

**The Multimodal Construction of Race:
A Review of Critical Race Theory Research**



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The Multimodal Construction of Race: A Review of Critical Race Theory Research

This article critically appraises a body of original critical race theory research that attends to a range of multimodal language practices in the reconstruction of race and racial identities. An ultimate goal of critical race theory is social transformation, which begins by discussing race openly. The review addresses the question: What has critical race theory contributed to uncovering and transforming the racialisation of multimodal language practices in education? This is significant because little attention has been given to understanding the central role of multimodal communication practices in the social construction of race in education (Turner 2012). As a consequence of digital communication environments in the twenty-first century, multimodal texts are circulating more rapidly than ever before in education and society (New London Group 2000).

Multimodal language practices are sign-making practices that carry meaning through their entrenchment in cultural values, and which draw on a variety of symbolic systems involving linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, audio, tactile, and other modes of communication (Kress 2000; Street 1999). Examples of multimodal practices include sharing oral narratives, reading illustrated stories, viewing multimedia, performing hip-hop, digital storytelling, blogging, or podcasting.

Racism is defined as the beliefs, practices, or structural systems—such as education—that function to oppress racial groups. It is socially produced and endemic in societies, operating

ideologically to contribute to the social and material or economic stratification of certain groups (Bell 1992; Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Critical race theory in education has examined racial inequality in relation to African-American identities (Hughes-Hassell, Barkley and Koehler 2009), later extended to include Latina and Latino (Haney-Lopez, 1994), Asian (Chang, 2013), Indigenous Americans (Romero, Arce and Cammarota 2009), and Indigenous races beyond the USA (Vass, 2014). Racism intersects in complex ways with other social markers, such as gender, socio-economic background, ability, beliefs, and age (Haney-Lopez, 1994).

Critical race theory was begun by Scholars of Colour and others in legal studies in the USA during post-war civil rights movements to challenge and change racial politics and power relations in institutional systems (see, e.g., Bell [1980]; Crenshaw [1988]; Delgado [1990]; Matsuda [1989]). It has voiced oppositional accounts of racism in international scholarship with a commitment to social justice and the rights of all people (Solorzano and Yosso 2002), raising a consciousness of racial identity construction and stratification in education (Pane and Salmon 2009). Since the work of Ladson and Billings (1998) and others (see, e.g., Solórzano and Bernal [2001]; Tate [1997]; Haney-Lopez [1994]), critical race theory has indexed a legacy of White supremacy within education, challenging colonisation and its influences on education systems (Cheruvu et al. 2014).

CRT theorists have uncovered the endemic nature of racism in society, applying transformative ideals that aim to ameliorate the subordination of others based on race, gender, sexuality, age, economic or social status, and other multilayered identities, confronting dehumanising societal structures (see, e.g., Ladson-Billings [1998]; Ladson-Billings and Tate [2014]). Critical race theory scholars illustrate the difficulties that arise when racial and other categories—gender, sexuality, age, and economic or social privilege—are simplistically

constructed as homogenous groups. This masks the diverse and multilayered identities, composition, and histories of communities (see, e.g., Solórzano and Bernal [2001]; Tate [1997]).

CRT provides a critique of racial colourblindness, assimilation, and multiculturalism, revitalising race-consciousness and critiquing White racial privilege. Social justice is seen as central in education to interrupt, rather than reproduce, White norms and practices as the measure for meaning and value (Pane and Salmon 2009). It contests a so-called colourblind racist ideology that permits Whites to disregard the racial discrimination that persists in teaching, teacher education and society, and consequently, to be blinded to the social privileges of Whiteness (Vass 2014). However, new questions need to be asked about the construction of race in multimodal and digital texts that figure prominently in education and in everyday lives: Whose linguistic and cultural capital counts in multimodal and digital language practices in education?

