

“Lorena Escoto Germán walks us through a framework that is realistic, wholistic, liberating, and necessary! *Textured Teaching* is THE book every teacher should read. Not only does the book guide us into meeting our students where they are and learning who they are, it also helps us [the educators] to grow and become the teachers we are meant to be. Centering education in love, community, justice, truth, and knowledge, Germán pushes us to go beyond ourselves and to be present and to open our hearts to the possibilities of justice-centered learning.”

—Tiffany Jewell, author of the #1 *New York Times* best seller, *This Book Is Anti-Racist*

“As this country becomes more divided, this book helps educators step into the liberation work with both feet. Germán has written the teaching book that will hopefully push teachers and their classrooms to more justice-centered practices and orientations.”

—José Luis Vilson, Executive Director of #EduColor, NYC math educator, and author of *This Is Not a Test*

“*Textured Teaching* is a combination of affirmation, culturally relevant practices, culturally sustaining teaching, and liberating pedagogies. It is love. It is truth-telling. It is nuanced. It is hopeful. It is necessary in its stance and commitment to dismantle harmful schooling practices through pedagogical restoration, equity, and justice. In fact, it is Lorena Escoto Germán’s commitment to anti-oppressive and anti-racist teaching, which is felt on every single page of this book, that should encourage us to reimagine teaching as a Project in Humanization that positions teachers as learning partners alongside students. What a beautiful text. What a layered teaching framework. What a textured book. Read it and be left inspired!”

—Valerie Kinloch, Renée and Richard Goldman Dean & Professor, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh

“The craft of teaching is both science and art, but *Textured Teaching* suggests that it also wisdom and discovery. The wealth of this approach, subtle in its implication, transformative in its intent, is found at the fertile intersection of where profound education work sits in the lives of youth; to equally empower, enhance, and sustain them while fostering conditions that promise they will grow.”

—David E. Kirkland, Executive Director, NYU Metro Center and Professor of Urban Education, New York University

TEXTURED TEACHING

A FRAMEWORK
FOR CULTURALLY
SUSTAINING
PRACTICES



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**FOR ANALÍZ, ZION, AND SOL,
AND FOR EVERYONE ELSE'S
CHILDREN WHO ARE BLACK, BROWN,
INDIGENOUS, IMMIGRANT, AND
MORE, WHO HAVE STORIES TO TELL
AND ARE STARDUST, TOO.**

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FOREWORD

Imagine what it would be like if that extraordinary social justice educator who has been throwing down beautiful work with communities for years was willing to share all of her brilliance, commitment, heart and soul work with you, one-on-one, with all the receipts, all the reading and research, nothing held back, just the beautiful and honest truth of her practice. That is what *Textured Teaching* is: a guidebook for those of us in the ongoing journey of being and becoming culturally sustaining educators, of teaching and learning with communities to build the world we need. As Lorena Germán writes in the concluding chapter, “I want to hug you with these words: we are in no position to consider ourselves apolitical or neutral members of society. As educators, we are either dismantling the unjust system that is education, or we are complicit in it.” Be prepared to be embraced with words, images, stories, examples, experiences, a love for teaching in community with young people toward social and cultural justice.

But let me begin at the beginning. As you will hear in the following pages, I have been learning in community with Lorena for over a decade. Indeed, when I was first writing about Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) back in 2011, I was just coming to know Lorena. At the time, I was an early career professor, a former English language arts (ELA) teacher now working with other ELA teachers, and Lorena was an early career ELA teacher just getting grounded in her practice. We were both critical educators of color (me, a Black man born to a White settler mother and a Black Jamaican father; Lorena, a Black Latinx Dominican American woman). And we were both committed to centering our communities through education in a system we knew was in many ways designed to do the opposite. In this way, Lorena has been part of our CSP collective all along, and she has been there as we have kept joining communities, deepening the work, learning what it means to center and sustain young people through teaching and learning.

Over the years, when I wanted to connect with an educator doing the CSP work we need, I always reached out to Lorena, and I always followed her work on social media with the #DisruptTexts squad, with the National Council of Teachers of English, or across the many facets of her practice. To be honest, Lorena is a teacher hero of

mine. She is one of those educators that all of us—teachers, students, families, community members (and those that hold multiple roles and memberships)—gravitate toward because of her vision, passion, commitment to lay it all on the line in the project of justice for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander (not mutually exclusive) communities across intersections with gender and sexuality, disability, language, class, land, and more.

One of the reasons Lorena has been so inspiring to my own teaching, learning, and theorizing about CSP is because she truly gets what CSP is all about. As she recalls from those early years of our learning together,

What I learned about CSP has become the foundation of my teaching approach. It is what I stand on, unwaveringly. . . . The verb *sustain* is important to note because it requires a depth not necessitated by, say, *relate* or *connect*. To sustain something means you feed it and nurture it to make sure it's healthy and alive.

