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Race, difference, meritocracy, and English: majoritarian stories in the education of secondary multilingual learners

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Abstract:

Urban Community Teacher Education, University of Colorado, Denver, USA In this study, empirical and conceptual scholarship (approximately 100 studies) regarding the education of secondary multilingual learners and their teachers are analyzed through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). Specifically, four common majoritarian stories are identified that are both challenged and endorsed in the research literature: there is no story about race, difference is deficit, meritocracy is appropriate, and English-is-all-that-matters. This article discusses the literature, the four identified majoritarian stories and the specific ways they are both promoted and countered throughout the literature. The implications of these four majoritarian stories on research, policy, and practice are also addressed and the article concludes with a discussion about the value the identification of these stories offers for future research.

Keywords: multilingual learners; Critical Race Theory; secondary schools

Even though the institutions and fundamental structures of our society were built on legally sanctioned racial discrimination and the perpetuation of white privilege (Campbell and Oakes 1997; Horsman 1997; Omi and Winant 1994), many people today fail to see how they themselves and various institutions participate in the continuation of social inequities, especially those based on race (Flagg 1997; Wildman and Davis 1997). These research findings suggest that, while racism is no longer explicitly legally sanctioned, it is still manifested, particularly institutionally (Crenshaw 1988).

Contemporary racism, which appears substantially different than the racism of the pre-Civil Rights Movement, significantly intersects with other issues such as culture, language, and class. In fact, institutionalized racism is such a foundational feature of US society that our culture is fundamentally racist and operates off of white normativity (Crenshaw 1988). Markers of difference from the White, monolingual, middle class, standard-English speaking norm, like language, class, gender, religion, and national origin, are frequently used as tools to promote racialized agendas and outcomes through institutional practices (Yosso 2005). In this time of 'racism without racists,' (Bonilla-Silva 2006) where biological race can no longer be an explicit, legal tool for discrimination, culture and language have become powerful factors in institutionalized discrimination and racist outcomes, especially

for multilingual learners and their teachers. Lippi-Green (2006) illustrates the intersection of racism and language discrimination saying, 'Most would be surprised (if not shocked) at an employer or teacher who turned away an individual on the basis of skin color; most would find nothing unusual or wrong with a teacher of Puerto Rican students who sees her students as a problem to be solved' (292).

In fact, common perceptions and depictions of multilingual learners, the fastest growing student subgroup in the US that is predominately comprised of students of color (Awo-koya and Clark 2008; Crawford 2004), are misleading, inadequate, deficit-laden, and ultimately reflect institutionalized discriminatory practices and beliefs. However, in reality, a multilingual learner is a student whose daily-lived reality necessitates the negotiation of two or more languages. In the US one of those languages is English, and the students whom I call 'multilingual learners' are at all stages of language development in regards to both English and their heritage languages. Brisk (2006) contends that multilingual learners are more than simply the sum of multiple monolinguals. They are 'influenced by a dynamic cross-cultural experience, rather than rigid cultural stereotypes,' and understanding this 'is vital for designing school policy, classroom practices, and assessment procedures' (3).

Along these lines, multilingual learners are only partially accounted for in education data and policy where the focus is on students with 'Limited English Proficiency' (LEP). The varying cultural and linguistic perspectives of a student who negotiates the world through multiple languages and cultures are frequently overlooked and often invisible in research, policy, and practice, especially once that student reaches a certain level of English proficiency. The data that is regularly cited to ignite concern and describe crises (e.g., National High School Center 2009) actually only expose the unremarkable finding that students who are not yet proficient in English struggle to succeed in a schooling system that is predominately in English. However, these same data are often used to make high stakes decisions about teachers, students, and schools.

It is a sign of systemic discrimination at the intersection of racism and linguicism (García 2009; Phillipson 1992) when students who are by definition 'not currently able to perform ordinary classroom work in English' (Massachusetts General Laws 1971, M.G.L.c.71A§2) are expected to meet competency determinations, pass high-stakes tests, and complete the coursework necessary for graduation in English. The manner in which the multilingual learner population is constructed in terms of English proficiency and therefore either situated as academic failures or invisible in policy and practice, is highly problematic. Therefore, closer examination of the positioning of multilingual learners in policy and practice is necessary to substantially challenge these deficit perspectives and reposition secondary multilingual learners in terms of their assets rather than English language deficit.

This study is a cross-cutting analysis of over 100 empirical and conceptual studies regarding the education of secondary multilingual learners and their teachers through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). Specifically, it identifies four common majoritarian stories, or normative narratives that promote racist and linguicist outcomes, that are both challenged and endorsed throughout the research literature: there is no story about race, difference is deficit, meritocracy is appropriate, and English-is-all-that-matters. This article discusses the literature, the four identified majoritarian stories, and the specific ways these stories are both promoted and countered throughout the scholarship. Additionally, the implications of these four majoritarian stories on research, policy, and practice are discussed, as well as the value the identification of these stories offer for future research.

A major reason to engage in this kind of critical literature analysis is to challenge the majoritarian stories and/or hegemonic deficit ideologies that have been perpetuated in

educational scholarship and research. Along these lines, Stevens (2009) argues for critical examinations of research related to immigrant students saying:

I suggest that the ways in which education has framed immigrants solely as language learners destructively obscures both their needs for educational and societal achievement and society's responses to those needs. Language is crucial to immigrant populations, but how this is framed from educational perspectives currently falls short of critical language awareness, favoring necessary but insufficient skills acquisition. (2)

Brisk (2006) and García, Kleifgen, and Flachi (2008) make similar arguments about the limiting the ways in which multilingual learners are framed in educational contexts and how those frames often create limited educational opportunities for multilingual learners. Educators and educational researchers may participate in the perpetuation of structural inequities by researching and teaching from uncritical standpoints in which deficit perspectives are passed on and insufficient forms of education are embraced. This literature analysis seeks to challenge these practices, highlight the strengths of critical research that disputes majoritarian stories, and encourage transformative research and pedagogy in order to agitate the status quo laden with substantial racism and linguisticism.