Method

This review is a critique and synthesis of existing critical race theory research of language practices in education. Electronic database searches were conducted using Ebscohost, A+ Informit, and ProQuest databases. Searches applied the phrase critical race theory or CRT and a set of search terms for literacy practices (e.g., literacy, language, reading, writing, narrative, multimodal), with search modifiers appropriate to each database (e.g., AND, OR, parentheses). We also conducted searches to account for the circulation of texts in digital contexts of use (e.g., digital, media, technology). The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles. The critical race studies selected for this review met the following criteria: (a) explicitly located in critical race theory, (b) centered in education and literacy contexts, and (c) focused on examining the construction of race across multiple modes. Perspectives of race that did not explicitly

identify with critical race theory (e.g., socio-cultural literacy theory, critical literacy, critical language awareness, critical pedagogy, critical media literacy, critical geography, critical discourse analysis) were excluded, except when combined in the studies with critical race theory (e.g., critical race theory and critical discourse analysis).

A total of forty-four journal articles reported original studies from a critical race theory perspective in education that use multimodal literacy practices as data sources. A further thirty-seven journal articles were identified that provided literature reviews, historical accounts, and theory that were used to contextualise the original studies. Further searches were conducted to locate other interpretative sources, including academic books, book chapters, and book reviews, and to retrieve updates of peer-reviewed articles.

Analysis of data sources

The studies were categorised by the following features: (a) authorship, (b) year of publication, (c) race and relevant demographics of participant group, (d) nation or country where the research was conducted, (e) type of education site, (f) study aims, (g) methodology and methods, and (h) multimodal practices observed or data sources. See Table 1 for a summary of the original studies reviewed here.

<Insert Table 1 Here>

Table 1 Research of Critical Race Theory and Multimodal Language in Education

Results and discussion

Of the corpus of original critical race theory studies of multimodal literacy practices reviewed, the largest proportion were conducted in teaching contexts in the USA, supplemented by research from Canada (van de Kleut 2011), and Australia (Ford 2013). African-American teachers and students comprised the largest racial participant group (Turner 2012), followed by

Latino/Latina participants (Fránquiz, Salazar, and DeNicolo 2011; Rodriguez 2011), and to a lesser extent, participants of Korean (Han 2014), Japanese (Shao-Kobayashi 2013), and multiethnic (Chang 2013), White (Anderson 2008), and Indigenous Australian ethnicities (van de Kleut 2011). Race, equity and textual practices were sometimes shown as intersecting with gender (Haddix 2012), transgender identities (Blackburn 2003), migrant and refugee status (Chang 2013), economic advantage (Martin 2014), urban identities (Godley and Loretto 2013), remoteness (Han 2014), and other characteristics.

The reviewed studies were conducted across all levels of education, with the largest proportion conducted with adolescents in high school settings (Chang 2013; Hoffman & Carter 2013; Knaus 2009; Thomas 2013) or community groups (Blackburn 2003). This is followed by studies in early childhood and elementary schools (Brown, Souto-Manning and Tropp Laman 2010; Love 2014; Monzó and Rueda 2009), middle schools (Turner, Hayes, and Way 2013), and teacher education (Rodriguez 2011).

Many of the studies apply ethnographic (Hoffman and Carter 2013) and micro-ethnographic methodologies (Godley and Loretto 2013). Narrative-inquiry (Michael-Luna 2008; Rodriguez 2011) and socio-linguistic studies (Haddix 2012) figure prominently. Key analytic methods include discourse analysis (McCarthy 1998) and critical discourse analysis (Schieble 2012), critical language awareness (Martínez 2013), heuristic research (Pane and Salmon 2009), systemic functional linguistics (Thomas 2013), thematic analysis (Han 2014), and reconstructive analysis (Lewis and Tierney 2013).

The findings are discussed in the following sections, demonstrating how language teachers need to: (a) critically challenge the discursive construction of race through talk, (b) make strategic use of racial counter-narratives, (c) use literature as a key site for deconstructing

race, and (d) use music, visual and performing arts, and digital media for the counter-hegemonic performance of racial identities. Evidence is presented to support these key findings.

Teachers challenge the discursive construction of race through talk

The CRT studies show that inequities are often firmly ingrained in the discourses of children's early socialisation, but teachers can play a powerful role in disrupting racism (Brown, Souto-Manning and Tropp Laman 2010). For example, Brown, Souto-Manning, and Tropp Laman (2010) traced class and race biases in the speech documented across three early childhood literacy contexts. The characters portrayed in the reading program did not reflect the racial diversity of the school, and the picture books used in the read-aloud session reinforced concepts of racial segregation. However, the themes were carefully challenged and interrupted by the teachers' questioning strategies, underpinned by her knowledge of critical race theory.

