

**Literature Review**Introduction – Statement of the Problem

Schools function as socializing institutions that maintain the existing socioeconomic, political, and racial status quo of the majority despite inequitable outcomes for a rapidly growing diverse student population. Traditional educational policy and practice serve as *transmission tools* that require all students to meet normative standards of the dominant culture irrespective of racial, ethnic, or linguistic diversity; that sorts students by socioeconomic status; that engenders a hegemonic school culture that contributes to disproportionate achievement and discipline gaps for students of color and those with exceptionalities; and that ultimately contributes to the continued marginalization of disadvantaged students far beyond their K-12 experience. Despite the advancements within public education and decades of reform, the system has an established history of inequitable experiences for students of color while demonstrably privileging white students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). The failure of schools to provide equitable educational experiences for all students is significant as evidenced by the achievement gap (Aud, Wilkinson-Flicker, Kristapovich, Rathbun, Wang, & Zhang, 2013) and the discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba, Noguera, 2010; Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015) which oftentimes serve as a pipeline to prison (Horsford, 2011 ; Noguera, 2008; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014); administrators and educators must act to address these disparities. Researchers may argue the contextual effects of neighborhood and family versus ineffective teaching, mismanaged schools, and the effects of high-stakes standardized testing and their impacts on student outcomes, but schools must accept the fact that there are ineffective, inequitable practices and policies in place that facilitators of learning cannot ignore: Hanushek's (2016) analysis of the 2013 National Assessment for Educational Progress data in comparison to the historic Coleman Report¹ notes that if narrowing the achievement gap continues at the current rate, it will be approximately 250 years before the black-white math gap closes and over 150 years until the reading gap closes.

Currently, approximately 80% of all public school teachers are white, middle-class, and monolingual (Aud et al., 2013); the current make-up of the student population, on the other hand, is 48% white (NCES, 2016). By the year 2024, projected figures put students of color at an expected 55% of the population (NCES, 2016). The cultural mismatch between teachers and students creates obstacles for effective instruction (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Hauc, 2011). White teachers have historically considered culturally and linguistically diverse students from a deficit slant; where

¹ Commissioned by the U.S. Office of Education in accordance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and published in 1966 "Equality of Educational Opportunity", otherwise known as the Coleman Report, which detailed inequities in student education. Some highlights of the report include: 15% of black students meeting academic expectations achieved in the upper 50% of the white student population; the awareness that "[achievement] tests do not measure intelligence, nor attitudes, nor qualities of character. Furthermore they are not, nor are they intended, to be 'culture free.' Quite the reverse: they are culture bound"; and that school differences and teacher effectiveness have significant impacts on student outcomes. See Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F., & York, R. (1966). The Coleman Report. *Equality of Educational Opportunity*.

differences from and failures to meet expectations of the dominant culture are regarded as problematic or deemed as academic inadequacies or behavioral issues of the “disadvantaged” (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). The principal means to effectively teach students is through instruction. However, when the instruction is not responsive to all students, it contributes to the persistent, ever-widening gap that creates, however unintentional, a tiered education system where inequity and injustice are perpetuated. Culturally responsive teaching is one method for interrupting the current system, a pedagogy intended to meet the needs of all students and close the gap.

Culturally Responsive Education It’s More Than Just Good Teaching

The American education system must enact a paradigm shift to integrate effective, culturally responsive instructional practices to support and maintain equitable educational attainment for all students, but what does being culturally responsive mean? “Culturally responsive teaching facilitates and supports the achievement of all students, and refers to teaching that, uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them . . . it teaches to and through the strengths of these students” (Gay, 2010b, p. 31). Culturally responsive practices endeavor to address the cultural mismatch between teachers and their students by establishing learning environments that foster respect and tolerance, where the diversity of culture, language, race, and exceptional learners are valued (Gay, 2002; Milner, 2011; Prater & Devereaux, 2009).

