

A Race(cialized) Perspective on Education Leadership: Critical Race Theory in Educational Administration

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On June 28, 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its opinion in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, et al.* (2007). The central issue in this case focused on the constitutionality of using race as a voluntary means to educational ends in elementary and secondary school desegregation plans in Seattle (and Louisville, Kentucky), and the majority opinion ruled that the U.S. Constitution is “color-blind” and that for schools that were never guilty of segregation by race, “the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race” (pp. 40-41).

This color-blind interpretation of the law and legal policy has had a major ideological and substantive impact on the administrative organization of schools and postsecondary education. In this special issue of *Educational Administration Quarterly*, we argue that critical race theory (CRT) is a valuable lens with which to analyze and interpret administrative policies and procedures in educational institutions and provides avenues for action in the area of racial justice. CRT has emerged from the legal arena to uncover the deep patterns of exclusion and what is taken for granted with respect to race and privilege (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It relies on various strands of social

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criticism and seeks to push a social justice agenda into the legal and public discourse on race (and gender and social class as well). Critical race theorists seek to disrupt the dominant narrative stories of success through merit, equality, the market, and objectivity that are so deeply entrenched and accepted unquestioningly by the larger society. CRT calls for the legitimization of narratives of discrimination, and the power of the law used against persons of color and the importance of these counternarratives are key aspects of CRT and have implications for educational leadership and policy. In this special issue of EAQ, some central themes that define CRT will emerge from the literature. They are

The Centrality of Race and Racism. CRT acknowledges as its most basic premise that race and racism are a defining characteristic of American society. In American higher education, race and racism are embedded in the structures, discourses, and policies that guide the daily practices of universities (Taylor, 1999). Race and racism are central constructs that intersect with other dimensions of one's identity, such as language, generation status, gender, sexuality, and class (Crenshaw, 1990; Valdes et al., 2002). For people of color, each of these dimensions of one's identity can potentially elicit multiple forms of subordination (Crenshaw, 1990); yet each dimension can also be subjected to different forms of oppression.

The Challenge to Dominant Ideology. CRT in higher education challenges the traditional claims of universities to objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. This theoretical framework reveals how the dominant ideology of color blindness and race neutrality act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in American society (Delgado, 1989; Lopez, 2003).

A Commitment to Social Justice and Praxis. CRT has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination (Matsuda, 1996). In higher education, these theoretical frameworks are conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2003).

A Centrality of Experiential Knowledge. CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racial subordination. The application of a CRT framework in an analysis of research and practice in the field of higher education requires that the experiential knowledge of people of color be centered and viewed as a resource stemming directly from their lived experiences. The experiential knowledge can come from storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989, 2000).

A Historical Context and Interdisciplinary Perspective. CRT challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses in educational research. In the field of higher education research and practice, these frameworks analyze race and racism in both a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

In addition, other recent research has documented the critical race disconnect between communities of color and their schools, teachers, and administrators. Kailin's (1999) study of white teacher attitudes and perceptions of African American students in the one "liberal" midwestern university community she studied revealed a great deal of resentment and outward hostility of the teachers and administrators toward African American students and parents. Lopez (2001) looked at how recent Latino immigrant parents have high expectations for their children to succeed in school, but that does not translate into traditional paths of parental involvement that the schools sanction. This in turn creates tension between teachers and administrators who feel that Latino parents do not care about education versus parents who care very deeply for the success of their children. In examining the causes of students of color disengagement with school and the disproportionate rates of disciplinary proceedings, Larson and Ovando (2001) found a consistent pattern of using administrative rules to enforce order and efficiency. When educational leaders were faced with the threat of racial confrontation related to student discipline or failure of educational achievement by minority students or lack of relevant curriculum and poor instruction, they relied on standard bureaucratic operating procedures and enforced neutral administrative policies to address such problems. Yet as Larson and Ovando revealed in their case study, this solution did not ameliorate the problem but instead heightened racial tension and conflict.

