

**The House That Race Built:
Critical Pedagogy,
African-American Education,
and the Re-Conceptualization
of a Critical Race Pedagogy**

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Critical pedagogy has been widely characterized as a crucial construct in challenging the inequalities that have evolved in the context of schooling in the U.S. Evidence of this can be found in critical pedagogy's attempt to offer critique of the analytic connections between race and education within the context of the African-American struggle for humanity. In particular, critical pedagogy has functioned as a discourse on schooling and inequality that has developed in tandem with theories of race and pedagogical practice in ways that reflect the context of African-American education. This work expounds upon our previous scholarship to offer a broadened conception of critical race pedagogy that incorporates central aspects of critical pedagogy but is drawn from African-American epistemological frameworks.

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Origins of Critical Pedagogy within Critical Theory

Critical pedagogy has maintained its status as an important component of educational research and inquiry since the early 1980s when critical educational theorist popularized the concept in academic writing (Bennett & LeCompte, 1999; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). Since that time, these theorists have continued to struggle with the central question of critical pedagogy: “Whose interests are served?” (Bennet & LeCompte 1999, p. 250). In answer to this query, Gordon (1995) asserts that “Critical theory seeks to understand the origins and operation of repressive social structures. Critical theory is the critique of domination. It seeks to focus on a world becoming less free, to cast doubt on claims of technological scientific rationality, and then to imply that present configurations do not have to be as they are” (p. 190). Not only do critical theorists attempt to discover why oppressive structures exist and offer criticisms of their effects; they also explore the ways in which we can transform our society. In this sense, critical theory is not simply a critique of social structures it is an analysis of power relations that asks questions regarding: what constitutes power; who holds power; and in what ways power utilized to benefit those already in power.

Critical theory emanated from “the Frankfurt School” under the auspices of cultural theorists Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm, and Walter Benjamin) worked together at the Institute for Social Science Research originally located in Frankfurt, Germany. The group began to form under the leadership of Max Horkheimer in the 1930s but later changed location several times throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Eventually, the group returned to Germany during the early 1950s (Giroux, 1997; Bennett & LeCompte, 1999).

Although no single or unifying theory emerged from their work, the Frankfurt School generated a strong set of critiques arguing that social phenomenon could not be understood solely through the use of scientific methods. This was an important challenge because the use of scientific methods in analyzing social phenomenon was widely thought to be scientific, objective, and value-free (Bennett & LeCompte, 1999). Instead, the Frankfurt School researchers felt that both social phenomenon and the scientific research methods used to explore them were tied to social and historical contexts that made neither of them neutral or value-free.

Other individual theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Jurgen Habermas, and Michael Foucault also played important roles in the development of critical theory. Antonio Gramsci (1971) was an Italian theorist and activist who explored the ways in which individuals were active rather than passive agents in the face of even the most oppressive conditions. He coined the term “hegemony” to describe the complex process that allows dominant groups to establish and maintain control of subordinates by using specific ideologies and particular forms of authority that are reproduced via social and institutional practices (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996). Gramsci believed that this hegemony would be challenged and social

change would occur only when an intellectually sparked “revolutionary consensus” occurred amongst the subordinate classes. This would, in turn, lead to the creation of alternative institutions that would defy the hegemony previously imposed by dominant groups (Bennett & LeCompte, 1999).

Jurgen Habermas and Michael Foucault both developed special interest in the relationship between knowledge and power. They strongly believed that knowledge was an important social resource that rivaled land, money, status, etc. in terms of importance. Foucault believed that knowledge and power were largely synonymous thus focusing on power as an agent controlled by those who defined the standard of “true” knowledge. Habermas asserted that the restriction of information in society fostered and maintained inequality through controlling access to knowledge (Bennett & LeCompte, 1999). Thus he advocated that the “free flow” of ideas was important for the creation and maintenance of “true” knowledge. Both of these theorists emphasized the importance of social and historical contexts in their analysis of knowledge and inequality. In doing so, they urged contemporary social science to re-evaluate positivism as a guiding tool for research.