Although cultural responsiveness incorporates overall tenants of effective teaching, such as communicating high expectations and actively engaging students, it goes beyond “just good teaching”. Ladson-Billings (1995a) discusses this argument put forth by educators when they respond “but, it’s just good teaching” when learning about culturally relevant practices. By claiming that being culturally responsive is just good teaching, the insinuation is that existing practices already incorporate these tenets and the suggestions for improving practices are nothing new. Ladson-Billings’ (1995a) question then is, if it’s just good teaching then why isn’t that evidenced in outcomes for students of color? The author sought to challenge these preconceived notions about the status quo of what good teaching is and puts forth suggestions on how to incorporate culturally relevant teaching practices for educating diverse student learners. Specifically, these teaching practices intentionally incorporate the cultural strengths, assets, funds of knowledge, and other cultural capital of diverse learners, whereas “good teaching” may not. To effectively teach all students, educators must have the skills to successfully implement and measure culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ware, 2006).

In order to apply culturally responsive methods in the classroom and in schools generally, teachers and educational leadership must abandon hegemonic understandings of race, culture, ethnicity, class, and gender; the aim must be to engage and provide opportunities to support academic achievement for students of color comparable to their white peers (Gay, 2010a; Zozakiewicz, 2010). The American education system cannot continue to apply the systemic, institutional authority of the dominant culture that supports privileging of white students while prohibiting the

success of diverse learners (Hayes & Juarez, 2012). Schools must develop the means to challenge the structures that inhibit educational social justice; understanding key theories that intersect race, culture, and education can inform educators' understanding of differential educational achievement. Traditional educational models, instructional practices, and school/district policies fail to take into consideration the broader sociocultural context of their students' communities and families.

Theory to Practice

Critical Race Theory

Recognizing students' race as an important sociocultural context to be considered within educational policy and practice requires educators to challenge existing assumptions about race and culture and to accept that racism is entrenched in American history; that social, legal, and economic policies or structures exist that subordinate people of color and privileges whites (Horsford, 2010b). Critical race theory provides a critical analysis of the relationship between policy, structures, and race (Crenshaw, 2011). CRT defines race as socially constructed (Ladson-Billings, 1997) and should be considered as a "difference which exist[s] only in society [and that] makes sense only in relationship to other racial categories, having no meaningful independent existence" (Lopez, 2000, p.171). Committing to equity in education without discussing race is impossible. Educational leaders must understand that schools can reproduce the structures of power and privilege and that working to combat oppression or inequities by virtue of perceived deficits associated with social class, race, or ethnic heritage is an ever-evolving and continuing process that necessitates a personal commitment to critical discourse (Capper, 2015). It is one thing to examine race and culture, in an attempt to understand how it plays out in schools and classrooms; it is something else to engage in the practice of developing and maintaining an educational system with anti-oppressive, anti-racist agenda. Critical race theorists analyze education and race through various tenets, such as structures within the educational system that contribute to pervasive racism as evidenced in the essential re-segregation of schools (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). School administrators and instructional staff are obliged to take into consideration that traditional curriculum and assessments employ knowledge hegemony in which white culture is ordinary, affirmative, and ideal where the foundation for learning is assumed to be common among all students (Ford & Quinn, 2010; Laughter, 2011; Levine-Rasky, 2012), a tenet known as Whiteness as property (Aggarwal, 2016; Annamma, 2014; Harris, 1993). CRT criticizes the color-blindness approach as ignoring the cultural experiences of students and applying a one standard for all practice replete with biases (Capper, 2015).