In another illustrative early childhood study, Rogers and Mosley (2006) applied critical race theory and Whiteness studies to analyse young children's spoken words at school. The teachers encouraged their students, who were White, to speak openly about race, racism and anti-racism, and the children's racial-identity formation began to exhibit instability. Students' discursive patterns showed an initial distancing of self from Whiteness, and they began to recognise the unfair behaviour of White people in the past. Students became aware of the endemic nature of racism, naming themselves as White and understanding how their own experiences of privilege were associated with Whiteness (Rogers and Mosley 2006).

Similarly, CRT researchers conducted analyses of the discourses of cultural socialisation among preservice teachers in early childhood teaching courses, and across home and community settings with young children, focusing on spoken discourses that function to resist or reify racism (Nash and Miller 2014). These studies provide evidence that racial literacy development can be

taught during the formative years of schooling and in early childhood teacher education programs.

Research on Spanish-speaking Latino immigrant children and their cultural productions in elementary school—where all teaching was conducted in English—points to the students' embodied strategies of resistance and self-preservation through gaze and speech (Monzó and Rueda 2009). The students developed survival strategies, such as pretending to understand the teachers' instructions and story readings, mumbling while reading aloud to hide errors, and avoiding eye contact with teachers. The fifth-grade students developed an awareness that English non-fluency would prohibit their acceptance as full members of society, raising the question: Whose linguistic and cultural capital counts?

Critical race research in secondary schools has examined the meta-pragmatics, or tactical discourses of White English teachers as they navigate racial difference in literature classes (Thomas 2013). Thomas (2013) applied systemic functional linguistics to examine moments of *décalage*—the disconnection between cultural groups through points of uncertain translation and cultural misunderstanding—in spoken discourses (Edwards 2009). Through a White teacher's selection of a White hero text, the author's liberal use of the racist *n-word* created points of *décalage* as the teacher attempted to clarify the social sanctions that policed the use of the term. A key recommendation was that systemic functional linguistics position teachers to communicate across cultural divides by enabling students to gain control of academic registers for their own cultural goals (Schleppegrell 2004).

Case studies conducted in the USA and Canada highlight the prevalence and implications of racial colourblind thinking that pervades classroom talk. In order to appear unbiased, colourblind racism regards race an invisible (e.g., I treat everyone the same), while blinded to

White privilege and the realities of negative racial discrimination (Schofield 1986). For example, Modica (2015) researched a mixed race high school in the USA where talk about race was not encouraged. Teachers anxiously and actively avoided potential accusations of racism through discursive and pedagogical choices, including guarded responses in research interviews. Teachers missed opportunities to address racial inequity in school programs due to colourblind racism, permitting Whites to ignore the inevitable inequities and maintain their status of privilege. However, the reflexive research process began to dislocate and rupture deep-seated ideals of meritocracy and individualism through critical race dialogue (Modica, 2015).

Similarly, colourblind racism was examined in culturally diverse Canadian schools (Schroeter and James 2015). Schroeter and James (2015) demonstrate how the specialist language programs for French-speaking African-Canadian refugee students became a site for racial separation. The boys' identification with rap music and Black stylised English intensified their marginalisation, yet fulfilled the boys' desire to belong to a particular location and history. The streaming program conflated their academic needs with those of disengaged students, potentially limiting their educational, work, and life outcomes. Yet teachers talked about their pride in a multicultural clientele and the harmonious coexistence of students of many races, oblivious to the reproduction of racial colourblind practices of the school.

The circulation of racist discourses also persists in pre-service teacher education (Han 2014; Haddix 2012). For example, Han (2014) illustrated the racially contentious dynamics that emerged between White preservice teachers and their Asian professor in a racially homogenous rural America. Haddix (2012) researched how deliberate silence was used to protect the voices and identities of Black pre-service teachers in their teacher education programs. These studies theorise the role and function of the discursive construction and reconstruction of race through

talk or silence in teacher education. Teacher preparation programs need to embed community-based immersion experiences and critical race theory training, supporting pre-service teachers as they transition into the profession to equip them to navigate race talk (Sleeter 2001).

