

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Andrew P. Johnson, Ph.D.

www.teaching-reading.com

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Critical Race Theory has been much maligned, discounted, and discredited without fully understanding exactly what it is.

Systemic Racism

Systemic racism is that which serves to disadvantage and restrict people in color in ways that advance the interests of those in power (who, by the way, are overwhelming white males). Whether implicit or explicit, intended or unintended, white racism creates and maintains a racial hierarchy that provides advantage to the white majority in terms of opportunities and resources (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevarez, 2019). Specifically, there is a finger on the scale to ensure that the dominant class have continued access to better jobs, loans, housing, schools, teachers, and health care, and that they are treated differently by the criminal justice system.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

A theory is a way to explain a set of facts. It explains phenomena by connecting the data-dots to form a picture. Different theories connect different data dots differently. Critical race theory (CRT) is one such theory used to explain and understand the phenomenon known as systemic racism. CRT invites us to critically our examine policies, practices, assessment, curriculum, courses, pedagogy, and traditions. The questions in Figure 1 can be used toward this end.

Figure .1. Questions related to CRT.

1. Who gains? Who is exploited?
2. Who gets the resources? Who is deprived?
3. Who is advantaged? Who is disadvantaged?
4. How are marginalized populations depicted and portrayed.
5. Whose voice dominates and whose is silenced?
6. Who is included? Who is excluded?
7. Who gets opportunities? Who does not?
8. Who gets punished? Who gets rewarded?
9. Who gets attention? Who gets ignored?
10. Who is making money? Who is paying money?
11. What makes it difficult for some and easier for others?

Critical Race Theory – Seven Big Ideas

Described here are seven big ideas common to most understandings of CRT:

1.Racism is normal. It is so ingrained our societal consciousness that most do not see it; however, our brains see racism in the form of implicit bias (cite). As well, our policies,

programs, laws, and procedures do (cite). This is systemic racism. And it exists, unseen by most, within many teacher education programs (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). For change to occur, we must expose systemic racism as well as that which maintains and perpetuates it. Towards this end, the questions in Figure 16.1 can be used to critically examine all societal systems including those systems used to prepare teacher candidates.

2. Change occurs only when it aligns with the interests of those in power. In other words, advances for people of color will occur only when it coincides with changing economic conditions and the self-interests of elite whites. Figure 2. contains a list of practices that have not been effective in bringing about the necessary changes for the elimination of systemic racism. The current protests will only be successful when it hits the pocketbooks of those in power or when it threatens the political power of those in power. In regard to teacher preparation programs, the hard questions to ask are, who stands to gain in the current system? More simply, who is making money? (Hint: Pearson Publishing.) Who is getting resources? And who is using teacher preparation as a pinata to get elected to office?

Figure 2. Practices not effective in bringing about social justice and racial equity.

What does not work:

- shaming
- name calling
- appealing to a sense of decency
- applying laws or appealing to the judicial system
- moral outrage
- doing nothing
- making speeches

3. Race is a social construct. It has no basis in biology. Race is an arbitrary category based on physical appearance that society has created based around the idea of a mythical white norm. These arbitrary categories become used as a sorting mechanism. This sorting has both material and psychological impacts, creating winners and losers. (cite).

4. No person has a single identity. Instead, there is an intersectionality between race and other marginalized groups. These other groups are based on gender, ability, sexual orientation, class, SES, religion, and culture. Understanding oppression and marginalization in one group enables greater understanding of all marginalized groups.

5. All people in a category do not think and act the same. Physical characteristics referred to by racial terms are not indicative of deeper, underlying commonalities or shared traits. This idea of non-essentialism. One famous black person does not speak for all black people. All people's experiences are different. One person of color should not be asked to be the spokesperson to try to explain systemic racism.

6. The stories of people must be heard. Hearing and honoring the perceptions and experiences of real people is essential in making progress toward social justice and racial equity. However, in education, peoples' voices are muted in two significant ways. The first occurs through the overreliance on controlled experimental research studies to establish cause-effect

relationships. The federal government has determined that this type of research (known as the “gold standard”) is the only legitimate way knowing, thereby de-legitimizing other forms of scholarship. The result is a distorted picture of the very reality it seeks to portray. For example, a controlled experimental study may demonstrate that a certain practice is effective, but it does not tell you for whom, how, under what circumstance, for what purpose, for how long, and to what degree.

This points to the importance of recognizing qualitative research as legitimate and valued forms of knowing as well as controlled experimental studies. Types of qualitative research include surveys, interviews, observations, ethnographies, grounded theory research, case studies, and historical research methods. These should all be used to fully understand human phenomena. All quantitative data must be considered in their broader contexts.

The second way of disallowing the voices of marginalized groups in education is through the disremembering and misremembering of history. Here, history is described only through the lens of the privileged majority. The histories of marginalized groups are misremembered using cartoonish configurations, distortions, omissions, and blatant misrepresentations. Books that illustrate a more complete remembering include *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, (Ortiz, 2018), *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* (Dunbar-Ortiz, (2014), and *Caste: The origins of our Discontents*, (Wilkerson, 2020). Books like these describe a decidedly different version of U.S. history than the McGraw-Hill version of reality provided in most K-12 curriculums. Here, the atrocities of slavery, the greed of colonization, the avarice of imperialism, and the wanton genocide of indigenous peoples are fully portrayed.

7. Cultural parochialism and white superiority are factors in maintaining systemic racism. A belief that one’s own culture is the correct one to be used as a standard of comparison is called cultural parochialism. Here, practices, customs, lifestyles, traditions, views, and values that do not align with the dominant white culture are deemed to be defective, deviant, or inferior. Thus, right and wrong, good and bad, normal and abnormal are all determined by the majority white culture. This is white superiority. This last idea must be considered as a factor contributing to the perpetuation of systemic racism in teacher preparation programs.

Figure 16.3. Seven big ideas related to critical race theory.

1. Racism is normal.
2. Change occurs only when it aligns with the interests of those in power.
3. Race is a social construct.
4. No person has a single identity
5. All people in a category do not think and act the same
6. The stories of people must be heard.
7. Cultural parochialism and white superiority are factors in maintaining systemic racism.

References

- Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2014). *An indigenous peoples' history of the United States*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevarez, A. (2019). The “new racism” of K-12 schools: Centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education*, 41, 182-202.
- Ortiz, P. (2018). *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press
- Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: The origins of our discontents*. New York, NY: Random House.

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

Critical Race Theory: What it is and What it is NOT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df3v6MDw1oc&t=69s>

Racism and Disabilities: An Overview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrDwsJyNbgA>

School-to-Prison Pipeline

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hap3Bs2GhMI&t=7s>

PODCASTS

Critical Race Theory: An Overview

<https://rss.com/podcasts/drandy/217536/>

Helping White People Understand Systemic Racism

<https://rss.com/podcasts/drandy/218004/>

How Can We Get More Teachers of Color Into our Classrooms?

<https://rss.com/podcasts/drandy/204150/>