While CRT's focus is obviously on race, educational leaders must look at the intersectionality of differences, including, social class, culture, and ethnicity to understand positionality and the complex transactions of cultural competence. However, intersectionality cannot be confronted without first addressing the issues of race and equity in education, which is oftentimes ignored or avoided in any true sense of critical discourse; without directly addressing power, privilege, and engrained racism in schools, how do educators expect to truly address disproportionate educational outcomes for racialized groups?_The terms culturally responsive or cultural competence are mentioned among professional learning communities, in attempts to incorporate race and culture into instruction, and in initiatives that claim to address racial diversity. However, these endeavors are mostly superficial and not only distract from the core issue, but also fail to disrupt the normative structures of the dominant culture

embedded in our educational system as evidenced in the persistent academic and discipline gaps between white students and students of color. Ladson-Billings (2014) states:

What state departments, school districts and individual teachers are now calling 'culturally relevant pedagogy' is often a distortion and corruption of the central ideas I attempted to promulgate. The idea that adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting 'diverse' images makes one 'culturally relevant' seem to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to". (p. 82)

True culturally relevant pedagogy is comprehensive and goes beyond a one-time lesson or designated period of instruction, but is implemented in everyday practices from policy to instruction that centrally features cooperation, community, and connectedness (Gay, 2010a). A commitment to cultural responsiveness requires educators to “develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them [students] to critique the cultural norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a p.162). Culturally responsive lessons incorporate students’ “funds of knowledge,” the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skill” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p.133), that diverse learners bring to the classroom and views them as a vital part of the learning process instead of a deficit to overcome.

Funds of Knowledge

The concept of Funds of Knowledge (FoK) involves an understanding that each person has his/her own personal knowledge that is derived from a combination of cultural traits, history, and family life (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). FoK emphasizes the presence of knowledge, skills and strategies among students that were produced beyond the school environment, and thus are not appreciated by the teacher (Rodriguez, 2013). Employing a FoK method as part of instructional practice involves teachers taking on the role of ethnographers to seek out deeper understandings of their students and the communities represented in their schools. The education system repeatedly fails at democratizing the process for gathering meaningful input in to the formation of pedagogical practices that help to realize the full potential of the diverse learners both inside and beyond the classroom (Zipin, 2009); FoK provides a means to build student-teacher relationships grounded with the appreciation that all students can be considered competent and bring knowledge and life experiences that contribute to learning (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Subero, Vila, & Esteban-Guitart, 2015). Rodriguez (2013) summarizes the primary themes around the Funds of Knowledge framework:

- 1) Engaging students in the co-construction of knowledge to deepen or extend their academic learning
- 2) Recognizing and encouraging the utilization of the various sources of knowledge in the classroom, including connection between family and community connections with academic content as well as youth and popular culture
- 3) Moving beyond academic instruction to process of classroom transformation involving the teachers and students as agents for social justice within and beyond the classroom

Educators can apply the FoK framework to create learning experiences that are culturally centered to enhance student engagement and increase academic achievement. Furthermore, the instructional and pedagogical choices of teachers are directed and inspired by the interests of the students and applied to current problems and issues present in their communities. This involves a certain level of mutual trust throughout the teaching and learning process to address social injustice in their current environments (Rodriguez, 2013). Central to the social justice potential of the FoK framework is how utilizing students' "*funds of knowledge*" counteracts the deficit model of thinking often attributed to diverse learners (Darder, 2012).

Social Justice in Education

Social justice pedagogy necessitates the recognition that the concept of knowledge is socially constructed, subjective, and dependent on the intersection of an individual's positionality and the values, beliefs, identities, and experiences that result from that positionality (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Positionality refers to the specific conditions of a social situation where a person's position in relation to others is based on certain social structures and the systems that maintain them (Takacs, 2002). These social structures include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, ability, and religion, which collectively have an effect on the experiences of people within a social context, such as school (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014). Social justice perspectives in education offer a challenge to stratified educational policies that reinforce socially constructed group memberships where the dominant group is systemically advantaged and systemically disadvantaged groups are considered subordinate (Gorski, 2006a; Schoorman & Bogotch, 2010b; Tatum, 2000). Educators must consider their own positionality and participate in critical, reflective dialogue and epistemology to address racism and promote social justice (Banks, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Picower, 2009).

