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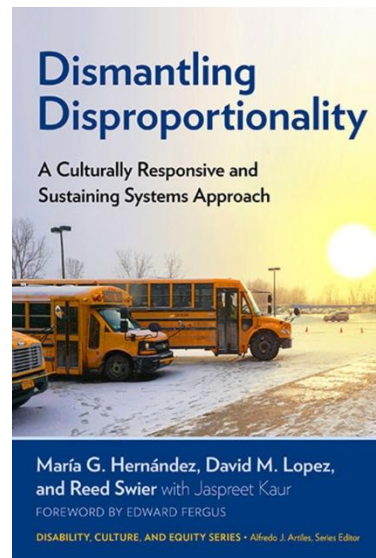
Hernández, M. G., Lopez, D. M., & Swier, R. (2022). *Dismantling disproportionality: A culturally responsive and sustaining systems approach*. Teachers College Press.

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The introduction to *Dismantling Disproportionality* provides a strong foundation for the authors' systems-based model. It centers on culturally responsive and sustainable practices for achieving equity in schools. This work fits within the growing body of critical literature, including Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory (DisCrit). The authors, Maria Hernández, David Lopez, and Reed Swier, demonstrate a clear commitment to exposing and transforming the structural forces that produce educational inequities. As in the DisCrit series, they highlight the intersections of race, disability, and systemic power while challenging deficit-based models that have historically shaped special education and school discipline. What distinguishes this book is its focus on institutional and systems-level transformation, with practical tools to support sustainable change. Their emphasis on critical data use, culturally responsive-sustaining leadership, and collective efficacy aligns with ongoing efforts in the field to move beyond symbolic reforms toward authentic transformational practice. The introduction, therefore, not only sets up the book's structure but also positions it as a timely and necessary contribution to dismantling institutional inequities in education.



Chapter 2 is distinguished from prior literature by rooting structural critique in the applied work of the Center for Disproportionality (CfD). While previous studies (particularly within the DisCrit tradition, such as Annamma et al., 2016) have focused on the intersectionality of race and ability, this chapter demonstrates how such theory can be translated into long-term institutional reform. The CfD's multi-stage model draws from adult learning theory, culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and root cause analysis. This makes the model adaptable for school systems aiming to go beyond surface-level compliance. The blending of qualitative frameworks with quantitative tools (for example, risk indicators, relative risk ratios, and implementation monitoring) allows the CfD model to function as an actionable strategy. The inclusion of student voices through the Youth Center for

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Disproportionality (YCfD) enhances democratic accountability, which is often missing from institutional interventions. Although concerns about the model's scalability in different political contexts are valid, this chapter succeeds in offering a clear, replicable pathway for systemic reform grounded in culturally responsive-sustaining education.

Building on the previous chapter's systems-level framework, in Chapter 3 the authors explore the cultural and pedagogical shifts needed to sustain equity efforts through *Culturally Responsive Education* (CRE). Drawing from Gay (2018), Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014), and Paris and Alim (2017), the authors argue that dismantling disproportionality requires more than administrative reform. It involves reshaping adult beliefs, school culture, and teaching practices. The Elmer City School District case demonstrates how leadership development, data analysis, and intensive professional learning can help reduce disciplinary and academic disparities. By embedding critical reflection in teacher learning and identity development, the authors highlight the necessity of internal work among educators. However, their focus on race as the primary axis of marginalization lacks sufficient discussion of disability or linguistic diversity. Despite this, the chapter offers strong support for the book's central message: sustainable equity reform depends on intentional cultural change aligned with institutional shifts.

In Chapter 4, the authors focus on educational leadership and its role in sustaining equity-centered reform. They argue that culturally responsive-sustaining practices require bold, ethically driven leaders. School and district leaders must transcend traditional managerial roles and embrace leadership as both political and moral practice. This involves disrupting comfort zones, modeling core values, and embedding justice into organizational structures. A case study of the Palisades School District illustrates how long-term, consistent leadership – particularly that of Superintendent Charlie Wright – fostered profound cultural transformation. The chapter details how the district responded to civil rights violations and reduced disparities among Black, Latino, and IEP students. Key leadership concepts, such as coherence, distributed leadership, and internal accountability, are also discussed.

