

# Chapter 1

## Culturally Sustaining Film Pedagogies

**Max Thiede**

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Current film pedagogies strive to incorporate student interest in film analysis and production. Unfortunately, these pedagogies often ignore students' experiences, cultures, and media consumption habits. This chapter creates a framework for culturally sustaining film pedagogy (CSFP) to better support students' identities. To do this, this chapter examines film pedagogies, their flaws, and how they can benefit from incorporating elements culturally sustaining pedagogies. Then, this chapter discusses how two classrooms successfully incorporated CSFP and how students benefitted using interviews, examples, and analysis.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies (CSP) has radically changed how educators view representation in the classroom. Instead of assimilating and conforming students to dominant languages and cultures, CSP advocates use students' own experiences as an essential scaffold to learning and development. For these educators, understanding how students live is essential. As of 2022, student interaction with screen media is an at all-time high. It has become so ubiquitous that the most recent survey done by Common Sense Media (2022) found that "If forced to choose a single site or platform they wouldn't want to live without, 32% of teens would choose YouTube, followed by 20% choosing Snapchat, and 13% choosing TikTok" (Peebles et al., 2022 p. 4). While they are different applications, each program includes short, video-centric media. Snapchat's key feature is its stories and self-erasing "snaps," both of which are designed to be quickly consumed and erased. TikTok's most engaging videos are between 21-34 seconds, and videos longer than a minute stress viewers (Stokel-Walker, 2022). YouTube has much longer videos, though this is changing. Video analytics firm Convivia's State of Streaming Q4 2021 (2022) found "... videos less than a minute grew from 9.7% to 12.1% in a year" (p.14). YouTube even encourages creating shorter media through YouTube Shorts, which limits videos to 60 seconds.

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As educators, it is essential to embrace students' preferred forms of expression. Incorporating films diverse in both representation and mode encourage students to engage and present content in ways that are meaningful to them. To better align CSP and film pedagogies, I suggest the creation of a new branch of CSP called Culturally Sustaining Film Pedagogy (CSFP). CSFP is a framework that seeks to use/ incorporate film production and analysis to sustain linguistic, literate, cultural, and cinematic pluralism to support student and social development. It connects students to their local communities by providing opportunities for them to see films that display diverse themes, peoples, and identities. It broadens students' understanding of film and asks them to reconsider how they view film production. It also taps into students' innate skills and lived experiences to produce works that display their unique identities and experiences, while decentering cultural, linguistic, and cinematic hegemony. Through these experiences, students can better advocate, express, and learn about the cultural and linguistic pluralism in their community. CSFP does not seek to replace CSP nor film pedagogies. CSFP instead asks educators to center their education on what matters to students and to consider film's purpose in their curriculum and what messages they send to students.

## **EXAMINING ASSET-BASED PEDAGOGIES**

Before educators examine *what* they teach students, they must consider *how* they teach their students. The two most common pedagogies are asset-based pedagogies and deficit pedagogies. Deficit pedagogies, like Teach Like a Champion, use strict behavioral rules, teach the canon without reference to the present, and focus on student data to foster learning. In these pedagogies, cultural dominance and assimilation are necessary to properly educate students, even if it means reducing and replacing the identities of minority students. CSP and other asset-based pedagogies instead cultivate and celebrate students' skills and experiences. Coined by Paris and Alim (2017), "CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster-to sustain-linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation" (p. 1). To do this, CSP practitioners support students' diverse identities, communities, and relationships in their curriculums by teaching various histories and identities while supporting and celebrating diverse forms of expression. Effective CSP makes schools places that develop their identities and humanistic beliefs, as well as academic skills and knowledge.

CSP works because it empowers students as learners and individuals. A study by Valerie Kinloch (2017) found students engage more in writing and literacy practices when teachers reject "deficit-oriented educational approaches" (p.38) and encourage positive identity development. Multiple researchers (Kelly Puzio et al., 2017; Izarry, 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017) found incorporating heritage language use in classrooms increases student skill, academic engagement, and self-esteem. Others (Paris & Alim, 2017; Hutchinson & Buckingham, 2021) found incorporating cultural identities in the classroom led to higher self-confidence and academic achievement.

Despite these successes, CSP can be ineffective if not continually examined. Such was the case for Gloria Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), which Paris and Alim consider to be "... where the beat drops" (p.5, 2017). While revolutionary at its time, Ladson-Billings herself noticed many educators incorporate CRP in half-hearted and superfluous ways, saying

*...I have grown increasingly dissatisfied with what seems to be a static conception of what it means to be culturally relevant. Many practitioners, and those who claim to translate research to practice seem*

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