Social justice praxis, moving from theory to practice, can incorporate a multitude of theories and actions to promote educational equity (Theoharis, 2007) that are complex and sometimes difficult to apply (Scanlon, 2013), however educational leadership must focus on an ethic of care to forestall subtractive practices that dismiss, devalue, or discard students' cultures (Valenzuela, 2005). Furthermore, school administrators must engage themselves and their staff in reflective processes that recognize and challenge institutional and structural racism (Case & Hemmings, 2005; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Sixty-two years have passed since the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* at Topeka (1954) and schools have failed to eliminate educational inequities that deny equal access to high quality education. Educational leadership practices that democratize educational practice to ensure that all students have the same academic success rather than ensuring that all students are treated the same (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Fraise & Brooks, 2015) are central to a socially just learning environment. Theoharris (2007) defines social justice leadership to mean that "principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (p.223). The extant literature on school transformation and turnaround in low-performing, high-poverty schools where issues of

equity are oftentimes the most pronounced demonstrates that when leaders commit to organizational transformation premised on new positionalities, reevaluations of student teacher relationships, and progressive conceptions of school communities, student outcomes improve (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Tallant, & Rahmatullah, 2010; Robinson & Aroncia, 2015; Steiner & Hassel, 2011). Whereas, when the focus for change is solely on technical improvements, such as improving test scores, improving instruction based on walk-through data, and controlling practice through the use of sanctions and rewards, school culture deteriorates (Mette & Scribner, 2014). Developing a school culture that integrates ongoing cultural learning, acknowledges historic and current cultural and racial power dynamics, and considers a holistic understanding of students to restructure schools to meet the needs of all students is a quality of cultural competence (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive practices act as an instrument for social justice, a means to balance equity and equality in education in meaningful ways.

Equity vs. Equality

There is a long-standing mistaken belief that the terms equity and equality are interchangeable; while they are related, the distinction between them is important (Secada, 1989). Within the educational system, equity refers to fairness; providing the resources for all students to be successful by the use of a range of strategies, practices, and policies that are fair and just, but not necessarily equal. Equality, on the other hand, refers to parity, providing the same resources to all students with the expectation that they will be successful (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Practices of equality intend to support fairness, but these practices are only successful if all students start with the same foundation, represent the same style of learning, and exhibit the same learning needs (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Milner & Williams, 2008; Tate, 2008). Educational inequity occurs when unfair, unjust, or biased practices and policies contribute to disparate student outcomes as demonstrated in the disproportionate representation of black students in special education (Easton-Brooks & Davis, 2007); the underrepresentation of students of color in gifted education (Card & Giuliano, 2015; Ford, Scott, Moore, & Amos, 2013); gaps in graduation rates between students of color and white students (Storer, 2012); disproportionate discipline rates of black and Hispanic students compared to their white peers (Losen et al., 2015); and racial disparities in achievement (Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Hanselman, Bruch, Gamoran, & Borman, 2014). A key component to combating inequity is to cultivate cultural competence: Conceiving an awareness of positionality, confronting implicit biases, recognizing the permanence of racism, understanding interest convergence (“recognizing that those empowered are not moved to change policies for disadvantaged groups unless they are also beneficiaries” [Bass, 2015, p.714]), deconstructing whiteness, and constructing appropriate pedagogy around these tenets to provide an education that is responsive to the identities and cultural backgrounds of all students (Hawley & Nieto, 2010).

Colorblindness and melting pot metaphors

Historically, the educational system has approached racial, cultural, and/or ethnic differences from *colorblind* or *melting pot* perspectives that recommend treating all students equally without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity that consequently ignores the experiences of diverse students (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). These metaphors serve as ideological tools that promote a hegemonic understanding of race/culture; statements like “I don’t even see color” fail to confront inequities (Picower, 2009) and force students to overcome implicit and explicit biases in order to be successful in school (Mazzei, 2008). Melting pot metaphors and colorblind perspectives may contribute to the perpetuation of problematizing or isolating diverse students who do not fit the normed reference of “same.” Horsford (2011) explicates:

“critical race scholars dispute liberal ideals of colorblindness (color or race doesn’t matter), meritocracy (access and achievement are based on individual worthiness), and neutrality of the law (all persons are treated equally under the law), all of which conceptualize equality and fairness as the removal of legal racial barriers rather than the equalizing of resources” (p.29).