One of the first theorists to specifically align critical theory with the interest and needs of educational research was Brazilian educational researcher, Paulo Freire. Freire is known for his work in literacy and anti-colonialism both in South America and Africa (Leistyna, 1999). His seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), discussed education as both an oppressive and liberating force in our social order. Freire also emphasized the need for the development of a critical consciousness in students that would help to transform society and he believed that it was important for oppressed people to develop a critical consciousness that would help them analyze their social, historical, and economic conditions. The development of a critical consciousness can potentially encourage both teachers and students to be more reflexive of their experiences and therefore more open to understanding how the hegemony of the state has structured their life experiences (Freire, 2000; Bennett & LeCompte, 1999). Freire believed that translating this critical consciousness into action required both reflection, dialogue *and* action which he refers to as “praxis.” This dialogic approach can be summarized as “the ongoing relationship between theoretical understanding...and action that seeks to transform individuals and their environments” (Leistyna, 1999, p. 45). The idea of dialogic transformation was a central component of Freire’s thought because of the importance he placed on moving from reflection and discussion towards positive action. Through his research and work in South America and Africa, Paulo Freire helped to ignite a spark of interest in critical pedagogy that quickly spread to the United States. However, it was not until 1983 that Henry Giroux coined the term “critical pedagogy” which expressed the fusion of critical theory with the practice of teaching and learning. Soon after the release of Giroux’s first book, *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition* (1983), research in the field of “critical pedagogy” became one the major paradigms in contemporary educational thought. Evidence

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of the proliferation of critical pedagogy in the academy can be seen over the past twenty years in the numerous variations that have arisen espousing these same values. These variations have been labeled in numerous ways including: “border pedagogy (Giroux & McLaren, 1994);” “transformative pedagogy (hooks 1994);” “pedagogies of dissent;” (McLaren, 1997) and “critical race pedagogy” (Lynn, 1999; Jennings, 2000). While there may be differences in how individual theorists define these critical ideologies they have all relied on a mutual desire for social transformation both in schooling and the larger society.

The Foundations of Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy as a discourse on schooling and inequality relies mainly on three theoretic and analytic strands of thought: (1) Social Reproduction Theory, (2) Cultural Reproduction Theory, and (3) Theories of Resistance. These areas of study, have contributed, in unique ways to the development of critical pedagogy.

Social Reproduction theorists believe that schools maintain the status quo by making certain that existing social and economic relations remain constant. The work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) is largely based on five key principles that undergird their political economy of education. First, that “market, property and power relationships” (p. 11) determine and shape the looming disparities in wealth that exist between the rich and the poor. In other words, the capitalist economy is responsible for creating and maintaining widespread poverty and disenfranchisement among minorities and the poor in most industrialized democracies. The second, and probably the most important principle is that schools act as agents in the regeneration and solidification of existing political, social, and economic arrangements by preparing students for predetermined roles in the labor force. To that extent, students from working class families are trained to work in low paying non-skilled jobs, since it is highly likely that they will attend schools that foster this kind of mentality. The third principle recognizes that school professionals do not necessarily reproduce social inequalities with malice of intent. Instead, this principle recognizes the hierarchical structure of schooling and its tendency to mirror the “top-down” structure of the labor market which aids in the reproduction of social inequality. To the extent that school officials and teachers work to maintain the bureaucratic structure of schooling, they are implicated as agents of this capitalist domination. The very basis of the argument here is that “the U.S. economy is a formally totalitarian system in which the actions of the vast majority (workers) are controlled by a small minority (owners and managers)” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 55). Moreover, the U.S., with its run-a-way capitalist economy, allows the forces of the market to dictate what happens in the rest of society. To that extent, schools were designed for the purpose of maintaining current economic relations. As a result, schools have not been instrumental in helping the majority of poor and working class people achieve social mobility. Rather schools have helped solidify poor

people's position at the bottom of the economic hierarchy. In other words, "Schooling has been...something done *to* the poor" and not in the interest of the poor (MacLeod, 1995, p. 29).