A subgroup of CRT studies addresses the discursive construction of race that is entrenched in education systems through standardised literacy achievement measures and English language streaming (Blaisdell 2010; Ford 2013; Shapiro 2014). CRT theorists critique the deficit discourses about race that are both explicit and implicit in education and the media, and with misleading interpretations of data from standardised literacy testing (Ford 2013). For example, Ford (2013) shows how the gross inequality of achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Australia is currently masked in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) reporting, to downplay the extent of failed political rhetoric that claims to close the Indigenous achievement gap. Appallingly, secondary education has only been available in remote areas for Indigenous students since the 1980s, while non-Indigenous students had free access to primary and secondary education throughout the entire twentieth century (Ford 2013)

CRT theorists show the inequality that results when standardised literacy achievement data are used to determine streaming decisions about English Language Learners, in many cases, segregating students along racial and language lines (Blaisdell 2010). For example, Bilingual teaching and education for students who spoke Indigenous language ended in Australia in the 1990s, reinforcing White dominance and monolingual English (Ford 2013). In Shapiro's (2014) research, the lived experiences and voices of English language learners highlighted that they confront narratives of intellectual inferiority, education deficit, and essentialisation—a belief in biologically determined racial characteristics—on a daily basis.

A central argument that emerges from the research is that racial identities are socially constructed, produced, negotiated, and performed through the modes of talk or silence. A key recommendation is that race talk about structural inequalities is needed to oppose racial colourblind spaces, and sharing personal histories of racial inequity can illuminate broader patterns of inequality (Nash and Miller 2014). Such dialogue uncovers contemporary racist ideologies, while showing transformed uses of spoken language in language education (see, e.g., Stovall [2005]).

The central role of anti-racist, multimodal counter-narratives

A key theme that emerged was the use of counter-narratives to recover the collective history of marginalised races through the lens of the oppressed (García 2008). Counter-narratives are stories that openly challenge racist ideologies by reinstating previously unacknowledged racial understandings, honouring first-hand experiences as official knowledge (Godley and Loretto 2013). Such accounts have been biographical (see, e.g., Fernandez [2002]), autobiographical (see, e.g., Montoya [1994]; Schroeter and James [2015]), and composite—combining data from oral arguments, community memories, and other accounts to represent composite characters that personify the lived experiences of marginalised groups (see, e.g., Delgado [2000]; Yosso [2006]).

A transformative example is provided by Godley and Loretto (2013), in an urban US high school, where a teacher's expert deconstruction of racist terms and use of co-constructed counter-narratives disrupted and disputed essentialised racial assumptions. The teachers guided the students to discuss the social implications of various dialects and registers, deconstructing phrases such as *talking White* and *talking Black*. Students' counter-narratives were affirmed as part of the official knowledge, disrupting hegemonic notions of success.

Counter-storytelling in education increasingly includes multimodal accounts that combine words, images, audio, and other modes (Turner, Hayes, and Way 2013). For example, Indigenous Australian teachers taught Indigenous students to create digital counter-narratives about the White colonial invaders who displaced the Indigenous custodians of the land using the iPad application, Tellagami (Author/s 2016). The teachers guided the students to decolonise White accounts of conquest and power, reframing their own racial identities and collective heritage with animated audio-recorded readings of original historical narrative poetry. Such accounts of teaching show the potentials for transforming oppressive social structures and curricula that normalise Whiteness.

In a US study by Hoffman and Carter (2013) the students used Apple GarageBand software to create racial counter-narratives in *cipher*—a multimodal hip-hop session involving multiple speakers in rapid succession, accompanied by collaborative musical improvisation. A key finding was the students appreciated the significant level of agency and creativity they were able to exercise over the digital composition, including the ‘freedom to think’, rather than reproducing song in a tightly controlled process of design (Hoffman and Carter 2013, 143).