Theoretical framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed as a response to the stalled advances of the civil rights era during the mid-1970s and originated in the field of law to combat the lasting, institutionalized forms of racism that were becoming prominent (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Though significant progress in improving racist issues across the nation had been made, racism persisted and largely became conceived as 'prejudice based on skin color,' a definition that ignores the systemic, institutional, and social practices of power and privilege distribution (Crenshaw et al. 1995, xv). In response, early CRT scholars called for expanding the legal scholarship and activism that led to the civil rights movement (Crenshaw 1988), as well as reinterpreting civil rights laws in order to unmask the undermining systemic and institutional factors preventing the remedy of racial inequity (Tate 1997).

CRT construct: majoritarian stories

The research presented here draws methodologically on the CRT construct of 'majoritarian stories' which utilizes the fundamental tenets of CRT to expose issues of racial oppression. The overarching tenets of CRT centralize race; challenge meritocracy, objectivity, neutrality, and a historicism; emphasize experiential knowledge; and support interdisciplinarity (Matsuda et al.

1993). Majoritarian stories often stand in contrast to these tenets and are therefore challenged by CRT scholars. Love (2004) defines majoritarian stories as:

The description of events as told by members of dominant/majority groups, accompanied by the values and beliefs that justify the actions taken by dominants to insure their dominant position. The commonly accepted 'history' of the United States is one such story... Typically, majoritarian stories are constructed so that the responsibility for their own subordination falls on the subordinated people (228-9).

Contemporary majoritarian stories often downplay the centrality of race and racism in social institutions like schools and promote deficit ideologies that blame social and educational inequities on non-dominant populations. These stories generally draw on a cultural deficit model and blame students for failing to culturally assimilate to the dominant White, middle-class, monolingual culture that defines success in school (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Solórzano and Yosso further assert, 'Therefore, according to cultural deficit storytelling, a successful student of color is an assimilated student of color' (31).

Gillborn (2005) further discusses the power that majoritarian stories have in affecting definitions of success and failure and argues that majoritarian stories often come from an ahistorical perspective. He suggests that solutions to inequitable schooling outcomes for students will never be found through 'common sense' stories that ignore existing structural and historical issues of power and domination. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) make an important point about majoritarian stories saying, 'Whether told by people of color or Whites, majoritarian stories are not often questioned because people do not see them as stories but as "natural" parts of everyday life' (28). The idea that majoritarian stories are largely 'invisible' is important to note for the analysis of research described in this article, which identifies four common majoritarian stories in the education of secondary multilingual learners.

Data sources

For this analysis, conceptual, empirical, and policy research regarding the education of multilingual learners and the preparation of their teachers was identified through extensive searches on multiple databases, reviews of research handbooks, and cross-referencing articles. Over 400 articles, book chapters, and reports were initially found and examined for their fit into this review. In order to ensure relevance and rigor, certain criteria were applied in selecting the reviewed literature. After the application of the criteria described below, approximately 100 studies remained and were analyzed in order to determine the majoritarian stories common in the education of multilingual learners and their teachers.

The following are the criteria applied for inclusion of research in this analysis. First, only research published in 1998 or later was analyzed since 1998 is the year Proposition 227 passed in California. Proposition 227 was the first English-only language restrictive voter referendum passed in the US. Since 1998, scholarship regarding multilingual learners and their teachers has increasingly focused on policy contexts, implementations, and impact since similar initiatives were passed through voter referenda in both Arizona (Proposition 203) and Massachusetts (Question 2). Therefore, the scholarship after Proposition 227 was passed is most relevant to current issues in schooling for secondary multilingual learners as it represents the beginning of a new era of successful, widespread, and sustained efforts to curtail schooling options for multilingual learners.

Second, to ensure quality of research, only literature published in peerreviewed journals was analyzed. Third, no descriptions of K-12 or teacher education practices were included. Although descriptive articles are valuable in conveying the work happening in classrooms and programs, the focus of this analysis is on conceptual and empirical research. Fourth, only studies were analyzed with an explicit focus on teaching secondary multilingual learners or their teachers within the context of the US. Therefore, research looking at the preparation of teachers for diversity, minority students, or urban schools was not included. Similarly, research that looked at the education of various non-dominant populations without a specific focus on multilingual learners was not analyzed.

Research outside of the US was excluded due to the unique historical conditions, particularly in terms of racism and linguisticism, that have shaped education in the US.

The fifth and final major criterion for inclusion in this analysis was an explicit focus on teaching and learning at the secondary level or across all grade levels. Literature looking specifically at elementary level teachers and classrooms was not included as the context, strengths, and educational outcomes of adolescent multilingual learners differ significantly from those of elementary age learners.

Cross-cutting analysis and critique of the empirical and conceptual research

As a whole, the scholarship regarding the education of secondary multilingual learners paints a picture of systemic failure. In fact, the research documented contexts and practices in mainstream classrooms in secondary schools are disheartening. Many teachers were found to have negative attitudes about teaching multilingual learners (Walker, Shafer, and Liams 2004), to be unprepared to support their academic development (Li and Zhang 2004), and to perpetually overlook multilingual learners within learning contexts (Reeves 2009). Additionally, schools were found to segregate and marginalize (Valdés 1998), as well as foster anxiety among multilingual learners (Pappamihel 2001, 2002). Though some programs proved successful and supportive (Fine et al. 2007; Gibson and Hidalgo 2009; Short 2002), as a whole, the scholarship suggests that isolated instances of accomplishment occur despite the prominent systemic barriers for multilingual learner success rather than because of widespread effective practice.

