environment of acceptance and respect for all by explicitly discussing cultural and linguistic norms as a classroom community.
   b. Position yourself as a learner of languages, literacies, and cultural practices alongside your student. Look for opportunities to partner with families and community members.

2. Maintain High Expectations
   a. Create and provide literacy toolkits that include a variety of materials for composing, such as paper, scissors, craft materials, letters, and word stickers. These can also be digital, such as phones or tablets that have apps for designing text responses.
   b. Keep an eye out for students' multimodal interests and literacies—most students live rich, multimodal literate lives outside of school!

3. Foster Critical Consciousness
   a. Examine your professional practices that may create inequitable outcomes for students and try out new practices that may lead to more equitable student outcomes.
   b. Become mindful and aware of how racial inequity is embedded within our global and local contexts through your reading and talk with others who may see the world from perspectives different than your own.

4. Sustain Pluralism
   a. Intentionally build on your students' existing linguistic and cultural strengths in the design of activities in the classroom.
   b. Look past one lesson plan or unit of study—find ways to engage in this work across the year.

find their own ways of recognizing and building on their students' bi/multilingual practices in the classroom.

We encourage teachers to engage in ongoing learning opportunities that will assist them in implementing these tenets, possibly partnering with other teachers around new practices. We recommend that district and school administrators support such initiatives and use available professional development funds toward building local knowledge for teachers by bringing in experts from the community to talk to teachers, such as religious leaders, community organizers, and advocates for justice. Taking an approach that assumes we are all in this work together will take us further than we can go on our own.

Conflict of Interest

None

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- Teaching Bilinguals (Even If You're Not One): A CUNY-NYSIEB Webseries for teachers: https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/teaching-bilinguals-webseries/?fbclid=IwAR3yj3JUYh2OKzSkHORPl3rZ8rTwNyP0P8tRrpvZ_yrmsmO1svsgUeiMf3I

- Bilingual Education resources from Learning for Justice: https://www.learningforjustice.org/learning-plan/bilingual-education-0