A notably successful model of CRT teaching, *Barrio pedagogy*—pedagogy based on authentic cultural respect and appreciation—has transformed race consciousness among Chicano Indigenous education (Romero, Arce, and Cammarota 2009). Using narrative counter-histories, teachers and students challenged the majoritarian American stories to validate Indigenous epistemologies, using *I am* poetry, and by interrogating key concepts: hegemony, colonisation, resistance theory, agency, racial justice theory, and power-knowledge. Others, such as Chang (2013) have used counter-stories to trace the race-related struggles experienced by adolescent, working-class, Chinese immigrants, and those from multiethnic backgrounds in the USA. The

stories oppose dominant assumptions about Confucian cultural traditions, privilege, and racial stereotypes and experiences of being ‘Othered’.

Applying CRT in Australia, Vass (2014) presented counter-stories of race constructed using fictional characters to illuminate a White master script that was perpetuated in a school site. Indigenous students were taught by all-White staff, and racism was readily apparent in conversations between teaching staff, in the curriculum, and portrayed on the walls. The study demonstrates the urgency of an anti-racist framework to talk openly about race in classrooms, exposing the normalisation of White racial scripts.

The enactment of anti-racist counter-narratives is not without complexity and opposition. For example, Fránquiz, Salazar, and DeNicolo, (2011) found that ‘majoritarian tales’ or dominant racial scripts in US preservice teacher programs were very difficult to disrupt. Analysing multimodal texts such as life histories, music, videos and literature, the study highlighted the participants’ continued lack of understanding of Whiteness, White privilege, and contemporary forms of racism. The participants habitually drew on race-minimising ideologies.

Across the studies, conflicts sometimes ensued when anti-racist counter-narratives opposed views of meritocracy, racial colourblindness, and the racial neutrality of pedagogy and curriculum (Su 2007). However, counter-storytelling across multiple modes has been successfully used to broadcast *alternative* or *subaltern* portraits of race, critically deconstructing hegemonic epistemologies and grand meta-narratives, while enabling marginalised voices to be heard on a global scale.

Multimodal literature is a key site for deconstructing race

Multimodal literature for children and young adults in the school curriculum emerged as a key site for teachers to investigate racism through critical race theory. A body of evidence reviewed in this section points to the relative paucity of literary narratives in which the main protagonists are People of Colour and likewise, the general under-representation of People of Colour, Indigenous peoples, and other group in teaching materials. This finding emerges from research across literary text types that includes historical fiction, traditional tales (including fairytales), and contemporary fiction.

For example, in a study of books for transitional readers who were advancing from reading short picture books to longer books with chapters, only 25.8% of the books contained at least one Person of Colour as a main or major secondary character, and authors of Colour accounted for only 2.2% of the titles (Hughes-Hassell, Barkley and Koehler 2009). The under-representation of People of Colour in the authorship and literature for children and young adults is a form of racism that inhibits young readers of Colour from making text-to-self connections, potentially reducing their motivation to read school literature.

Among novels that include People of Colour, many of these present incomplete and distorted portrayals of race (Smith-D'Arezzo and Musgrove 2011). For example, Reese (2008) shows that the predominant portrayal of Indigenous peoples in historical fiction, such as *Little House on the Prairie*, by Wilder (1971), contrasts the primitive, animalistic savage, with the pioneering spirit of a White family that perseveres in the face of hardship, despite Indigenous peoples engaging in very sophisticated negotiations and treaties with the US government at that time. The problematic nature of such historical fiction demands the selection of alternative texts and critical readings to interrogate racist assumptions in educational sites.

Traditional tales similarly warrant critical race perspectives on their content and pedagogical use. For example, a retelling of a traditional tale was presented in a set of teacher professional learning materials in Ontario, Canada, presenting a romanticised portrayal of Indigenous people (van de Kleut 2011). The teacher training materials link Indigenous culture and environmental protection that essentialise Indigenous identity as spiritually connected to the land in a way that exoticises the other through a Eurocentric gaze, with ideological, political, and racist overtones (van de Kleut 2011).