Much of the research described issues of linguisticism and racism to be closely linked (MacGregor-Mendoza 2000; Wiley and Wright 2004) suggesting that language can be used as a proxy for race (Johnson 2005a). Further the research suggests that the English-Only movement is merely a way to mask racism behind discussions of equal opportunity and merit (Bratt 2007), and that policies like 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) hide racism and classism behind seemingly neutral discourse around the use of English in schools (Lapayese 2007).

Many studies about the education of multilingual learners are intended to challenge the myths and misconceptions about language acquisition and the successful education of multilingual learners that dominate contemporary thought. Along these lines, a significant portion of the literature explicitly challenged various hegemonic concepts. However, some of the research also perpetuated unhelpful messages about the education of multilingual learners and their teachers. The following sections describe the majoritarian stories that emerged from this comprehensive analysis and tease out where the literature challenged and critiqued harmful dominant ideologies and where it participated in perpetuating them.

As described above, majoritarian stories contain either overt or subtle messages promoting hegemonic values and ideologies. According to Liggett (2008), the tools creating these stories are the gradual and subtle practices that through repeated performance become so ingrained into peoples' lives that they go unnoticed and essentially become normalized. Liggett suggests that in order to recognize the complicated formation of our perceptions on race, culture, and – for the education of multilingual learners – language, it is imperative to identify and analyze majoritarian stories.

It is important to note that majoritarian stories and counter-storytelling are not mutually exclusive. In other words, a study may both challenge and promote majoritarian stories simultaneously. Because majoritarian stories represent the dominant ideology of the day, it is often difficult – even for the critically conscious – to avoid promoting them.

Therefore, the purpose of this analysis and critique is not to denigrate the work of fellow researchers, but to add to the existing discourse around these majoritarian stories and join in efforts to combat the hegemonic ideologies and assumptions that perpetuate the racist and linguistic status quo.

There is no story about race

A prominent majoritarian story, which is both conveyed and challenged in the literature, is that race does not need to be a central area of investigation or analysis because it simply is no longer a significant issue in the US. A substantial portion of the studies made no mention of race or racism (e.g., Bernhard, Diaz, and Allgood 2005; Goto-Butler et al. 2000; Virtue 2009), while several other studies mentioned race only in terms of the racial identities of research participants (e.g., Katz 2000; Li and Zhang 2004; Wade, Fauske, and Thompson 2008). From a CRT perspective where racialized experiences and practices are assumed to be central and relevant to the perceptions and actions of all Americans, these silences, omissions, and de-emphases are problematic.

Additionally, given that 80% of multilingual learners in today's schools are students of color (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin 2009), it is self-evident that researchers concerned with the education of these students and their teachers would have to acknowledge, challenge, analyze, and actively interrogate the racialized experiences and perceptions of both groups. Bashir-Ali (2006) contends that, 'Race, racial power dynamics, and subsequent conflicts are an unrecognized reality that touches our students deeply' (630). Therefore, without explicit and regular acknowledgement, analysis, and discussion of this frequently unrecognized reality, teachers and educational researchers stand in danger of perpetuating the majoritarian story about race that asserts there is no story about race.

One of the reasons race and racism are so easy to overlook in the field of education may be due to domination of the field by White educators (Hollins and Guzman 2005) and white privilege, or the 'invisible package of unearned assets' available to Whites but not to people of color (McIntosh 1993, 31). These invisible assets and inequitable access to them perpetuate a

racialized, oppressive institutional structure that those who benefit from it may not be consciously aware of. Additionally, as Flagg (1997) suggests, even when attempting to uncover issues of race and racism, White researchers may not be conscious of the hidden racial content in the criteria they employ in the decision making process. This is true even for those who do not hold either overt or unconscious feelings of white supremacy, but impose white norms through practice and discourse without recognizing their tendency to do so.

When educators guide their efforts by the invisible hegemonic White norm, their actions turn into vehicles for continued oppression and marginalization. Instances of White decision makers, especially teachers, unconsciously perpetuating issues of racial inequity were found in the literature. However, the researchers generally termed those educators 'well-intentioned' in those instances (e.g., Lee and Oxelson 2006; Sharkey and Layzer 2000).

Across the scholarship, when the term 'well-intentioned' was coupled with evidence of inequitable outcomes, it rhetorically suggested that these educators and the outcomes their actions produced were not as bad as if the educators had done the same actions with malicious intent. These linguistic choices purposefully avoid a confrontation with educators about the ways white privilege and norms color both their practice and the resulting inequitable, racialized outcomes. Therefore, when researchers make the rhetorical choice to discuss 'intentions' rather than interrogate issues of white privilege, they are telling the majoritarian story about the insignificance of race.

Ladson-Billings (1998) calls for educational researchers using CRT to take positions that are unpopular by proactively challenging the inequities plaguing our system and facing the danger and discomfort associated with such insurgency, especially because education is considered a 'nice' field. Researchers would do well to move away from tempering the uncomfortable realities about the effects of educators' actions on the educational opportunities and outcomes for multilingual learners. Though the harsh realities of both the intent and outcomes that are colored by white privilege and norms may be difficult for some research participants to become aware of and equally difficult for some researchers to acknowledge. However, they need to be empirically documented and investigated.