In line with these research findings, we collected a set of articles that serve to highlight the importance of CRT analysis to administrative policy and practice in the K-12 and higher education arenas. The themes in this special issue attempt to answer the question posed to one of the guest editors as to how and why CRT could be a useful analytic and interpretive research framework when applied to administrative issues. This comes at an important time since the demographics of the nation's schools are increasingly comprised of students of color; yet the percentages of principals who are Black, Latino, or Asian American have barely gained ground. For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), Blacks comprised 8.7% of the total population of public school principals in 1993-1994 and in 2003-2004, this figure only increased to 9.3%. Latino principals comprised 3.6% of principals in 1993-1994, and their percentage increased to 4.8 in 2003-2004. Asian American percentages were 0.8% in

1993-1994 and slipped to 0.7% in 2003-2004, whereas the Native American principals' percentage was 0.7 in 1993-1994 and did not change in 2003-2004. The disconnect between the growing population of students of color versus the stagnant percentage of administrators of color also comes at a time when alternative programs for administrative certification and new market-driven forms of schooling have the potential to further exacerbate this growing racial divide.

The articles in this special issue build on the work of DeCuir and Dixon (2004), as they used CRT to examine differential treatment and practice toward Black students in schools. Similarly, the article by Enrique Aleman looks at using CRT to explore inequities in school finance and how Latino education leaders have to negotiate their roles as advocates for their communities yet operate within an inherently racist and class-biased system of school finance in Texas that assures that predominantly wealthy White school districts will have more resources than low- and middle-income Latino school districts. The Iverson article explores the use of CRT to examine how higher education institutions continue to undertake a range of initiatives to combat inequities and build diverse, inclusive campuses. Diversity action plans are a primary means by which U.S. postsecondary institutions articulate their professed commitment to an inclusive and equitable climate for all members of the university and advance strategies to meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse society. Her analysis reveals four predominant discourses shaping images of people of color: access, disadvantage, marketplace, and democracy. These discourses construct images of people of color as outsiders, at-risk victims, commodities, and change agents. These discourses coalesce to produce realities that situate people of color as outsiders to the institution, at risk before and during participation in education and dependent on the university for success in higher education. Utilizing CRT as an analytic framework, this article aims to enhance understanding about how racial inequality is reproduced through educational policies. Her findings imply that although efforts are intended to create a more inclusive campus, they may unwittingly reinforce practices that support exclusion and inequity.

The Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano article compares perceptual data on issues of racial battle fatigue and racial profiling between White students and students of color on majority White campuses. The authors find that the incidents of racial harassment against students of color have disproportionately impacted them in terms of being able to matriculate through the university and graduate, and there is a sense of cumulative discrimination that these students face—from barriers to financial aid to hostile professors, teaching assistants, and campus police. This study should be viewed in the larger national context of the increased backlash and confrontations related to race

and ethnicity and sexual orientation that is happening on many major college campuses.

In conclusion, we feel there is a clear contribution of these articles to existing knowledge in the area of educational leadership, social justice, and racial equity. The future of a CRT agenda and its place in educational leadership and policy will partially depend on the efforts made by scholar/activists to explore its possible connections to life in schools and communities of color and to make that testimony a part of the legal and public record and discourse (Yamamoto, 1997). For example, the perspectives and evidence presented in these articles are most useful toward a critical race praxis that points toward developing a more “layered” policy discussion and analysis about struggles in education institutions that have diversity as a goal that has not been achieved in reality. This task is not impossible to achieve, because evidence already exists documenting how schools can provide racial equity, high student performance, and school improvement through the current climate of accountability, if the focus is on changing the culture of schools to meet the educational and emotional needs of the students, parents, and staff to create a different community based on love and caring for students of color (Scheurich, 1998). One of the basic ways to start is to deal with the issue of trust/mistrust between education leaders and teachers/faculty and students of color and their families and communities, because in a very real sense, perception is reality, and whether education administrators agree with this or not, it cannot be ignored when trying to achieve racial equity in the context of increasing federal and state accountability. Democratic leadership for social justice through CRT and action will provide us with some answers to this challenge.

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