Critical race studies include the critical analysis of contemporary literature for children and young people that either entrenches or resists hegemonic racist ideologies. Glenn (2008) demonstrates the former through the analysis of commercially successful teenage novels. The main characters are almost exclusively White, reinforcing racist hierarchies and White social power. Latina females and character of Colour were valued only for their physical appearance, or existed in the story plot to serve the White characters. Glenn (2008) contends that teachers need critical race theory and critical literacy pedagogies to challenge the insincerity of relationships, exploitative behaviour, and racism advanced as normality in this popular educational literature. Similarly, Smith-D'Arezzo and Musgrove (2011) examine the deep-seated racist attitudes of literature for children in the fourth and fifth grades, applying critical race text analysis. The researchers point to the need for teachers to challenge the stereotyping images and language choices that betray the subjugated self-positioning of races that are depicted as reliant upon White benevolence.

Adopting a critical race perspective on contemporary youth literature for teenagers in high schools, Schieble (2012) advocates that teachers engage students in critical conversations about these literary narratives by deploying a lens on Whiteness, analysing scenes in novels used

in the English curriculum that assert White, middle class domination. Shieble's (2012) text analysis demonstrates the importance of attending to the ways in which language choices construct meanings about race with particular emphasis on how fictional White characters question and resist racism, and how this relates to such actions by fictionalised People of Colour.

From picture books to novels for adolescents, critical race research demonstrates that literature for teachers to use with children and young people are not innocent texts, but are sites for the ongoing inscription and invocation of the racialisation of young readers. A complementary approach, critical literacy, supports the teachers' skillful critique of the ideological assumptions and interests of literary texts as a resource for transformative pedagogies (Comber 2015). The augmenting of critical race theory with such approaches can productively strengthen and advance crucial frameworks for understanding and responding to the social construction of race in multimodal texts.

Music, visual and performing arts, and digital media for counter-hegemonic practice

Critical race theorists have embraced pedagogies in which language and other dynamic representational resources are remade multimodally for different cultural purposes. Multimodal literacy practices open up a broader range of textual elements than words alone, differing from independent modes by interconnecting the other modes, such as language, images, sounds, gestures, and movement, in a dynamic relationship (Lemke et al. 2015). While multimodal literacies have long existed, the availability of digital technologies and the ease of production and distribution of multimodal texts, such as video and image sharing, have rendered many practices as a ubiquitous part of identity construction in young people's everyday lives (New London Group 2000).

For example, Lewis and Tierney (2013) conducted an intervention on race conscious media and documentary film analysis in midwestern USA. The study examined how students' race-related emotions were mobilised in a culturally diverse, interdisciplinary high school English-History classroom, with 85% Students of Colour. Emotions were mediated by texts, talk, and the students' histories of participation. The students wrote and read books, but also analysed and produced multimedia texts, including digital stories, documentary films podcasts and collages. An outcome was that student emotion about racial meanings was mediated by embodied multimodal communication, and critical literacy pedagogies empowered students' social action.

Hoffman and Carter (2013) describe how African-American middle school students, in an instrumental music class, constructed racialised musical identities within the teaching and curriculum structures. Teachers encouraged students to represent their communities through certain forms of multimodal forms of communication, such as clothing choices or through their music listening, while devaluing others. Students were not permitted to use their home dialects or play non-canonical musical genres in the official curriculum (Hoffman and Carter 2013). Contrastingly, critical race studies have examined how young urban children's hip-hop at school positively influenced their learning and identities. Enacted thoughtfully and critically, the program provided rich opportunities for young children to play, write, learn, create, socialise, and cooperate in a supportive learning community (Love 2014)

Explicitly addressing concepts of multimodality, Turner (2012) extended evidence that multimodal hip-hop text can be used to express creativity and race consciousness of urban, African-American female adolescents. Afro-diasporic, multimodal production, was focal, integrating five art forms: DJ-ing (disc jockey), MC-ing (master of ceremonies), break dancing,

graffiti art, and knowledge. These elements were critically synchronised in music video productions with digital beats and hip-hop songs, also performed at community events. Teachers included the key element of critical media literacy, where students resisted the reproduction of current societal power structures with a social justice agenda.