Another component of the majoritarian story about the absence of race as a relevant issue is evidenced when teachers and educational researchers who have not explicitly interrogated issues of race, especially as they pertain to multilingual learners, view racism only as overt acts of prejudice. However, the research documented instances of racism that deeply affect the education of multilingual learners and their teachers. The passage of Proposition 227, an initiative titled 'English for the Children,' is not widely considered an act of racism because it was framed as a means of improving education for immigrant youth. However, a number of the studies in this analysis exposed the role racism played in passing the initiative and revealed that the proposition imposed English-monolingual norms (Arellano-Houchin et al. 2001; Bali 2008; Cline, Necochea, and Rios 2004). Many of the policy researchers examining Proposition 227 revealed how the initiative utilized institutional structures already geared to favor Whites thus maintaining the status quo through publicly legitimating White racial hegemony (Cline et al. 2004). Other researchers discuss the way racism is institutionalized in US schools arguing that White American students can eventually overcome educational mis-steps where students of color often cannot (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2009), showing how whiteness dominates the curriculum (Hones 2002), how racial sorting frequently occurs in high schools (Bashir-Ali 2006; Expósito and Favela 2003; MacGregor-Mendoza 2000), and the way schools where the majority of students are not White are considered unsafe and academically unsuccessful by both White parents and educators (RubinsteinÁvila 2007; Valdés 1998).

The kind of racism that is prevalent in schools and classrooms today is fueled by a colorblind ideology that creates 'racism without racists' (Bonilla-Silva 2006). The majoritarian story suggests that race is no longer a relevant issue in education or the larger society is derived from this colorblind ideology. It also plays into the contemporary hegemonic project titled 'postracialism,' which calls for a 'retreat from race' arguing that because of racial progress (mainly signified by the election of Barack Obama), race-based remedies and decision-making are no longer necessary (Cho 2009). However, educational researchers, like Mica Pollock (2004a, 2004b), document the complex role race plays in everyday schooling practices, relationships, discourse, and outcomes. In fact, she uses terms like 'race wrestling,' 'race bending,' and 'colormuteness' to more precisely interrogate the racialized realities of schooling practices and how, despite various silences in public spaces, most educational actors engage with race in one form or another.

Though racism in schools today may not look like the overt acts of racism and prejudice that were prevalent - and often legally sanctioned - before the Civil Rights Movement, recent literature shows that multilingual learners today experience various forms of racism and prejudice in schools, most often from teachers (González 1998; MacGregor-Mendoza 2000; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2009). This suggests that colorblindness and postracialism are ideologies that do not accurately reflect the racialized reality and experiences

of multilingual learners in the US today, but instead work to perpetuate the hegemonic power of white privilege.

Some of the scholarship documents that racist issues in the US do not only fall along the Black/White divide, especially in terms of the experiences of immigrant populations. For example, some of the racialization that multilingual learners encounter comes from tensions and conflicts that exist among and between various immigrant groups. Though these issues of racialization and discrimination may focus on language, culture, and nationality, several studies showed that significant conflicts exist in some schools between Chicana/o students and their newly arrived peers from Mexico, or between Puerto Rican students and those from the Dominican Republic (González 1998; Pappamihel 2001, 2002; Rubinstein-Ávila 2007).

These racialized experiences and issues may be invisible and unfamiliar to teachers and researchers, yet they are pivotal to the educational experiences of many multilingual learners and therefore need to be considered. In fact, de Oliveira and Athanases (2007) contend that teachers need to be advocates for multilingual learners when issues of racism and linguisticism arise in class and argue for teacher education programs that prepare teachers for such work. Though Gibson and Hidalgo (2009) suggest that teachers from similar racial backgrounds as their students are better equipped to help multilingual learners deal with issues of racism, Ivey and Broaddus (2007) argue that White teachers can help multilingual learners deal with issues of racism by learning from the experiential knowledge of their students as well as from teacher colleagues who come from non-dominant backgrounds. However, this can also place an additional burden on students and colleagues to be guides for White teachers in navigating issues around racism and linguisticism.

Ultimately, racism is an issue in the education of multilingual learners and their teachers and needs to be consistently addressed in the relevant scholarship. Educators and researchers concerned with the education of multilingual learners cannot overlook race as a major aspect of their schooling experiences and contribute to the perpetuation of the majoritarian story that there is no story about race. By including critically conscious discussions about race and racism across all research about multilingual learners and their teachers and more thoroughly investigating the institutionalized issues of racism many students face, research can tell a counter-story about the role race and racism play in the education of multilingual learners and their teachers in an effort to transform oppressive structures and practices.

Difference is deficit

According to the story that 'difference is deficit,' variation from the hegemonic, White, middle-class, standard-English monolingual norm is often considered wrong, less valuable, and worth mocking. In his analysis of the media coverage of Proposition 203 in Arizona, Johnson (2005b) quoted Maria Mendoza, the chairwoman of the pro-Proposition 203 campaign as saying, 'Why do they [bilingual education advocates] want to keep them [multilingual learners] as prisoners in their culture and their heritage?' (81). Not only does this statement bear the message that languages other than English are inferior, it also draws a comparison between non-dominant cultures and prison, clearly pushing those cultures into the realm of perceived deficit. Meskill (2005) describes the majoritarian story of difference-as-deficit arguing that society and schools often interpret limited experience as limited ability. In such a context, students, families, and communities are blamed for students' failure rather than the mainstream schooling efforts that are not supportive for those from diverse backgrounds.

A commonly discussed aspect of the difference is deficit majoritarian story is the mismatch between home and school cultures. Though acknowledgement of the cultural disconnect that does exist is not inherently detrimental, the stereotypical assumptions about cultures, families, and parental practices that often come into play in the 'cultural mismatch' discussions are (Asher 2007). Much of the scholarship in this analysis challenges these assumptions in educational practices.

Ngo (2008) critiques the portrayal of immigrant cultures as backwards because they are traditional, patriarchal, rural, or not on the same level as the highly modernized culture of the US. These negative depictions of immigrant populations often determine the type of research that is conducted and educational practices that will be available to multilingual learners. In many instances, culture is blamed for low student achievement and seen as something that is fixed and unchanging. Orellana and Gutiérrez (2006) also challenge the 'cultural mismatch' frame because it is often driven by asking members of non-dominant groups to adapt to dominant culture. Orellana and Gutiérrez call for culturally and linguistically sensitive methods of improving educational outcomes for multilingual learners by drawing on their strengths and resources rather than focusing on their deficits.