The fourth principle is that schooling is "contradictory" in nature (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). While schooling (in this sense) primarily supports the aims of the dominant class, it can be credited with contributing to the overall development of consciousness about social inequalities. In other words, Bowles and Gintis also recognize that schools can sometimes serve as sites where social awareness takes place. This idea is further expounded upon in the work of resistance theorists, whose ideas we will address later. The last principle is that the relationship between the organization of schools and the structure of the labor market changes and shifts according to the particular sociopolitical and historical context. In other words, any critique of schools must be situated within an understanding of the particular socio-historical forces that have led to current conditions within a given society. In this regard, Bowles and Gintis' (1976) attempt to first understand the particular social, political and economic circumstances of the time period being described before undertaking an analysis of schooling as an agent of capitalist hegemony. Cultural Reproduction Theory offers an important analysis of how schools, in fact, support particular patterns of behavior in school.

Cultural Reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) in education refers to the ways in which schools and teachers reproduce social inequalities through the promotion of certain forms of class-specific cultural knowledge. This theory presents a departure from theories of social reproduction because it includes an analysis, albeit a materialist one, of culture. It also looks more micro-analytically at the ways in which school norms contribute to the systematic exclusion of ethnic minorities and poor whites from the educational system. Bourdieu, the leading cultural reproduction theorist, begins with the notion that students who lack the cultural capital or the requisite knowledge and skills with which to successfully navigate the parameters of middle class culture inevitably fail at school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In this sense, cultural capital is a form of symbolic wealth that one acquires through membership and participation in the dominant or middle-class culture. The accumulation of cultural capital is also related to one's degree of wealth in the sense that those who can afford it, participate, to a much greater degree, in the consumption of what is considered "high culture" or the arts (Bourdieu, 1977). Because schools are established in relation to these norms and standards, they also legitimize and therefore reinforce such standards while promoting the myth of meritocracy (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Moreover, the economically privileged utilize schools as a way in which to sustain and legitimate their "high-status knowledge" which, helps to maintain existing social, political and economic arrangements. This greatly disadvantages children from lower and working class backgrounds who are not aware of the rules required for successfully working within the culture of power (Bourdieu, 1977; Delpit, 1995).

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The effects of cultural reproduction are mitigated, in some ways, by each individual's habitus, or "the way a culture is embodied" within the individual (Harker, 1990, p. 118). One's habitus refers to the specific way in which an individual acts and responds to the system and the practices of those who maintain it. To this extent, the individual has some degree of agency in making choices that will benefit him or her. In this instance, the habitus is indeed a mitigating factor. Bourdieu (1977) is quick to point out, however, that one's agency is limited in a class-stratified society especially if we consider that people "can't teach what [they] don't know" (Howard, 1999). Consequently, since the majority of poor and working class students have not had the same experiences as middle and upper class students, their habitus will be markedly different. Therefore, while one's degree of agency is considered an important component, it is rendered nearly inconsequential when we consider how economic, political and social structures shape and constrict individual autonomy and agency (Bourdieu, 1977). Resistance Theory expands these ideas in important ways.

A theory of resistance in education necessarily begins with a critique of theories of social and cultural reproduction (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1998). Giroux (1983), Willis (1997) and Morrow & Torres (1995) argue that these theories are overly deterministic because they fail to adequately define the role of the oppressed actor in negotiating and responding to structures of domination. Resistance theory (Giroux 1983) is grounded in the notion that the oppressed have a degree of agency that allows them to actively resist and sometimes collude with structures of domination. In other words, resistance theory points to the "dialectical" nature of oppression and sees domination as "not only [the] result of the structural and ideological constraints embedded in capitalist social relationships, but also as part of the process of self-formation within the working class itself" (Giroux, 1983, p. 283). In other words, the social, economic, and political structure does not act alone; it is supported by the actions of people who work to maintain it or destroy it by resisting domination in myriad ways. Therefore, resistance theory does not characterize all oppositional behavior as counterhegemonic because it recognizes the potential for some forms of resistance to authority to be connected to patriarchal and racist motives. Giroux (1983), Willis (1977), Delgado Bernal (1997) and MacLeod (1995) argue that certain forms of oppositional behavior or resistance can and often do lead to greater degrees of social dislocation that delimits the actor's potential for further participation in liberatory practice and struggle. Ethnographic studies of working class students illustrate Giroux's point clearly. The working class white male students in Paul Willis' work (1977), for example, resisted dominant modes of thinking through their nonparticipation in and subsequent devaluation of academic work deemed crucial by school authorities who symbolized the dominant culture. Jay MacLeod (1987), in a similar study of white and African-American male working class youth, underscores the importance of understanding the role of the oppressed in resisting and accommodating to certain forms of oppression. In both