Arts-based multimodal literacy enquiry has been conducted with marginalised Students of Colour who experience isolation, segregation, and alienation in alternative education programs. For example, Pane and Salmon (2009) recount a revolutionary, arts-based inquiry that had radical implications for African-American students who became motivated to know about their own local history and heritage. Teachers engaged the students in excursions to historical sites, library searches, dialogue, script writing, prop making and stage production, leading to performances of plays in multiple community venues and public events. The multimodal literacy project was transformative, giving voice to previously silenced students against the hegemonic structures of the school system and alternative education.

These studies from a critical race perspective provide insights into the transformation of racial justice in multimodal spaces. The official school curriculum is typically a 'culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White...master script' (Ladson-Billings 1998, 18). These small-scale studies demonstrate some of the socially-just pedagogical possibilities for counter-hegemonic teaching practice. Critical race studies have reported a number of creative, multimodal, and transformative curriculum approaches to engage marginalised racial groups in critical media literacy, creative writing, performing arts-based inquiry, music composition and performance, and media-based projects led by socially-just educators (Anderson 2008; Yosso 2002). These teaching approaches have often simultaneously inspired students toward

conscientisation (Freire and Macedo 1987), providing real opportunities for students to read, represent, and remake the world differently.

Gaps in CRT research and the multimodal construction of race

What emerges in this review is that multimodal practices of various kinds have become vital sources of evidence for understanding the construction of racialised literate identities.

Multimodal texts are produced out of interest, always as transformations of culturally and historically available semiotic resources. It is in the transformative reshaping of semiotic resources by individuals and communities that makes possible the self-making of social subjects (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). However, there are several gaps that also emerged.

First, few critical race studies addressed digital media contexts of literacy use. This is surprising given the centrality of the internet in contemporary social life. For example, only one study examined online interaction, and this was the web content of a school-based program that reflected a failure to engage with anti-racist struggles (Kumar 2014). In a digital communications environment, in which diverse users interact daily with an array of hybrid literacy forms, material technologies, and virtual spaces, CRT studies need to open up repertoires of data sources to include digital contexts of language use.

Beyond critical race theory, it has been argued that literacies in digital spaces provide different challenges and opportunities for democratic participation, and online communities for racial justice figure centrally in global citizenship (Losh 2012). Multimodal literacy practices within certain online game environments can involve avatars of varied colours, shapes, or species, which can either provide a safe space for social diversity, or obscure race and other identities that would otherwise be evident in face-to-face encounters (Mahiri 2015).

Race-related research that is not framed by critical race theory shows that racial difference is not an obstacle to the bonding between players in certain online gaming spaces. For example, Gee (2007) argues that affinity groups are formed in online communities that are primarily united by shared goals, interests, and practices. Race, gender, nation, ethnicity, or culture are typically not the basis of these online social orders. Research by Mahiri (2011) demonstrated that African-American youth had a broadened range of affordances to portray their online personas in the multiplayer game—Teen Second Life—because they took on the personae of robots, furry animal-like creatures, or characters with green skin and purple hair, freed from stereotypical human features and visible social markers. These digital interactions enabled micro-cultural production that differed from face-to-face offline interactions (Mahiri 2015).

Second, there are few existing CRT studies that address the complex intersections of race and other simultaneous dimensions of identity and language (Gullickson and Morning 2011). An exception is Blackburn's (2012) study that examined the spoken and written discourses of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) urban African-American working-class youth (ages 12–23) from the Loft—a youth-run social activist center. The study highlights the subtle elements of community diversity, rather than homogeneity (Blackburn, 2003).

Educational institutions are complex sites where issues of race, sexism, classism, and ableism intersect with volatile forms of oppression, and often operate beneath a rhetorical veneer of racial tolerance, political correctness, and celebrations of cultural diversity. Future critical race theory research in language education may elaborate and theorise the fracturing of race, Whiteness, and other social identities to include a much more global chorus of voices, and counter-narratives of intersectional difference.

Third, critical race studies have drawn attention to the mismatch between claims of anti-racist ideals, and lived language practices in education, highlighting the ideological interpellation of Whiteness through which racial and linguistic minorities become subjected. Such studies have provided a critique of hegemonic practices in literacy research globally, yet the preponderance of studies is currently centered on races within the USA. International scholarship needs to challenge the racism that continues to pervade the textual practices of societies, and to challenge the mechanisms that prohibit some, while enabling others, to access material and semiotic resources along racial lines.

