

Chapter 6

Toward Racially–Just Multilingual Classroom Pedagogy: Transforming Learning Centers for the K–5 Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Creating equitable multilingual classrooms grounded in explicitly anti-racist teaching practices requires transformation of practice preceded by transformation of thinking. Classroom learning centers can provide the context for truly transformational, anti-racist teaching, but equitable implementation requires a deliberately humanizing approach toward teaching multilingual learners. The chapter outlines the process of operationalizing learning centers in such a way, through pedagogy grounded in the enduring principles of learning and critical sociocultural theory. Based on over 50 years of teaching across five countries and conducting international research in the field of multilingual education, the authors provide research-based, practical steps for learning center design and implementation. Educators will gain a practical pathway for implementation, as well as a model for the self-reflective work that is essential for any meaningful transformation toward racially just classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning centers are one of the most common and valuable teaching practices in K-5 classrooms but transforming learning centers to be anti-racist and equitable for all learners, regardless of background, requires intentional design and meticulous implementation. Throughout this chapter, we will illustrate how grounding our thinking around critical perspectives can elevate the efficacy of learning centers for all students. This chapter will recommend practical implementation strategies for K-5 educators, including general classroom teachers as well as language specialists (both kinds of teachers that can be considered TESOL educators as they work with and support the language and content development of many multilingual learners) around the use of learning centers to support strong, racially-just learning for students in multilingual classrooms. With attention to multilingual, culturally sustaining, inequity disrupting practices, the use of learning centers grounded in the Enduring Principles of Learning (Sherman & Teemant, 2021) are a great way for TESOL educators to move towards racially just multilingual classroom pedagogies. Our hope is that this chapter serves not only as a practical guide for the effective implementation of learning centers, but also as a model for what it can look like to reevaluate a common teaching practice through a critical perspective.

While all students benefit from the collaborative, hands-on, inquiry oriented, dialogic teaching that the Enduring Principles promote, for multilingual students they are particularly beneficial as they create the context for ongoing active engagement with language and ideas. Too often multilingual students are sitting quietly in spaces of whole class instruction with little differentiation or meaningful scaffolds for their higher-level thinking or engagement to be possible. The rest of this chapter will illustrate how the Enduring Principles can be operationalized in order to create meaningful, equitable learning experiences in learning centers for students in multilingual classrooms.

CONCEPT

The approach for transforming learning centers illustrated in this chapter with the aim of creating the classroom context for truly anti-racist teaching is grounded in the empirical and theoretical work of critical sociocultural pedagogical practices. The strategies presented are practical and derived from real classrooms, while the supporting rationale is driven by extensive research and theory in order to bridge the divide between theory and practice. By meaningfully merging researcher and practitioner perspectives, we aim to provide strategies to advance racially just classroom pedagogies through the transformative design and implementation of classroom learning centers.

Critical Sociocultural Pedagogy

Building off of extensive research in diverse classroom with particular attention to multilingual students learning English, researchers at the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) Center at UC Berkeley in the 1990s developed the Standards for Effective Pedagogy (Tharpe et al., 2000). These standards operationalize a Vygotskian, sociocultural pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1978) and have been examined across various empirical studies (e.g., Doherty & Hilberg, 2007; Doherty et al., 2002; Estrada, 2005; Estrada & Imhoff, 1999; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Saunders, 1999). These studies

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