studies, the resistance of working class youth to structures of domination actually served to further marginalize them. This, the authors argue, provides a clear context for understanding the complex nature of the relationship between structure and agency (MacLeod, 1995; Willis, 1977). Therefore, a resistance model analyzes the ways in which social structures work to reproduce inequalities and tries to understand how the complex web of relationships between people can either counteract or support the aims of the capitalist hegemony.

Next, resistance theory is founded on the principle that the oppressed can and do act as producers of culture (Giroux, 1983). This departs significantly from social and cultural reproduction theories because it views the individual as a site of cultural production and not merely as an instrument through which the dominant culture attempts to be recreated in order to regenerate itself. People can and do resist and sometimes assist in the creation or deconstruction of structures of domination and/or liberation. Finally, and perhaps most important, a theory of resistance has not only political and social implications but moral and ethical ones as well because it “takes the notion of emancipation as its guiding interest” (Giroux, 1983, p. 290). To that extent, schools can and do serve as sites of resistance and struggle against domination. Schools also possess the ability to help articulate ways that educators concerned about social inequality can encourage forms of opposition that challenge inequities in schools and in society (Giroux, 1983). Critical Pedagogy offers an articulation of the pedagogical practices of educators committed to the elimination of social inequality.¹

As we have shown, social and cultural reproduction and resistance theories have contributed greatly to the development of critical pedagogy (McLaren, 1997). Social reproduction theory with its focus on the relationship between schools and the social order is an important starting point for critical pedagogy. It serves, perhaps, as the foundation upon which many critical pedagogues draw their fervor or commitment for doing progressive work that seeks to change the nature of teaching and learning. Cultural Reproduction theory, on the other hand, serves as an illustration of the key ways in which schools “reproduce” white middle class cultural norms in schools. In other words, social reproduction lays the foundation for a reproduction of privileged cultures in the larger education system. Theories of resistance, on the other hand, provide insight into how students actively fight against forms of dehumanization that are inherent to systems in which inequalities are reproduced over and over again. Even more important, theories of resistance provide, as we indicated earlier, an important space for discussions about critical “work” aimed at transforming social relations in some fundamental way.

Critical Pedagogy and Its Discontents

Although critical pedagogy has been structured around an explicit advocacy for social justice and transformation within education, it has garnered a number of

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critics (Ellsworth, 1989; Gordon, 1995; Gore, 1990; Lather, 1991; Hytten, 1998; Lynn, 2004; Murillo, 1999). While it is beyond the scope of this work to offer an exhaustive discussion of these critiques, we will attempt to discuss several of the more salient criticisms and then attempt to incorporate these critiques into our continued construction of a theoretical alternative to critical pedagogy.

In attempting a critique of societal inequality, critical pedagogy has often reinscribed the very problems that it has sought to overcome (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). Rather than critically examining their own worldviews, many critical pedagogues have primarily focused on bringing to the oppressed a “pre-packaged” critical consciousness reflective of both the interests and understandings of the researcher (Jennings, 1999; Murillo, 1999). Part of this consciousness has included an analysis of schooling focused almost entirely on systems of class privilege. Such an analysis offers a partial and inadequate response to the longstanding problems that children of color have faced in America’s schools (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). To that end, Marxist and Neo-Marxist analyses have unnecessarily epiphenomenized (McCarthy, 1988) race by arguing that the problems minority students and teachers experience in schools can be understood via analyses that do not fully take race, ethnicity, culture, language and immigrant status into account (Gordon, 1995; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; McCarthy, 1988; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). Over a decade ago, Ladson Billings and Tate (1995) offered another way to frame the problem by arguing that “. . . race, unlike gender and class, remains untheorized” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 49). They suggested that we did not possess a language that allows us talk about race and racial inequities in ways that are useful and ultimately liberatory. This was especially true in education, a field that until very recently was dominated by a number of race-blind academic traditions such as: biological and social deprivation theories, (white) feminist theories, and social class analysis (Gordon, 1995; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995).

