

FOREWORD: Critical Race Realities

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While preparing this volume of the journal, we continue to see emotions running high in the public discourse on issues of race and racism. Notably, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become on the forefront of discussions and contentious conversations in many forums. The cycles of ignorance and intolerance continue to rage as if the CRT is a theoretical impossibility, a social taboo or political minefield. On the contrary, this framework has been around for a while and evolved out of the need to dismantle the status quo which benefits the privileged mainstream White populations at the expense of the masses of people representing a wide range of races, cultures, religions, ethnicities, and the like (e.g. see Bell, 1992; Bell, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). In other words, CRT is not a hypothetical scenario that is still being tested for validity and reliability. In fact, it is the true measure that continually tests our social realities on daily basis, a test that we continue to fail miserably as a nation founded on the principles of democracy and pluralism.

Apart from the destructive rhetoric and chaos, the fact remains that racism and bigotry are well and alive and continue to plague every institution around us including schools, thanks to those who have always sought to maintain the status quo and silence the voices of the oppressed. Jane Elliott put it succinctly as she frequently states, “Education in this country is about how to maintain the status quo and to perpetuate racism.” Unfortunately, this has dragged for so long, not so much because of the remission society experiences when racism cancers seem to have been neutralized, but largely because of the pathologies of silences that, in fact, serve as “the heartbeat of racism” (Shields, 2012; Kendi, 2019).

The micro-events, small stories, and minute realities around us tell it all as they reflect the bigger narrative and vice versa. At the local levels, we have seen the turns the rage of racism has taken. For example, initiatives towards equity, diversity and inclusion have become public taboos. They have also become a threat to the cozy status quo many enjoy. For those who are drafted to speak out and act, they have to endure the vicious attacks and resistance not only by the enemies who overtly are anti-equity and anti-social justice, but also the passive panders who enable them.

Notwithstanding, there is always hope and yes, we have come a long way. Juneteenth has finally been officially acknowledged and recognized; the Tulsa Massacre has become canonical... justice, albeit partially, has been served in George Floyd’s case. Still, we have a long way to go to narrow the existing gaps—all sort of gaps. One of the major steps in doing so, is to first and foremost, close the acknowledgement gap by becoming aware of the ills that affect us all. Of course, we always should not lose sight of what is right with us by getting over-engaged with what is wrong. But narrowing the acknowledgement gap requires us to face the

challenges and embrace differences. While doing so, we should not provoke the anger we seek to avoid; i.e. racism is not to be confronted with racism; bigotry, discrimination and prejudice should not be given as the dose of one's own medicine; and more importantly otherizing, instead of humanizing, one another is detrimental to all of us.

As the voices of ignorance continue, so will we through the platform of the Center for Leadership, Equity and Research (CLEAR). Activism, anti-racism, and advocacy for the oppressed will continue to be our mission. Critical Race Methodology and Praxis remain the driving epistemologies for the stories, research genres, authentic narratives, and counter-stories of those who have been largely marginalized and underrepresented. Research is also on the top of the Center's agenda. Having this in mind, **Ken Magdaleno**, **Founder** and **CEO** of the **CLEAR**, compiled a thoughtful Preface on a timely subject of conversation in which he delineates the basic tenets of the Critical Race Theory. While dispelling the myths and highlighting the facts of CRT, **Magdaleno** asserts that such theory is and should be used as a "framework that is committed to a social justice agenda intent on eliminating all forms of subordination of people. We can begin to uncover our own forms of racism by first recognizing their existence in our life."

Recognizing the role race, ethnicity, social status, and other factors play in students' lives and their families, **Arnold Sánchez Ordaz** and **Eduardo Mosqueda** examine the effect of belonging and peer influences on the achievement gap of immigrant high school students. Studying second-generation immigrant Filipino and Mexican-origin students, their findings underscore the need for "establishing school environments that foster a strong sense of school belonging" which "can help mitigate the academic disparities associated with students' ethnic background, immigrant generational status, and family socioeconomic status (SES) on their academic achievement."