Finally, Indigenous identities are often marginalised in CRT research. While this review has identified a small number of Indigenous CRT studies (e.g., Romero, Arce and Cammarota 2009; van de Kleut 2011; Vass, 2014), there is preponderance of studies focusing on non-Indigenous races; yet the work produced on critical race theory that is predominantly within the USA ‘...is written on and yet over the sovereign ground of Native Americans and Indigenous people’ (Moreton-Robinson 2008, 93). The non-Indigenous world have a vested interest in maintaining their own ignorance about Indigenous sovereignties, and the confining of Indigenous research to specialist domains of expertise. The failure of critical race studies in education to address colonisation, and imperialism of the nation state works in the service of White possession, reinforcing its power, authority, and control of nations (Moreton-Robinson 2008).

Recommendations for future CRT research on the multimodal construction of race

Following from the gaps identified in CRT research, a key recommendation is that critical race approaches need to critique the production of digital texts and to evaluate the potentials of techno-cultures for racial justice. Visual representations of race online have the potential to tell us much about how race is represented. Researchers need to ask questions about who controls

access to digital texts, and how this control is protected as White property—or alternatively, extended to all races (Author/s 2018). What can critical race pedagogies in digital spaces teach us about race and identity?

Language educators and researchers need to understand how racial colourblindness operates systemically and discursively in contemporary digital contexts. Racial colourblindness is associated with the assumption that: a) race is an invisible characteristic; b) race is a taboo topic; and c) social outcomes are based on individual circumstances, not on systems of privilege and discrimination—such as White privilege and racial discrimination (Schofield 1986). Theorists of race beyond the critical race tradition have demonstrated that in the rise of the internet, racial colourblindness leads to low multicultural competence, minimisation of the role of race in racist events, and resistance to discussing racial differences in order to appear to be nonbiased (Tynes and Markoe 2010).

A further recommendation is that the consciousness of racism and its intersection with other forms of marginalisation, such as sexism, classism, and homophobia, gains increasingly more importance in critical race theory studies. The concept of intersectionality calls into question the traditional binary understanding of identity and systems of oppression (e.g., Black/White, wealthy/poor, male/female), positing that lived realities are based on simultaneously interrelated forms of discrimination and inequity—including racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, nationalism, and ableism (Solórzano and Bernal 2001).

Similarly, critical race theorists in literacy teaching and education spaces need to critique essentialism—the notion that all people in a particular racial group think, act, and experience life in the same ways (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Essentialism obscures the truth of diverse and multilayered identities, and fails to account for the ways in which the intersection of multiple

forms of oppression influence lived experiences. There is considerable scope for new CRT studies to provide nuanced accounts of identity within and across multimodal and digitally networked communication environments. Such research needs to extend beyond the USA to better represent the racial diversity of globalised societies to include races of Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and South America, giving priority to Indigenous peoples, and to the analysis of White possession in language education. There is also significant potential for CRT researchers to combine other historically important and complementary understandings of race and culture, such as from the New Literacy Studies (Author/s, 2010). Such perspectives provide a powerful critique of “autonomous models” that impose Western versions of literacy and its associated ideologies upon other cultures and races—models that fail to recognise diverse communities of language practices (Street, 2003).

In sum, critical race theories point to the endemic nature of race and racism across an array of textual practices that circulate uncritically in educational sites, with the aim of interrupting the subordination of marginalised groups on the basis of race. Racism is a ‘...central organising principle of social life’ (Hughey 2012, 205), and a central organising principle of language education. Critical race theory provides constructive principles and guidance for language educators and researchers to mediate the social construction of race across modes within institutional and societal structures. This well-established theoretical tradition provides critical and pedagogical tools to deconstruct dehumanising, monolithic language programs, and across the curriculum. The pursuit of racial justice and anti-racist language practices are vital in the contemporary context of volatile and historically entrenched racial politics in an era of global geographical displacement, where racial marginalisation and exclusion cannot remain undisturbed in essentialising, homogeneous, and universalising

education systems.

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