Lorena understood this essential foundation of CSP early and kept it as her foundation as she taught, and read, and experienced across these many years. This book brings all of this praxis together, with love and vision. I mention love because in our work with CSP, H. Samy Alim and I have been explicit about the centrality of love in the practice of culturally sustaining education. Knowing the kindred relationship between CSP and Textured Teaching (TT), it will come as no surprise that TT also holds love as a core principle. It will also come as no surprise that central traits of Lorena's TT are being *student driven* and *community centered*, *interdisciplinary*, *experiential*, and *flexible*. These are all also fundamental features of settings enacting CSP. What may come as a surprise is the ways Lorena makes all of this both actionable and irresistible for educators looking to join the work as well as those looking to deepen their commitment to CSP and other strength- or asset-based approaches. This is to say, these traits, including the core focus on love, are made concrete through examples of practice; distillations of literature, research, and theory; and the essential practice of calling us in to our own necessary divestments from white supremacy, settler colonialism, and attendant cis-heteropatriarchal, ableist, monolingual logics so central to schooling in the United States and so many nations.

Lorena invites us to journal as we read, learn, bring these lessons into our practice—and she offers prompts, cautions, paths forward for our engagement. Through this beautiful pedagogical authoring, we find ourselves invited to practice alongside her. It is an invitation none of us will want to refuse.

Toward the end of the book, Lorena shares this necessary meditation on the origins of TT:

A truth about Textured Teaching is that it comes from a place of frustration and pain inside of me: the pain of having been wronged by educational institutions; the frustration of being silenced, ignored, and neglected. These feelings pushed me into knowing I could do better and believing that the classroom could be different.

I am so grateful you and I are holding this book so we can join Lorena and the communities we teach and learn with in building different classrooms; so we can, as Lorena writes, “stop wondering and guessing how social justice is implemented in the classroom.” No guesswork needed here, only a willingness to join Lorena in laying it all on the line to center and sustain the young people, families, communities we love.

Django Paris

University of Washington on Coast Salish Lands

INTRODUCTION

Who do you bring with you
when you walk into the room?

—Django Paris

Textured

My aunt once pointed out to me how the underside of a woven fabric seems chaotic and messy and doesn't appear to make much sense. The colors are going in all directions and the threads seem to be disorganized. Some might even look loose. You can't really decipher a pattern, and put quite simply, it looks terrible! But on the top is a colorful, purposeful, and beautiful pattern. The colors and threads come together to reveal a message, an artistic impression. There's texture, there's blending, and there's variety. It all comes together to create an impressive organization of shades that complement each other harmoniously. That's one way to think of Textured Teaching: a process that has many parts and elements and can even be considered messy, but on the other side of it is learning, growth, consciousness, beauty, and liberation. It's a very purpose-driven way to teach for what we know is good for the future, for what we know is freedom for all people.

The word *texture* has many definitions. As a noun, it can mean the visual appearance or surface of something—like an oil painting with ridges and curves showing us how the artist used their paintbrush—or a creation made of interwoven elements—like a pattern of musical sounds or the fabric my aunt showed me. As a verb, it is used to explain when we actively give texture to what we've made—like adding a sponge effect to an accent wall. Textured Teaching is all of these things. It is a noun and a verb. It is what we do and how we do it. In *The Latinization of U.S. Schools*, Dr. Jason Irizarry explains that based on large demographic shifts in the United States, "the racial/ethnic and linguistic texture of the United States is changing rapidly" (2011, 3). Our future is textured by incoming languages, blending cultures, welcomed voices, true history, robust art, all of life, warm and tasty food, and more. It is interwoven with so much and

if we don't respond to that reality we will, in fact, be leaving our students unprepared to engage in the future through our outdated racist and biased approaches. Textured Teaching is a dynamic, culturally sustaining framework with strategies that aim to engage all learners by welcoming all of who they are to work toward social justice.

My Own Schooling

I attended the public high school in the town where I grew up—the same high school that my aunt and older sister graduated from, where my grandpa once taught, and my mom had been an administrative assistant. As I walked through the front door on the first day of ninth grade, I was so excited about the journey I thought I would have there.

I wanted to make a name for myself. I, too, wanted to attend a basketball game and cheer for my friends. I, too, wanted to walk into

the building and have friends to say hi to and jokes to make with others. What I didn't know was that our graduation rate was at nearly 50 percent and that a couple of years into my attendance, we would lose our accreditation.

The majority of my peers and I were Latinx, yet our teachers and administrators were White, and to say that there was a cultural gap is an understatement. The curriculum I was taught was centered on Whiteness in every sense. The values that were prioritized, the culture that was celebrated, the authors that we read, the general

content in my classes were all by and about White people. My

experience was like the one described by Dr. Irizarry: “a process whereby [students] were expected to memorize discrete sets of facts that were completely disconnected from the material conditions of their lives” (2011, 10). This was and still is problematic.