Notably, Hernández, Lopez, and Swier address educator beliefs that can obstruct progress, such as colorblind ideologies and deficit thinking. Survey data and direct quotations show that technical fixes are insufficient without confronting belief systems that reinforce inequity. In contrast to literature that emphasizes individual dispositions (for example, Shields, 2010; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015), this chapter is focused on activating justice through institutional structures. Although it does not fully address the political complexity of leadership, such as alliance-building or navigating resistance, the chapter is a compelling case for the necessity of radical, justice-focused institutional leadership.

Chapter 5 is a sobering analysis of the limits of equity reform in contexts lacking institutional readiness. The case of Hamsburg reveals that even strong interventions like the CfD model cannot succeed without organizational will, unified leadership, and a shared cultural vision. The chapter is noteworthy for its honest assessment of reform failures when driven by compliance rather than transformation. The authors describe how resistance to racial dialogue, denial of bias, and stereotypical beliefs created cultural obstacles, despite the presence of contradictory data. Their critique

of superficial implementation illustrates the risk of adopting models prematurely. This chapter reinforces the idea that equity-focused reform requires not only initial readiness but also sustained organizational commitment, cultural alignment, and adaptive capacity throughout the process. Their focus on internal accountability, leadership courage, and organizational capacity-building adds further weight to their argument.

The final two chapters (6, 7) close the book in a reflective and urgent tone. Chapter 6 presents the Hayward School District's Train the Trainer (TTT) model as a case of system-wide implementation of Culturally Responsive Education (CRE). By investing in internal leadership capacity and ongoing professional learning, the district reduced dependence on external consultants. It built a diverse cadre of facilitators to drive the work from within.

Chapter 7 extends the discussion to racial power structures and institutional transformation through Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CRSE). Using multiple case studies and the CSC Theory of Change, the authors describe a developmental arc that moves from reflection to system redesign. They stress that justice must be embedded in data systems, leadership, policy, and pedagogy. These chapters reinforce the central message: sustainable change is value-driven, coordinated, and system-embedded.

Dismantling Disproportionality offers a timely, practice-based contribution to the literature on racial inequity in education. While it diverges from the more theoretical analyses of DisCrit (for example, Annamma et al., 2016), this practical orientation is a strength. The authors translate justice principles into actionable frameworks and emphasize the enabling conditions for system transformation. The book provides an ambitious but replicable roadmap for educational leaders, centered on readiness, support, capacity-building, and culturally responsive-sustaining education. At the same time, the book raises a critical question: Can models like CfD create true transformation without deeper engagement with abolitionist or deconstructive logics, as seen in DisCrit? Despite this tension, the book bridges policy demands with school realities and calls educators toward bold, justice-driven leadership.

Relevance to the Gulf Region

In the context of education systems in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, *Dismantling Disproportionality* offers rich guidance for policy and leadership reform. Marginalized student populations, including students with disabilities and culturally or linguistically diverse learners, remain underserved. The book's focus on readiness, internal accountability, and leadership development resonates with the Gulf region's urgent need to move beyond superficial reform, despite structural and political differences from the United States. In highly centralized systems such as those in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, the CfD model could serve as a transformative framework if culturally adapted. Emphasizing student voice, building culturally responsive school leadership, and analyzing data on opportunity gaps are essential strategies. The very existence of this book, therefore, invites researchers and decision-makers from the Gulf region to draw from global critical scholarship and reimagine institutional practices through a justice-oriented lens grounded in human dignity.

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About the Reviewer

Rasha Alajmi is currently pursuing a PhD in the Education Policy and Evaluation Program at Arizona State University (ASU). I have earned multiple degrees, including an MA in Educational Policy from ASU, and both a BA and MA from Kuwait University. My professional experience spans research, translation, and teaching, and I currently serve as a reviewer for *Current Issues in Education*. I have also worked as a translator and research assistant, contributing to various academic publications. My work focuses on improving educational practices and policies, particularly in Kuwait. I am fluent in both Arabic and English and have been recognized for my leadership and academic contributions.

About the Book Authors

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