Several of the studies also call for culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995) in classrooms with multilingual learners and an additive approach to their education (e.g., de Oliveira and Athanases 2007; Freeman, Freeman, and Mercuri 2003; Minaya-Rowe 2004). Therefore, teachers and teacher education faculty must learn about how closely culture and language are linked (González 2001), the role they play in learning (O'Hara and Pritchard 2008), and how they affect parental involvement in schools (Asher 2007; Gibson and Hidalgo 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2009).

In the 'cultural mismatch' discussions, the fluid and dynamic nature of culture can also become lost. For example, Harklau (2000) found that the dualistic representations of culture (US vs 'other') prevalent in classrooms can make students feel trapped between two cultures, when in reality their identity and life experiences are closely linked to both. This was especially true for multilingual learners who had resided in the US for a longer period of time. Though the 'cultural mismatch' issues are generally much more complex than is often represented in schools, the research suggests that newly arrived multilingual learners benefit from explicit instruction about American, school, and popular teenage culture (Gándara and Rumberger 2009; Short 2002). However, because of the history of using schools to force acculturation (Gándara and Rumberger 2009; Wiley and Wright 2004), and even 'deculturize' (Spring 2004) students from non-dominant populations, educators must participate in such work from a place of critical consciousness and affirmation of diversity. Additionally, some of the literature emphasized the critical role the social culture of a school plays in the lives of adolescent multilingual learners (Bashir-Ali 2006). Researchers found that hostile social environments may cause anxiety and delay academic progression, especially when multilingual learners face ridicule for their use of English (Pappamihiel 2001, 2002; Rubinstein-Ávila 2007).

A major aspect of the difference-as-deficit majoritarian story is that it blames students, parents, and communities for academic failure and suggests students need to adapt to schools and schools do not need to adapt to students. In two conceptual studies (Gutiérrez and Orellana 2006; Orellana and Gutiérrez 2006), Gutiérrez and Orellana challenge this majoritarian story and call for researchers to avoid promoting it by resituating research questions from people onto places. They argue that, by researching from frameworks that do not position people as problems, institutional practices, social processes, resources, and contexts can be analyzed and potentially altered to produce more equitable outcomes for

multilingual learners. However, this is not yet common practice and the scholarship documented instances where educators positioned students as being lazy, being unwilling to learn English, and simply taking for granted the opportunities provided to them by schools (González 2001). Additionally, their parents were characterized as being unsupportive and uninterested in their children's schooling (Bratt 2007; Rolón-Dow 2005).

Both the research conducted by Gibson and Hidalgo (2009) and Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) provided evidence contradicting this false perception of parental disinterest showing that most immigrant parents place immense value on school and want their children to be academically successful. However, these studies also showed the struggles immigrant parents face in supporting their students' academic achievement, both in the form of communication and participation at school as well as in homework support at home. Though parents express great desire for the academic success of their children (Gibson and Hidalgo 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2009), schools often staunchly continue in 'business as usual' practices expecting the parental involvement practices that were developed for homogeneous, monolingual populations to continue to be sufficient for the increasingly heterogeneous and multilingual populations of today. This assimilationist perspective reigns and demands students, families, and communities make accommodations rather than challenging schools, administrators, and teachers to re-think institutionalized approaches that are clearly unsuccessful especially considering the current shift in student demographics (Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney 2009).

A final aspect of the difference-as-deficit majoritarian story documented in some of the literature is focused on language. Yoon (2008) and Harklau (2000) found in their research that some teachers viewed native languages as a problem that students had to overcome, positioning multilingualism in terms of deficiency in English. However, Wiley and Wright (2004), Lutz (2004), and Bratt (2007) cited research exposing the prestige that accompanies the elective multilingualism of native English speaking students. This is an ironic contradiction that positions multilingualism as positive for those who are already fluent in English and negative for multilingual learners from non-dominant backgrounds, thus discrediting the intrinsic value of multilingualism (Brisk 2006).

However, it can be argued that the prestige of multilingualism is not distributed evenly across all race and language backgrounds. For instance, the multilingualism of a White native Albanian-speaking student is not interpreted or positioned similarly in terms of power and prestige as that of a dark-skinned native Spanish-speaking student. Language and race are often used to distribute power and privilege in complex ways. The majoritarian story of difference-as-deficit plays a significant role in that process. As much of the scholarship suggests, the negative effects that come from the difference-as-deficit majoritarian story significantly influence the learning opportunities and outcomes of multilingual learners.

Meritocracy is appropriate

Within the majoritarian story of meritocracy as being appropriate, public schools are positioned as the great equalizers in this country, providing equal opportunity for all students thus supporting meritocracy. Yet much of the scholarship documents how the story of meritocracy is a myth. For example, Reeves (2004) investigated a school that views equal opportunity as treating all students exactly the same. Though massive inequities persist in student achievement and outcomes, many teachers continue to believe that a fair and equal education means treating all students the same. The research by Callahan et al. (2009) shows that course placement affects student access to challenging, high quality academic curriculum, as well as English language instruction. Valdés (1998) documented how mul-

tilingual learners are often segregated into a school within a school. Therefore, even when attending schools that are generally regarded as academically successful, multilingual learners who are segregated into lower track classes are not receiving the same quality of education nor the same opportunities as their native-English speaking peers.

Language of instruction is another issue in terms of meritocracy and schools providing equal opportunity for students. When students have no chance of understanding the curriculum and content of a course, their education cannot be equal to the education received by their English-speaking peers. The students in Rolón-Dow's (2005) study discussed the inequitable distribution of resources by comparing their school's appearance with that of a school serving predominantly White students outside of the city. This inequity in resources forces the question: Are students in high-tech schools with extensive resources to support learning provided an equal opportunity to learn as students in schools where buildings are falling apart and fundamental resources, like books, are scant? The majoritarian story of meritocracy as appropriate overlooks many issues of inequity that fundamentally undermine any actualization of equality when it comes to schooling.

