



THE ISSUE

Often, schools that serve underrepresented students of color, low-income students, and emergent bilingual students carry deficit viewpoints and express lower expectations of these students and their families. This leads to varying levels of academic support from educators and a lack of understanding of students' lived experiences outside of school. As a result, students may be more likely to be disciplined, and not receive adequate socioemotional and academic support.

AN APPROACH

Helping students build college-going identities requires that districts and schools deliberately take steps to understand and value the cultures of students, families, and communities that they serve. By considering the assets students bring to schools (particularly underrepresented students of color, low-income students, and emergent bilingual) and refraining from deficit viewpoints, districts and schools can help students navigate their college and career pathway. Using a culturally sustaining pedagogy to foster a strong sense of community that embraces the differences in cultural identities has been associated with higher levels of college and career preparation rates for traditionally underrepresented groups. In contrast to assimilation, a school culture rooted in humanizing practices honors and respects the history, experiences, and perspective of students and makes them a fundamental part of students' educational experiences.



Create and Foster Learning Experiences that Honor Students' Humanity

HOW & WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

Vintage High School, part of **Napa Valley Unified School District**, attributes much of their success to the work they do to examine their own identities, biases, and privileges so they can better serve students' academic needs. Through their Culturally and Community Responsive, Sustaining, and Humanizing (CRSH) work (see A Note on Terminology), faculty and staff take a strengths-based approach to working with students and foster learning experiences that honor students' humanity.

At its core, CRSH focuses on counter-narratives, the stories of those whose experiences are not often told, which help challenge preconceived notions educators may have of students. Some of the spaces where students create and share their counter-narratives are in English and social science classes. The counter-narratives come to fruition through grade-level themes where students and teachers work together in exploratory identity work:

- *Ninth grade teachers and students examine their own identities and cultural strengths.*
- *In tenth grade, the focus is on learning about and celebrating others in the community. These two introductory themes help students understand that they are not alone in their positions and struggles.*
- *In eleventh grade, students and teachers ask themselves how they fit into the community where they reside and brainstorm contributions they can make.*
- *In twelfth grade, there is a senior capstone which infuses, incorporates, and celebrates the themes from each year.*

A Note on Terminology

Culturally and community responsive teaching¹ refers to deliberately including students' knowledge, experiences, and backgrounds to inform pedagogy while also meeting district and curricular requirements and expectations.

Community cultural wealth² refers to the aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital that socially marginalized groups possess, but often go unrecognized and unacknowledged.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy³ aims to foster community cultural wealth, and embrace all identities and cultural differences as people participate fully in the dominant society.

Humanizing pedagogies⁴ honor and respect the history, reality, and perspectives of students and makes them a fundamental part of students' educational experience.

This self-reflective work helps build community to humanize the experiences of students and fosters communicative relationships between students and teachers where they're both experts and learners.

Similarly, **Culver City Unified, Val Verde Unified, and East Side Union High School Districts** provide professional learning opportunities to address systemic racism and unconscious bias and employ culturally relevant pedagogy. In doing so, faculty and staff unlearn harmful stereotypes about students and instead focus on the assets students bring to school. Implementing restorative justice (RJ) practices and/or positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) also helps create more humanizing learning experiences for students. Instead of automatically blaming students when discipline issues arise, by employing RJ and PBIS strategies, districts and schools work to understand the underlying issues that caused students' resistance so that they can begin to work together to address root causes of students' behavior.

All of the districts and schools featured admit that because this type of work is deeply personal, it is often met with increased resistance from faculty and staff. However, one teacher explained, "nobody can argue that it's not good." By making it an integral part of their professional learning plans, districts and schools ensure that the work is continuous, that teachers create lessons and employ pedagogies that are reflective of students and their strengths, and that the rest of the school community helps build a school environment that honors and is representative of students' cultures. This practice allows students' assets to be seen and recognized in school, fosters a sense of belonging, and creates a culture where students are supported to succeed socially and academically.

¹ Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research* 32, no. 3 (Sept. 1995): 465-491.

² Tara J. Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (Aug 2006): 69-91.

³ Django Paris, "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice," *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (April 2012): 93-97.

⁴ Lilia I. Bartolomé, "Beyond the Methods Fetish: Toward a Humanizing Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review* 64, no. 2 (Summ 1994): 173-194.

⁵ Daniel G. Solorzano and Tara J. Yosso, "Critical Race and LatCrit Theory and Method: Counter-Storytelling," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 14, no. 4 (2001): 471-495.

Guiding Questions for Advocacy

- 1** Does your district/school offer continuous professional learning opportunities related to culturally sustaining pedagogy? If so, what impact have these had on students, the curriculum, and school culture?
- 2** Does your district/school offer continuous professional learning opportunities related to bias, identity, privilege, and systemic oppression? If so, what impact have these had on students, the curriculum, and school culture?
- 3** What is your district/school's discipline protocol? Does it include restorative practices?



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