Eduardo R. Muñoz-Muñoz and **Allison Briceño** explore the leadership and organizational structures required to expand Dual Language (DL) programs beyond the elementary years. In their case study approach, they found that the "primary organizational issues that impacted the program's success were a lack of articulation, a problematic DL middle school experience, weak relational trust, and an absence of professional learning and collaboration opportunities." The study has direct implications within the evolving mandates in California for creating effective bilingual education models and programs with "an aligned vision that is well understood by all constituents--site and district administrators, coaches, teachers, students, and families."

In an attempt to provide an account of the educational achievement rates among Black, Latinx, and Asian students, **Enrique Pumar** examines data from the Digest of Educational Statistics and other sources to investigate educational disparities. Comparisons among the three groups studies, the paper "documents the improvement in education among Latinx students in recent years despite falling behind other groups." In addition, the "data suggests that the educational transition rate from secondary school to postsecondary school is an urgent concern to be addressed by educational leaders." The article attempts to "demonstrate that the legacy of national development and a structuration theoretical framework could potentially be useful to explain different rates of educational achievement."

Drawing on some of the key tenets Shields' (2012) Transformative Leadership Paradigm, **Kimmie Tang**, **Kitty Fortner** and **Ronald Morgan** explore "both the effectiveness and importance of special education teachers and school counselor leaders through a literature review and qualitative semi-structured survey." Their findings "showed how school counselors and

special education teacher leaders work with principals to help increase the culture of success at schools.”

The final article of this issue is a posthumous contribution by **Michael L. Washington** who regrettably passed away during the last phases of the editorial process to produce this volume. Thus, it would be fitting to quote his last few words of the piece in his memory as his words seem immortal. He wrote:

Accountability is a key component as well. It is leadership that typically directs, guides, and models the behaviors we wish to see in our schools. It is this same leadership that typically provides support to students and teachers who are practicing effective pedagogy and other socially just practices that are effective at all levels and in all educational environments. This suggests that we must at least invest as much in developing more effective leadership practices as we do our pedagogy if we are to change this cycle of educational systematic failure.

Finally, the volume concludes with two thoughtful book reviews and analyses. First, **Pablo D. Montes** reviewed Ayala et al.’s (2018) collection, *Par EntreMundos: A Pedagogy of the Americas* of articles on timely issues related to various domains of equity, social justice and diversity as well as those postulated by CRT. In his summary of the review, Montes concludes, “Overall, the book is timely and provides the importance of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a legitimate and necessary framework for students. In many cases, the students were the experts of their communities. Such a framework provides an avenue for students to think critically and beyond the worlds they are forced to live in and towards an understanding of possible worlds; a possibility that exists is Entre Mundos.”

The second book review was compiled by **Shaylyn Marks** and **David Sandles** who aptly provide an insightful analysis of Gholdy Muhammad’s (2020) work, *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*. The reviewers are consummate proud Black educators who made keen connections their own personal and professional experiences and reflect a genuine passion for achieving equity and social justice. They profoundly prefaced by stating that “... we constantly interrogate elements of the existing curriculum and sometimes recoil at the paucity of inclusivity regarding Black voices, classroom practices that feature the historical richness of Black people, and a healthy respect for the oral tradition of Black people.” Marks and Sandles conclude with sorely needed call for action based on Muhammad’s work and her Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy (CHRL) model. They conclude: “Overall, we need to make space for this framework in our teacher education programs and classrooms. While at times we craved more attention and detail in regards to the implementation of this framework, *Cultivating Genius* creates a foundation for us as an educational community to build upon. We hope to see more work that uses the HRL Framework as a springboard to further discuss the intricacies and results of engaging in this practice.”

With this volume of the *Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research (JLER)*, we continue to enhance our efforts while marching towards diversity, equity and inclusion. Simultaneously, once again, researchers, practitioners, educators, leaders, and activists have joined to share their voices and perspectives in this regular edition. Their contributions underscore the importance of the work ahead of us. Readers will find a collection of contributions that hopefully direct the discourse towards humanizing the issues. They also are enticed to join the march towards equity and social justice.

Finally, on behalf of the JLER team, we are grateful to all the team members and their dedication to the cause by joining forces with the contributors, reviewers, and everyone without whom this volume would not have materialized.

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