Today, as an educator, I work diligently to make sure that my students have a different experience. All students deserve to be seen and have more than what they're currently getting from school. Specifically, they deserve to get an understanding of the diversity in the world and the richness that it brings. To be able to function in the world outside of the school, they *need* to develop a sense of cultural proficiency and

Textured Teaching is a dynamic, culturally sustaining framework with strategies that aim to engage all learners by welcoming all of who they are to work toward social justice.

deconstruct the harmful practices our society has socialized us all into. So in my quest to be, quite literally, the type of teacher I never had, I concentrated on developing an engaging, thoughtful, antiracist, and inclusive teaching approach. I began by asking myself these questions:

- What can I do to connect with my students in a way that affirms their culture?
- How can I make sure the content is engaging and relevant to their lives?
- What will I make sure I do consistently to have a positive impact in the classroom and in our school building as I strive for change?
- How can I use this content to help students relate to other cultures as well as the world around them?

It was such a challenge to try and be creative under the pressure of standardized testing dominating our school calendar and the Common Core State Standards dictating curricula. We were told what books we taught and some of our in-class assessments were also designed for us. Thus began my search for moments where I could take creative risks. I needed to be able to do the opposite of what Dr. Irizarry shared schools have always been doing: “victimizing young people by treating them as disposable, unworthy of investment, and incapable of original thought and higher-order thinking” (2011, 10). I knew that experience all too well. I wanted better for my students.

I began by texturizing the one unit I was allowed to develop on my own during the year. I decided to teach the Spike Lee film *Do the Right Thing*. I brought in a guest speaker, used supplementary texts strategically, and created opportunities for flexibility in their assessments and products. The students responded critically and were engaged throughout the entire unit. We were able to have deep, honest, and challenging conversations about our school and community. I wish the whole year could have been that way. I wish I had more choice. I wish my students had more choice. I wish that I could have used this type of learning to do more, to coach them into more skill building. I’ve since moved to a different school environment, but I share this because this is where Textured Teaching began: in the most oppressive teaching environment I’d ever been in. And I continue to use Textured Teaching to this day. I currently teach at a small independent school in the heart of Austin, Texas. Although I have a

predominantly White student body that I work with, there are many students that are a blend of Latinx and White ethnicities, primarily Mexican. The size of the school also definitely plays a role in what I can achieve, academically speaking. Our classes meet two to three times per week for about seventy minutes. That structures my planning and what I set out to do with them, in terms of pacing. Lastly, it's a school community that is very unique in terms of its culture. There is a general openness to antibias and antiracism dialogue and work. My administrators are openly making space for that dialogue and have engaged in the work themselves. Textured Teaching works in this setting, too. The approach I am sharing with all of you is for anyone anywhere.

The Shoulders I Stand On

While teaching at my first high school, I earned my master's degree through a graduate program that impacted me in unexpected ways. Although it was very traditionally Eurocentric and focused on literature written by and about White people, for the most part, there was a growing movement toward change and inclusivity. For the first time, I met academics who were people of color teaching about social justice in education and using pedagogy for liberation. My mind was blown and my hunger was piqued.

I met Dr. Django Paris my first summer. He was working on developing Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) and would publish the introductory article the following year. Later, he would coedit the text *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* (2017) with Dr. Samy Alim. His work changed my life. Our talks opened my mind. His words encouraged me in ways that healed the academic trauma I was carrying. I met so many educators of color who influenced me in ways that affirmed my identity and expanded what I believed I could do in the classroom. Similarly, I met Dr. David Kirkland and he, too, left an indelible mark on me as a teacher. His course was fascinating, highly intellectual, and so deep. I had never sat in a class like that in my entire life and I was close to thirty years old. He is also a direct source of motivation for the publication of this book. He told me to do it! I realized the power of teaching and why I was in these shoes. All of those academics of color shifted the way I saw myself. I had never seen us shine so bright. I had never seen us walk with such authority and knowledge and power in a space that constantly questioned us. Representation matters.

What I learned at this institution, both the good and the bad, continues to fuel my practice today. Most significantly, what I learned about CSP has become the foundation of my teaching approach. It is what I stand on, unwaveringly. CSP is a pedagogical stance that aims to rectify the ways that schooling has harmed and vilified communities of color in this country. Dr. Paris was influenced by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings' work on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (1995). Dr. Billings' work provided us with a theory that recognized the value and need for including students' cultural backgrounds, interests, and lived experiences in the curriculum and in the school-wide approach. In 2012, Dr. Paris realized that we had to go further than being relevant to or responsive to young people and build a space to sustain their lifeways and communities. He's since partnered with Dr. Samy Alim and together they are encouraging educators to take this stance to dismantle the harmful practices of schooling in the United States.