Theories of social and cultural reproduction as well as resistance are derived from Marxist and Neo-Marxist perspectives. Such perspectives strongly suggest that class is the primary determinant of social relations in society (Gordon, 1995; Lynn 1999). To that extent, their analyses of education are based on these premises. While critical pedagogy and other work situated within the class-conflict approach attempts to more clearly recognize race, gender and sexuality as axes of domination, they still tend to rely on the notion that racism is primarily a by-product of capitalism and that it operates mainly at the level of ideology (Gordon, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994). In essence, even though there is recognition of the existence of racism and sexism, capitalism becomes the primary organizing tool for society thereby becoming the primary lens through which such research is formed.

What many critical pedagogues have minimized or ignored is the reality that oppressed groups have produced “critical” ways of learning that have been transformed into practice, often by oppressed people themselves. Scholars of color

(Delgado Bernal, 1997; Fuller, 1980; Robinson & Ward, 1991; Sewell, 1997) have articulated what Bernal (1997) refers to as a “transformative resistance” that can be identified in the counter-participatory stances and actions of people of color within educational institutions. In doing so, they argue that people of color can and do actively resist racism in their daily lives even when schools fail to do so. Robin D.G. Kelley (1994) uses the term “race rebels” to refer to those “resistors” who find a multitude of ways to challenge the inherent injustices of the system while working within the system for effective change.

The African-American community serves as a pertinent example of this by establishing a strong critical tradition of both theory and practice in educational institutions which developed long before the development of critical theory by the Frankfurt school or the rise of critical pedagogy as practiced by Freire and the Latin American liberation movements (Banks, 2004; Jennings, 2000; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Nieto, 2004). African American thinkers like W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, and Carter G. Woodson have all led principled scholarly struggles against the systematic dehumanization of African Americans (Gordon, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2001). In doing so, they theorized about the conditions of people who were racially and culturally subjugated. Specifically, the pedagogies of resistance theorized by African-American researchers and practiced by African-American educators and activist such as W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, and Marcus Garvey expressed critical ideas in relation to the state of African-American education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Watkins, 1996; Richards & Lemelle, 2006). These thinkers were part of an important intellectual tradition that emphasized education and reform, however their work is rarely viewed as part of the historical legacy of critical pedagogy (Watkins, 1996).

The African-American intellectuals of the early twentieth century developed a scholarly/intellectual tradition that was different from their white counterparts. Many white social scientists were approaching their research through the development of academic disciplines that emphasized the compartmentalization of knowledge (Ross, 1991). By contrast, many African-American social scientists were often trained in specific subject areas but developed a generalist scholarship based on their desire to critically examine the African-American experience in the United States (Watkins, 1996). Similarly, while mainstream (i.e., “white”) educational theorists became more focused on specific educational movements (Kliebard, 1987 cited in Watkins, 1996), African-American educational theorists established themselves through a more general focus on sociological inquiry (Watkins, 1996). Watkins (1994) and Shujaa (1994) both point out that the schooling and education of African-Americans has been heavily shaped by the complex interplay of power and politics in American society. Marginalized groups within the United States have created and maintained institutions and ideologies that represent powerful critiques of society’s dominant paradigms. As discussed previously, this study of pedagogy conceived and conducted from the margins represents the possibility of

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a critical paradigm that has been envisioned and practiced by African-Americans for many years and has gone largely un-explored by mainstream educational researchers (Watkins, 1996; Gordon, 1994).