Educators tend to dismiss race as an issue to avoid difficult discussions and having to critically examine their own perceptions around race (exposing their cultural naiveté and confronting their limited understanding of race and experience with diverse cultures; as well as revealing possible implicit or explicit biases) and how their positionality within majority structures impacts student learning (Athanases & Martin, 2006; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000; Kyles & Olafson, 2008; Sleeter, 2001). When acknowledging achievement gaps, educators often point to socioeconomic issues as the root cause instead of racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995c; Orfield & Lee, 2005). Focusing on socioeconomic correlations denies the realities of the intersectionality between race and poverty-related burdens. The correlation between low-performing schools and students’ race and class are not indicative of students’ potential, but of the legislative, economic, and social policies that contribute to the establishment and preservation of racist structures that perpetuate racial folklore and myths regarding poverty (Hilfiker, 2011; Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Pathologizing the Poor

The “demographic imperative” (Banks, 2008) highlight the experiences of students of color versus students in schools that are predominately white by emphasizing “the disparities deeply imbedded in the American educational system” (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The demographic imperative is described as the convergence of three factors: [1] the diversity of the student population, [2] the homogeneity of educators (instructional staff and administrative leadership), and [3] the “demographic divide” which calls attention to the disproportionality in “opportunities, resources and achievement among student groups that differ from one another racially, culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p.4). Classist arguments regarding the culture of poverty (e.g. Payne, 1996) present oversimplifications of the realities of poor communities that fail to take into account the structural inequalities and institutionalized oppression that effect the educational outcomes for students in disadvantaged communities.

Ullucci and Howard (2015) examine four myths of poverty (p.175) that teacher educators accept and preserve concerning the academic potential of students who come from impoverished backgrounds:

1. The Bootstraps Myth – anyone can pull themselves out of poverty
2. The Individual Faults Myth – those in poverty are lazy and/or irresponsible
3. The Educability Myth – children in poverty are not particularly smart or school-ready
4. The Culture of Poverty Myth – people in poverty share a common “culture”

The Bootstraps Myth is long-held belief centered in the “American Dream” that states that anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and achieve their economic goals (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). This belief not only fails to take into account how structural processes support and, at times, worsen poverty, but also ignores the inequities in these communities including failing schools, limited job opportunities, and geographic isolation. Educators must come to the realization that students and families in these communities lack only in opportunities based on historically discriminatory barriers and not in intellect, morality, or values (Glynn, Cowie, Otrell-Cass, & Macfarlane 2010; Gorski, 2006b; Ng & Rury 2006; Osei-Kofi, 2005; Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

The Individual Faults Myth relies on assumptions about the poor rooted in “folk wisdom” and bigotry to explain individual reasons behind poverty as applicable en masse (Baptist & Rehman, 2011; Books, 2004; Ullucci & Howard, 2015; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). Beliefs surrounding this myth include notions regarding the devaluation of education among the poor and the notion that poor people don’t want to work (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). These beliefs ignore the realities of people in living in poverty such as, underemployment, low-wage jobs, wage gaps for women, discriminatory hiring practices, deficient quality child care options, geographic steering that ultimately results in desegregation, and traditionally prejudicial policies legislated at the expense of the disadvantaged (Ayscue & Orfield, 2015; Quiroz & Lindsay, 2015; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Educators can use the individual faults myth to deflect professional responsibility and place blame on lazy parents who don’t value education, fail to support their children at home, and lack the resources necessary to support educational efforts of the schools, so how can they “fix” “these kids” (Nygreen, 2013).