A significant component of the majoritarian story about the appropriateness of meritocracy is the positioning of standardized test scores as valuable information about the success of teaching and learning efforts that should be used to guide policy decisions. The literature took varying stances on this aspect of the majoritarian story about meritocracy. Some studies challenged the use of such data for policy decision making (e.g., Goto-Butler et al. 2000; Thompson et al. 2002), while others used standardized test score data in their own analyses of the quality of education multilingual learners receive (Li and Zhang 2004; Spycher 2007).

In the context of teaching multilingual learners, assessments that have been created, normed, and validated for native-English speaking students will never be accurate measures of what multilingual learners, especially those at the lowest levels of English proficiency, know and can do. In a recently released report about multilingual learners in Massachusetts, a committee of educators and researchers appointed by the state Board of Education analyzed statewide data and found that students at the three lowest levels of English proficiency determined by the state (out of five levels) were exceptionally unlikely to pass the statewide high-stakes test (ELL Sub-Committee 2010). The students at the two highest levels had a greater chance of passing the test, but still at a significantly lower rate than their native-English speaking peers. Essentially, the data offer the unremarkable findings that students have been correctly identified as multilingual learners and that with greater English proficiency comes greater chances of passing the high-stakes statewide test in English.

Despite the unsurprising findings, these results highlight two major issues with the majoritarian story about the value of standardized assessments. First, as was discussed in some of the literature (e.g., Goto-Butler et al. 2000; Thompson et al. 2002), the tests that are used across the US to measure educational outcomes for accountability purposes are overwhelmingly inaccurate measures for multilingual learners. Regardless of this well-known issue, on occasion, researchers trying to support the education of multilingual learners draw on these test scores to paint a picture of their low achievement. For instance, Spycher (2007) discusses the so-called achievement gap between multilingual learners and their native English speaking peers as being well documented by the test scores on the California statewide English language arts standardized test. Highlighting low scores as a cause for concern perpetuates the majoritarian story of meritocracy as appropriate and that such test scores are meaningful in discussions of the education of multilingual learners.

Another issue that the research in Massachusetts highlights is how pointless it is to look at the test scores of the entire aggregate of multilingual learners (ELL Sub-Committee 2010). Because the subgroup is composed of students who, upon gaining proficiency, will move out of the group, the scores will always remain low (Crawford 2004). Further, considering that across five levels of English proficiency only two of those levels have any chance of passing the test, there is little that the aggregate score for this widely diverse group of students could actually explain. None of the scholarship challenged the use of aggregate scores for the subgroup of multilingual learners nor discussed the inherent issues with such practices.

The report in Massachusetts calls for states and districts to rethink the use of data regarding multilingual learners and to no longer look at test scores, drop-out rates, graduation rates, or any other educational outcome indicator without disaggregating the data for multilingual learners by proficiency level (ELL Sub-Committee 2010). Because this type of data was not available at the state level, a data case study was conducted on one Massachusetts district showing that the majority of drop-outs among multilingual learners in that district were actually those at the highest levels of English proficiency. Further investigation is necessary within that district in order to determine the reasons students at the higher levels of English proficiency were dropping out. However, disaggregating the data by language proficiency level is the first step in such an investigation. Disaggregated data about the multilingual learners subgroup is pivotal for policymaking and programmatic improvement, but is not routinely available across the US.

Because the scholarship did not address, let alone challenge, this issue of data aggregation for multilingual learners, a change of practice is necessary. If researchers continue to draw on data from the entire aggregate of the multilingual learner subgroup as if it had something meaningful to explicate, the majoritarian story of meritocracy being appropriate will strongly persist. Multilingual learners are an incredibly diverse group with extensive assets and skills. Therefore, the current data conversation must be disrupted and altered in order to effectively portray those positive qualities. The aggregate scores of the multilingual learner subgroup will always offer a portrait of failure. However, disaggregated scores by proficiency level, length of residency, language background, educational background, and so forth can provide more useful information on both the students' accomplishments as well as areas for targeted program and policy improvement. Yet, standardized test scores should always be utilized in program and policy work through a critical lens that recognizes how little such scores can show about what a multilingual learner who is still mastering academic English knows and can do.

English-is-ALL-that-matters

Though seemingly innocent, especially from the position of white privilege, the majoritarian story about the position and value of the English language deeply affects the opportunities and quality of education available to multilingual learners. This story essentially says that English is really all that matters.

This story was told in various ways by teachers (Reeves 2004), community members (Galindo 2004), and policymakers (Olsen 2009), and usually from the perspective that there is resistance by immigrant populations to learn English. Yet, Herrera and Murry (1999) report that, 'In reality, English is spoken well or very well by 97% of US natives and by 94% of the 32 million speakers of other languages in the US' (180). When the overwhelming majority of those presently residing on American soil do speak English well, the majoritarian story highlighting the importance of English acquisition becomes less about promoting

English as the language of opportunity and more about targeted eradication of languages other than English in the public sphere.

Accompanying this majoritarian story is the following tale of immigrant ancestors from previous waves of immigration, 'Poor hardworking European peasants, with great ingenuity and hard work, gladly give up their counterproductive Old World ways (including language, customs, and values) to become prosperous, proud, and loyal Americans' (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001, 37). The majoritarian story about the importance of English demands that immigrants 'gladly give up their counterproductive Old World ways,' which includes languages other than English.

