

Transforming the Multicultural Education of Teachers

THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE

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Foreword by
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Race and Multicultural Education

Mindful of the origins of multicultural education, this book prioritizes the concept of race. Bringing race to the forefront of teacher education is a fundamental concern for transformative multicultural education (Cochran-Smith, 1995a, 1995b; King & Castenell, 2001a, 2001b; Sleeter, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; G.P. Smith, 1998a, 1998b). Avoiding the interplay between race and power can undermine the effective development of culturally responsive teachers. Using critical race theory (CRT) is one way for a teacher education program to reconceptualize issues of race in its curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluations.

A Critical Race Theory Perspective. CRT has its roots in multicultural legal studies (Brooks & Newborn, 1994). By extending critical theory and critical legal studies, faculty of color in U.S. law schools created CRT to draw attention to the limitations of equality based on a legal system conceived under White privilege (Brooks & Newborn, 1994; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995a; Delgado, 1995a; Harris, 1994). CRT offers an alternative approach to dominant practices of White silencing of racial discrimination in institutional policies and practices by putting "race at the center of critical analysis" (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 1). Like multicultural education, CRT is an interdisciplinary field. CRT draws from the scholarship of postcolonialism and racial and ethnic identity formation and is transdisciplinary in its perspective-taking (Tate, 1997).

Two common interests unify CRT. First is an effort to understand how White privilege or supremacy has been able to subordinate people of color while maintaining a legal system that purports to provide equal protection under the law. Second, echoing critical theory's concept of transformation, CRT strives to change racially oppressive conditions under "an ethical commitment to human liberation" (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995b, p. xiii). Cornell West (1995) asserts that CRT "compels us to confront critically the most explosive issue in American civilization: the historical centrality and complicity of law in upholding white supremacy (and concomitant hierarchies of gender, class, and sexual orientation)" (p. xi).

CRT begins with the premise that "racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society" (Delgado, 1995b, p. xiv). White privileged notions of racial equality contend that institutional racism does not exist or appears only as a deviation from the norms of a presumed fair society. CRT theory and historical research counter this master metanarrative or dominant socio-political chronicle to describe how Whites tend to tolerate antiracism when White interests are benefited or at least not threatened (Bell, 1995a, 1995b). CRT exposes claims of a neutral "color-blind" meritocratic foundation of public policy by detailing the role of White legal bias in the continuing legitimization of racism (Crenshaw, 1995,

1997, 1998; Flagg, 1998; Gotanda, 1995; Harris, 1993; Kousser, 1999). Applicable to a study of transformative multicultural education, CRT finds that “no scholarly perch [exists] outside the social dynamics of racial power from which merely to observe and analyze” (Crenshaw et al., 1995b, p. xiii). CRT understands race and racism as central and intersectional to all public policy analyses and actions.

Critical theorists have also provided sympathetic critiques to shortcomings of CRT claims at its present stage of development. CRT’s original “Black/White paradigm” continues to need expansion to be more inclusive of racialized perspectives from Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans (Alfieri, 1997, p. 1649). A major CRT issue is how disparate interests of groups can converge into a collective and pragmatic antiracist plan, especially if White antiracist narratives and propositions are incorporated into a CRT perspective (E. Taylor, 2000). Critical race theorists have also been encouraged to be mindful of the importance of translating marginalized perspectives into an advocacy that can be realized through practice (Alfieri, 1997; Esposito & Murphy, 2000). Likewise, CRT has been challenged to more clearly articulate alternative standards of practice that multiple forms of affirmative action can take (Brooks & Newborn, 1994). These critiques are not dissimilar to the challenges that exist for transformative multicultural education.

Critical Race Theory and Education. Analyses of educational practices that use CRT seek to demystify color blindness and its subsequent oppressive outcome on the lives of children and youth of color (Ladson-Billings, 1999a, 1999b; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 1999; Roithmayr, 1999; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Villapano, 1998; Tate, 1997; E. Taylor, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999). Law professor Daria Roithmayr (1999) notes that CRT provides a way to understand how presupposed neutral educational concepts such as “knowledge, truth, merit, objectivity, and ‘good education’ are in fact ways of forming and policing the racial boundaries of white supremacy and racism” (p. 4). Presumably neutral educational standards—even those ostensibly intended to support multicultural education—can be analyzed for Eurocentric biases. CRT can help teachers look at their own social and professional positions in relationship to the perspectives and knowledge of families and children of color. CRT can lend authority to historically marginalized voices.

CRT explains how civil rights laws “to remedy racial inequality are often undermined” (Tate, 1997, p. 234) prior to and during implementation in a manner that rarely threatens the legal foundation of White property rights and citizenship (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999a). One example is the historic 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Although the outcome of this case attended to some of the worst conditions of racial exclusion, discriminatory systems of ability tracking based on race continue inside

“integrated” U.S. schools today (Banks, 2000; Green, 1999; Oakes, Garmoran, & Page, 1992; Welner & Oakes, 1997). By assuming that racial integration was the solution, the Court avoided the topic of a racialized hierarchy that negatively skews educational resource allocations and opportunities for people of color, leaving the issue lingering into the 21st century (Harris, 1993). Although rarely recalled, a court-argued rationale for *Brown vs. Board of Education* was to better position a White U.S. government against charges of racial apartheid by communist nations. *Brown vs. Board of Education* also converged with White southern business profit interests that were threatened nationally and internationally by state-sanctioned racial segregation (Bell, 1995a).

CRT can provide a teacher education program a transformational perspective to examine contemporary civil rights policies for their strengths and weaknesses in serving marginalized students of color. CRT can assist educators to develop programs that transform civil rights orientations to more thoroughly benefit families and children of color. As part of this process, CRT places race, racism, and educational equity in a historical and legal context. Although issues of socioeconomic class and gender discrimination obviously deserve transformative analyses and multicultural education solutions, CRT points out their singular perspective “shortcomings vis-à-vis race” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 49). CRT analyses can contribute to a more profound grasp of how U.S. capitalism negatively skews life opportunities for people of color and individuals born into poverty, disproportionately to the rest of the population.

Ladson-Billings (1999b) draws together examples of CRT practice in teacher education. Highlighted is Jacqueline Jordan Irvine’s work at Emory University to help teachers negotiate professional challenges in under-resourced urban schools. She guides teachers in an effort to overcome detrimental gaps between urban schooling environments and interests of African-American children and their families. Irvine’s culturally responsive sensibilities contrast with urban education orientations that attempt to “rescue” populations of color for assimilationist goals. Boston College’s Marilyn Cochran-Smith uses a CRT approach of story-telling to help teachers construct their own narratives of race and racism. She uses these teacher-generated texts to critically analyze teaching from a transformative perspective. At Santa Clara University, the University of New Orleans, and now as provost at Spelman College, Joyce King incorporates a CRT orientation to deconstruct the premises of liberalism so that teachers understand how incremental notions of progress and social change can make “marginalized groups appear to be impatient malcontents rather than citizens demanding legitimate citizen rights” (Ladson-Billings, 1999b, p. 232).

CRT makes imperative the necessity for sweeping changes to school and community-based racism. Exclusionary practices require transformative alternatives. CRT can complement analyses and goals of transformative multicultural education. Ladson-Billings (1999a) contends that curriculum, instruction, as-

assessment, school funding, and desegregation should be analyzed by using race, racism, and White privilege as centrally defining variables. CRT adds to an understanding of how institutional racism perpetuates schooling inequities within a White-dominated metanarrative about educational purposes and practices. Ladson-Billings writes, "Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing it" (p. 27). This book represents a modest contribution toward that goal.