The Educability Myth perpetuates the idea that poor children have “different” cognitive and intellectual abilities than children who are not disadvantaged, a belief that has been extensively challenged by the research (Berliner, 2006, 2009, 2013; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). This view goes against what teacher educators know to be true: that all students can learn (Hopkins, 2013). This myth allows for the categorization of disadvantaged students as atypical from their privileged peers and sets a reference for “normal” children that is based on both implicit and explicit biases (APA, 2012).

The Culture of Poverty Myth is based on a single, limited study of small communities of poverty that was generalized to suggest a universal culture for all those who live in poverty (Lewis, 1961). This myth pathologizes the poor as people with inherent cultural systems that keep them in poverty (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Ullucci & Howard describe teacher educators that believe this myth as considering the problems of disadvantage students to be

“deficiencies beyond their scope as educators” (p.9). Gorski (2008) encourages the rejection of deficit theories to explain educational inequities:

“Education that explains inequality by demonizing disenfranchised communities must be abandoned. I must be wary of any supposed intercultural paradigm that, like the ‘culture of poverty’ myth, attributes values or worldviews to anyone based on one dimension of identity. I must recognize deficit theory as a diversion from the goal of dismantling oppression (Gorski, 2008, p. 522).

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2016), 31.4 million children (44%) live in low-income families and 15.4 million (21%) live in poor families. We cannot discount 65% of children as academically different due to their demographic, economic, and geographical characteristics. When educators, especially those working in high poverty schools, dismiss race and use poverty as an explanation to justify the continued marginalization of disadvantaged students they are engaging in the “othering” of an entire group of people: perceiving the disadvantaged as collectively different from *them* (Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Developing a Culturally Responsive Mindset

Whiteness and School Culture

Given that white culture is overrepresented in schools (Ahmad & Boser, 2014), it is not surprising that the dominant culture dictates school culture. School culture is comprised of “formal and informal dynamics related to espoused and hidden curricula, instructional strategies, administrator-staff-teacher-student interaction, language, communication, and policy development and implementation” (Fraise & Brooks, 2015, p. 11). Whiteness is a theoretical concept that encompasses normative references that support systemic power and privilege whether it is deliberate or unconscious; the system favors whites (Milner, 2005; Utt & Tochluk, 2016; Matias & Grosland, 2016). White culture, has an, oftentimes, invisible quality, yet is the hegemonic force that exists as the dominant racial reality that can be both oppressive and non-agentic (Flores, 2016; Horsford, 2011; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1997). Whiteness exists within “macro-level structures and institutionalized practices that lock in historically derived advantages” (Donnor, 2015, p.2). Gay (2010b) explains the relationship between culture and education as a “cultural fabric, primarily of European and middle-class origins, so deeply ingrained in the structures, ethos, program, and etiquette of schools that it is considered simply the “normal” and “right” thing to do” (p.9). Critical Whiteness Theory (CWT) (Frankenberg, 1993) is an extension of Critical Race Theory that explains how people live racially structured lives and how whiteness is a structural phenomenon that privileges white people by creating a common sense ideal of identity (Hughey, 2012) which forms a center for US society in terms of agency and resources (Gillborn, 2005). Whiteness does not place blame for being white, but emphasizes the privilege of being white in that whiteness is an ideological structure that rejects anything outside of the fixed construction of normative white epistemologies

surrounding race and culture. Understanding whiteness in education means recognizing how traditional teacher education, pedagogy, professional organizations, and curriculum support hegemonic ideas of education and maintain a hierarchical balance of power (Matias, 2013; Picower, 2009). Culturally relevant pedagogy needs to include an explicit deconstruction of whiteness, employing counter-narratives to challenge white epistemology (Aggarwal, 2016; Matias & Liou, 2015). Educators have a duty to apply critical methods to their pedagogical practice, to engage social justice as praxis and go beyond the orthodox standards that have been accepted as cultural competence, that are little more than platitudes

“Plainly stated, increased exposure to people of color, multicultural theories, and explicit commitments to social justice is simply not enough to eradicate Whiteness in teacher education. To self-invest in an antiracist education system, interrogations of how Whiteness mutates, survives, and re-fashions itself must be taken up, even if it means uncomfortable discussions” (Matias & Grosland, 2016, p. 152).