The literature largely challenged this majoritarian story showing that English is not all that matters. For instance, Johnson (2005a, 2005b) critiqued how English was promoted through the Proposition 203 campaign in Arizona as good, liberating, superior, and a tool to escape oppression while the use of minority languages in the social realm was stigmatized. Portes and Hao (1998) challenged the demand for English monolingualism by describing the benefits of multilingualism both individually through improved cognitive achievement and collectively through national participation in the global economy. They also point out the previously mentioned contradiction in which multilingualism is sought after and promoted for those who are already fluent in English, but is actively prevented in those who come from language minority backgrounds.

Beyond the economically and politically unhelpful drive for English monolingualism promoted by this majoritarian story and within the mythical narrative of immigration that accompanies it, the racialized nature of immigration into the US is overlooked. At a time when the majority of immigrants are people of color (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2009), even when immigrants do adopt the language, customs, values, and culture of mainstream America, because of issues of race and white privilege, they cannot disappear into it (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). Some of the scholarship documents the issues of racialization during immigration (González 1998; Pappamihel 2001, 2002; Rubinstein-Ávila 2007). Nevertheless, the majoritarian story prevails and dramatically affects the educational opportunities provided to children of immigration.

A significant component of the English-is-all-that-matters majoritarian story is that English is most efficiently and quickly learned in English-only contexts. This aspect of the majoritarian story both fits within the immigrant narrative described above and actively diminishes the opportunities to use languages other than English in the public sphere. Some teachers in Walker et al.'s (2004) study offered similar responses on the open-ended question section of their survey saying essentially, 'My grandparents came to this country and did just fine learning English without any help.' Arellano-Houchin et al. (2001) documented comparable sentiments from their research participants, even from bilingual teachers, saying that the real goal is for students to become fluent English speakers. Much of the literature challenges these notions and calls for native languages to be welcomed and utilized in classrooms (e.g., Lapayese 2007; Valdés 1998) and even calling the one-size-fits-all English-only approach to educating multilingual learners harmful (Cline et al. 2004). For instance, Bratt (2007) discusses how the pressure to write in English-only often prevents students from being able to fully express themselves and contributes to students feeling less capable.

Overwhelmingly, the scholarship challenged and attempted to disrupt the English-is-all-that-matters majoritarian story, especially the aspect of the story promoting English-only instructional practices. Many researchers disputed it by showing how this story played a significant role in the passage of the English-only Initiatives in California, Arizona, and

Massachusetts (Johnson 2005a, 2005b; Olsen 2009; Wiley and Wright 2004) and dominated discussions about bilingual education. Researchers documented how proponents of the language restrictive initiatives labeled bilingual education anti-English (Wiley and Wright, 2004), inhibiting to English language acquisition (Arellano-Houchin et al. 2001; Johnson 2005b), a violation of student's rights to learn English (Wright 2005), and a money-making industry for self-serving educators (Galindo 2004).

The campaigns promoting the English-only initiatives also had the following core messages about bilingual education according to Olsen (2009): bilingual education is divisive and has failed, parents are being denied opportunities to have their children learn English because students are trapped in bilingual programs, the job of schools is to teach English, not home languages, and that learning a new language only takes a year if you are not held back from doing so. However, as Johnson (2005b) critiques, a major goal of many bilingual education programs that is hidden in these messages and the English-only-for-instruction component of the majoritarian story: to develop strong, effective, and valuable multilingualism and multiliteracy as well as provide immediate access for all students regardless of English proficiency to grade level academic content.

A major issue with the English-is-all-that-matters majoritarian story is the way the education of multilingual learners is essentialized to reductive, technical approaches to language acquisition. Gándara and Rumberger (2009) argue that the education of multilingual learners has been diminished through various policy and assessment maneuvers to almost solely focus on language, even though multilingual learners need to learn a great deal more than just English. One of the ways such a reduction has occurred is through the labels given to describe multilingual learners.

Across the literature many different labels were used to identify multilingual learners, though English language learner (ELL) was by far the most frequently used term. Overwhelmingly, these labels are problematic. When multilingual learners are positioned according to their lack of English proficiency, the majoritarian story is endorsed in that the education of multilingual learners is solely about learning English. Labels like English learner, non-native English speaker, and so forth, promote a deficit ideology focused on the ever importance of English and suggest student deficit due to lack of proficiency in it. Additionally, some labels for multilingual learners position them as 'other' and tell the majoritarian story of difference-as-deficit. For example, the label 'culturally and linguistically diverse,' 'speakers of other languages,' and 'language minorities' emphasize the 'otherness' of multilingual learners in comparison to the perceived monolingual student norm and may contribute to their marginalization.

The labels used to name such a large and diverse set of students affects the way the population is viewed by educators and policy makers and the types of language support programs created for their academic development (Brisk 2006; García and Kleifgen 2008). Therefore, researchers and educators need to critically examine and carefully select the labels used to describe multilingual learners by focusing on what story those labels promote about the population.

Beyond reducing the focus of their education, labels can also essentialize multilingual learners into a falsely monolithic representation of what is in reality, an extremely heterogeneous group. Such essentialization is a common practice in oppressive contexts that is challenged throughout the literature. For instance, Freeman et al. (2003) critiqued the practice of giving multilingual learners from vastly different linguistic and educational backgrounds the exact same curriculum and learning opportunities. Bashir-Ali (2006) critically appraised the comment by a teacher in her school who falsely believed all multilin-

gual learners were students of color and questioned why a White student was in an ESL class. Asher (2007) considered the homogeneous representations of immigrant youth and immigrants in general that she heard from participants in her teacher education courses and how those views reify stereotypes, deny multiplicities, and essentialize complex trans-cultural identities. Reeves (2009) investigation of teacher identities exposes the issue of viewing of multilingual learners simplistically and how the positioning of students by educators greatly affects the education they receive. Depending on how educators position multilingual learners, they either take ownership of or dismiss responsibility for the teaching of multilingual learners.