Paris and Alim contextualize the history of schooling and its historical purpose in our country as mainly forwarding the assimilationist agenda of the state's violent and White imperial project (2017, 1). They offer CSP, which they've defined as teaching that "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. CSP positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, . . . as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits" (Paris and Alim 2017, 2). A close reading of that definition creates for us an opportunity to think critically about schooling. The verb *sustain* is important to note because it requires a depth not necessitated by, say, *relate* or *connect*. To sustain something means you feed it and nurture it to make sure it's healthy and alive. When I think of the ways that schooling has forced assimilation on groups of people and sought to explicitly cancel the use of non-English languages, making a call for linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism is humanizing and dope. To assert that education should lead students toward positive social transformation is revolutionary and necessary.

This Book

So much of our current conversation in teaching is about what not to do. It's about what to tear down and what to remove. We talk about not teaching certain topics, not teaching certain books, and all the approaches we should not follow. That is definitely

important. This book aims to answer what it is in fact that we should do. I propose that it's teaching in a way that is textured, that is nuanced, and that spends time in the gray space. It offers students skills to navigate society and be solution oriented and problem solvers who are authentic and working toward positive social transformation. Textured Teaching is a framework for teaching and learning about texts, centered in love and social justice. The term *social justice* refers to a redistribution of resources, opportunities, wealth, and power that promotes equity. A teaching approach that strives for social justice, then, is one that openly addresses social injustices and functions in a way that leads students to reimagine an equitable redistribution. Our framework is built upon the values that a Textured Teacher must hold. The strategies we use to bring those values to life are the traits of Textured Teaching. Therefore, a thoughtful and intentional implementation of Textured Teaching leads to social justice work.

Each one of the traits of Textured Teaching fills the pages of the following chapters. In Chapter 1, I walk through important definitions needed for social justice work, and introduce the Textured Teaching framework and the four traits. We need to name systems of oppression and the realities of our socializations. We'll do that together. Chapter 2 aims to help you understand how we should be focusing on students, supporting them, including them, and being driven by them. It will also help you see the power in community, land, and culture. I hope to offer ideas for how to build rapport with students, sustain relationships, and consider the community in which we teach. In Chapter 3, I use sample teaching ideas and examples from my classroom to offer practical strategies for making meaning with your students. Chapter 4 is about making Textured Teaching physical, sensorial, and thus highly engaging and memorable. I share ideas for experiential strategies for comprehension and analysis as well as some cautions about what not to do. In Chapter 5, we will think about ways we can be flexible in our practice. Flexibility is humanizing for both teachers and students, and allows for relationships and empathy to enter the space.

You are invited to journal throughout your reading of this book. I want to push us to reflect on our practices and important changes we may want to make. There are journal prompts throughout the chapters that will hopefully guide your personal growth and critical self-analysis. If you're reading this with a partner or a group, that is fantastic. You can use those prompts to share your reflections with each other, and I hope it brings accountability to your experience. Additionally, Chapters 2 through

5 end with boxes titled “Adding a Layer of Texture” that offer suggestions for taking the work a little deeper. If you’re an educator who is established in your social justice work and it’s embedded in your pedagogy, one who already incorporates some of the elements of Textured Teaching, then those ideas are for you! I thought of you a lot while I wrote this book. I don’t intend to assume I’m the only one who has worked on and developed solutions for doing this work, and I know we can continue to learn from each other and grow. I’m grateful you’re here, and I hope these boxes offer you a way to expand your already-strong tool box.

My Hopes for Us

My hopes for Textured Teaching and for this book are big. I have wild dreams of teachers becoming better at working with and for students toward improving our society. I have wild dreams about education helping us as a nation move toward freedom and justice. I believe in our calling and I believe in the task ahead of us. I don’t blindly believe that all teachers are already doing wonderful things in schools. We know that’s not true. I’m writing this very book because of the lack of this approach in my own schooling! And yet, I believe we want to be better. I’m selfishly in the struggle for educational justice because I need our schools and our country to be better for my own kids and for other kids in my life. I want a country where my son doesn’t have to be cautious with the police. I want a country that won’t punish my daughters more than their peers because they’re Black. I have to believe that this can happen. I believe that Textured Teaching will help us all.

My dream is for all of us to be doing this work in our classrooms regardless of our content area. My dream is that we will all be intentionally inclusive and restorative in our pedagogy and that in doing so we’ll be teaching in ways that inspire love and justice in our students. They will go on and strive toward equity in their roles in our society and lead the change we need so badly. They are our future and the future is sitting in front of us. We must teach like our lives depend on it.

*We
must teach
like our lives
depend
on it.*