Transformative Pedagogy

Transformation and School Culture

“The call for a recognition of cultural diversity, a rethinking of ways of knowing, a deconstruction of old epistemologies, and the [associated] demand that there be a transformation in our classrooms, in how we teach and what we teach, has been a necessary revolution—one that seeks to restore life to a corrupt and dying academy” (hooks, 1994, p. 30).

A universal, system wide approach to promoting equity in education is necessary for the reason that the problems of the U.S. educational system are inherently systemic; the system consistently fails the same demographic of students (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Peske & Haycock, 2006). The challenges to combating educational inequities can be translated into new opportunities and resources in education. The new conceptualization of culture and identity moves beyond the mere celebration of differences but also incorporates critical self-reflexivity and empowerment of unheard voices (Kim & Slapac, 2015). Too often, educators take their own identity and cultural values for granted and become unknowing transmitters of their own values, knowledge and learning tools. Consequently, this results in the loss of potential funds of knowledge that students bring to the classroom. Teachers’ apolitical assumption of teaching as neutral endorses the assimilationist view of learning for diverse students (Capper, 2015; Kim & Slapac, 2015).

Kim & Slapac (2015) propose that by acknowledging multiple modes of learning into the curriculum, teachers can create an additional realm of scholarship that goes beyond the connection between family and school life, but also creates an empowering third space where students can share diverse perspectives and identities. Furthermore, the author describes culturally responsive, transformative pedagogy as building on the potential of students as active designers of meanings, identities, and cultures. Berger (2004) expands on the idea of a third space and describes the “growing edge” as a space where teachers are taken to the “edge” of their meaning which she believes pushes them to “move outside of their current understanding and into a new place” (p.388). This aligns with the notion that to truly transform teachers to social justice educators, they [teachers] will have to go through a cycle of

questioning their positionality through deepened understanding of current injustices and inequities. Baily, Stribling, & McGowan (2014) explicate that this deepened understanding can be provided through intentional professional developments, such as experiential learning. The authors further described this experience through the lens of the “growing edge.” Experiential learning can provide opportunities to realize teachers’ current social reality (finding and recognizing the edge) and explore power and privilege (building new foundations at the edge), engage with people in diverse communities (company along the edge), and discomfort from potentially benefiting from the privilege that comes with being white or male (Baily et. al, 2014). This transformation is a cyclical process that requires teachers to challenge the inequalities of access and inequities of opportunity for particular students or groups who desire the freedom of a high-quality education.

Conclusion

The critical examinations of theories regarding the intersectionality of race, culture, class, and education explored in this document would characterize the enduring nationwide achievement and discipline gaps for students of color as, actually, equity gaps that uphold historical practices that marginalize diverse learners and are reflective of ineffective and unfair educational practices. Critical theorists would argue that practices that uphold inequities must be countered by targeted reforms such as culturally responsive or culturally competent practices. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), culturally relevant pedagogy is framed around three standards:

- (1) “Students must experience academic success”
- (2) “Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence
- (3) “Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). Villegas and Lucas (2007) define cultural competence as (p.2): “Having a stance around equity and diversity along with possessing a body of knowledge and skills for effective cross-cultural interaction. On the other hand, cultural responsiveness is something a culturally competent educator does” (p. 2).

Educators and school administrators must consider how they will confront historically, inequitable practices in order to commit to anti-biased policies and equitable education for all. In order to provide equitable education for an increasingly diverse student population, *it is imperative* for school leadership to define what Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) means for their districts and how it will be applied to teaching and learning in their schools.

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