In the research, significant numbers of teachers claimed that teaching multilingual learners is not the responsibility of mainstream teachers (Reeves 2009; Walker et al. 2004; Yoon 2007, 2008). Though the researchers critiqued this perspective, it is a belief that can be an outcome of the labels used to define the population as well as from the common Western concept of content areas and the distinct responsibilities teaching a particular content area entails. Valdés (2004) critiqued the separation of academic fields and documented how the division can prevent common understandings among professionals. She also argued that this partitioning creates boundaries within schools where ESL and mainstream teachers exist in two different worlds. Challenging the labels and rigid content distinctions, Carhill, Suárez-Orozco, and Páez (2008) and Valdés (1998) document how they can cause the segregation of multilingual learners from their native-English speaking peers. Reeves (2009) argues that it takes a whole school to successfully educate multilingual learners and that institutional representations of multilingual learners are pivotal for asserting whole school action as well as educational success.

Another tenet of the English-is-all-that-matters majoritarian story focuses on the knowledge base and skills of teachers of multilingual learners. If all multilingual learners need is to learn English, then all their teachers need is proficiency in English and the technical, interventionist practices that promote second language acquisition. The literature both promoted (e.g., Li and Zhang 2004; O'Hara and Pritchard 2008) and challenged (e.g., Expósito and Favela 2003; Virtue 2009) this aspect of the majoritarian story. When research focuses extensively and at times exclusively on the technical, intervention-based skills or strategies (e.g., KWL, Think-Pair-Share, using visuals, etc.) teachers need to develop to effectively teach English to multilingual learners, teachers are positioned as technicians who use particular intervention to fix English deficiencies in multilingual learners.

Stevens (2009) challenges this positioning by critiquing both technicism and individualism along with the way multilingual learners are often framed solely in terms of their need to develop particular English skills. She tells a counter-story by showing that multilingual learners need more than schoolbased literacies, an aspect of their education that is frequently overlooked because of the extensive focus on the development of discrete English skills. Moses (2000) offers a similar critique suggesting that a quality education for multilingual learners must promote self-determination as well as an authentic cultural identity, aspects of development that may be overlooked or made completely impossible by an extensive and exclusive focus on English development. Finally, de Jong and Harper (2005) suggest that teaching multilingual learners requires technical skills and expertise as well as a critical awareness of one's attitudes towards students, their languages, cultures, and communities. Therefore, they argue that teaching multilingual learners is not 'just good teaching' and requires more than discrete technical, intervention-based skills.

However, the English-is-all-that-matters majoritarian story supports the notion that teaching multilingual learners is just good teaching. From this perspective, any good

teacher (who knows English) can teach English to multilingual learners without specialized training or skill, he or she must merely apply various useful teaching strategies that are effective to support all students like using graphic organizers or pre-teaching key vocabulary before reading a text. Though there is a technical aspect to all teaching, including quality instruction for multilingual learners, these technical skills alone without cultural responsiveness, attention to academic English development, and ideological clarity will not create the learning spaces necessary for all multilingual learners to succeed. Several researchers found evidence of this 'just good teaching' paradigm in their studies (Harper and de Jong 2009; Reeves 2009; Walker et al. 2004) and call for a more complete understanding of what quality teaching for multilingual learners looks like.

Some of the literature explicitly challenged the English-is-all-that-matters majoritarian story by suggesting that quality education for multilingual learners is focused on much more than just English. They call for additive (Bratt 2007; Gibson and Hidalgo 2009), culturally and linguistically affirming approaches to education (Fine et al. 2007) by teachers who embrace pluralism (Hones 2002), view the language resources of multilingual learners as assets (MacGregor-Mendoza 2000; Rubinstein-Ávila 2007), challenge dominant discourses and hegemonic powers (Asher 2007; Hones 2002; Lapayese 2007), and teach with ideological clarity (Expósito and Favela 2003; Olivos and Sarmiento 2006). This kind of teaching is much more than technical, intervention-based work focused on the development of discrete English skills or 'just good teaching.' Though several researchers call for this sort of teaching and teacher preparation, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that this kind of teaching is far from the norm of what most multilingual learners are experiencing in today's schools (Bratt 2007; Reeves 2004; Reeves 2009; Walker et al. 2004; Yoon 2007; Yoon 2008).

Conclusion

Centered on the strength and outcomes of four common majoritarian stories, this study of the scholarship focused on the education of secondary multilingual learners and their teachers exposes substantial systemic issues that perpetuate a racist and linguistic status quo. The majoritarian stories about race, difference, meritocracy, and English both promoted and challenged in the literature accurately describe current contemporary thought and practice relating to the concepts of race, culture, and language in US schools and expose troubling issues and practices. As suggested by this research, without carefully investigating the way these stories play out in the schooling of multilingual learners and how policies, practices, and research may be contributing to their promotion, these powerful stories will perpetuate inequitable schooling for multilingual learners.

This analysis focused not only on the larger majoritarian stories that are told, but also on the specific schooling practices and relevant mechanisms that promote these stories. Because majoritarian stories are evidenced and promoted through various gradual and subtle practices (Liggett 2008), this study that specifically pinpointed such issues and practices provides a substantial contribution to the CRT research literature about majoritarian stories as well as a starting point for all concerned about quality education for multilingual learners to begin on a path of critically reflective practice geared towards the deconstruction of hegemonic messages that negatively govern much of the learning opportunities for multilingual learners in secondary schools.

As a whole the literature exposes systemic failure regarding the education of multilingual learners and their teachers. However, it also suggests that through engaged critical practice, the inequitable system can be transformed. Therefore, further research is neces-

sary to investigate whether and how majoritarian stories, like the ones identified in this study, play a role in the failure of the current education system to effectively educate multilingual learners and their teachers. With further investigation and critically engaged practice and policies targeted towards battling the hegemonic and oppressive ideologies captured in the identified majoritarian stories, institutionalized racism and linguicism can be battled and an improved educational system for secondary multilingual learners in the US can be created.

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