African-American educators have examined the differences between “schooling” as a process of hegemonic control and “education” as a liberatory process of obtaining and utilizing community-sanctioned forms of knowledge (Shujaa, 1994). Shujaa (1994) points out that this distinction is important in order to garner a more complete understanding of the socio-cultural context and uneven power dynamics that have shaped the African-American educational experience. In this context, schooling is a formal process that takes place within institutions that are directly (or indirectly) linked to the state (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1994). This process is “intended to perpetuate and maintain the society’s existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements” (Shujaa 1994, p. 15). Contrasting this, education can be viewed as a broader and often less formalized process that takes place outside of formalized institutions and represents a “collectively produced set of experiences organized around issues and concerns that allow for a critical understanding of everyday oppression as well as the dynamics involved in constructing alternative political cultures” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1994, p. 127). We are not suggesting that schooling and education (or schools and non-schools) are mutually exclusive in their existence and goals. It is possible in many instances for the two to overlap. There are certain aspects of schooling that can serve the common interests of an entire society regardless of the particular “position” (as related to race, class, gender, etc.) of any given individual or group in that society (Shujaa, 1994). However, these commonalities are often overshadowed by the fact that the common mutual benefits of schooling and education are contextualized within a particular set of experiences shaped by the race and class distinctions of American society. For African-Americans, these experiences speak closely to how issues of race, identity, and resistance are negotiated in America. Despite this realization, it must be understood that the formalized learning process engendered within schools is an important component for analyzing and understanding critical pedagogy. Since most educational research refers to critical pedagogy in conjunction with the schooling process it has left many other venues generally un-examined.

Conclusion: Towards a Critical Race Pedagogy

Thus far, our discussion of critical pedagogy has highlighted problems in the way(s) that critical pedagogy deals with the complexity of race and identity (Gordon, 1995). Specifically, it has been suggested that critical pedagogy has sought to emphasize the study of class dynamics at the expense of examining issues of race and gender (Ellsworth, 1989; McCarthy & Apple, 1988; Lynn 1999). Perhaps with this in mind, many educational researchers of color have looked outside of their field of study for a theoretical construct that would provide a critical analysis of race

within the context of pedagogy. Critical race theory in education has offered an important response to this problem.

Legal scholars who had long grappled with the centrality of race in American society formed a critical ideology that focused on the dynamics of race in the American legal system. They used the term, Critical Race Theory (CRT) to describe their system of thought (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1998). CRT can be characterized as a counterdiscourse (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993) created by legal scholars of color to highlight issues of racial oppression in legal studies. CRT however was not created in a historical vacuum, but rather sprang from scholars' dissatisfaction with Critical Legal Studies—a disciplinary perspective that relies on a notably Marxist critique of the U.S. legal system (Tate, 1997). This dissatisfaction echoes the experience of educational theorists who have questioned the reliance on class analysis that characterizes critical pedagogy.

Within the field of education, CRT has been defined as “an interdisciplinary attempt to approach educational problems and questions from the perspectives of Women and Men of color” (Solorzano & Yosso, 1998). Solorzano and Yosso (1998) hypothesize that schooling plays an important role in the maintenance of hegemony in our society, but that it also exists as an entity that can be used to help dismantle this same hegemony. Lynn (1999) states that Solorzano (1998b)

...has created a theoretical starting point from which to begin to think directly about the possibilities that lie in connecting CRT to a broader discourse on pedagogy, particularly the emancipatory teaching of practices of people of color attempting to utilize such liberatory strategies as a vehicle for counteracting the devaluation of racially oppressed students. (p. 611)

In this same article, Lynn (1999) utilizes a study of African-American teachers to undertake the first step(s) in delineating the characteristics of a Critical Race Pedagogy. Jennings (2000) builds on Lynn's (1999) ideas by constructing a framework for critical race pedagogy that focuses on the intersection of race, identity and pedagogy primarily outside the bounds of formal schooling. As a continuation of this work, we seek to continue the delineation of critical race pedagogy as a theoretical construct that address the complexity of race and education. In re-conceptualizing critical race pedagogy, we have identified three very broad yet closely interwoven characteristics that form the basis for this continually evolving construct. These characteristics include: the negotiation of power; the critique of self; and the need to be counter hegemonic.

First, critical race pedagogy must recognize and understand the endemic nature of racism. Racism is a concept is played out world wide but has a particularly significant meaning in the history of the United States (Feagin, 2001). Critical legal scholar Derrick Bell (1992) argues that racism is a permanent fixture of American society. That is, racism is not an aberrant entity but is instead an integral part of the

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American socio-political landscape. Being such an integral part of America has allowed racism to shape and be shaped by the major institutions within American society (Feagin, 2001; Hacker 1995). Among these institutions is the compulsory public education system that developed from the Common School movement of the 19th century (Spring, 2005). This system is an integral part of American society and has historically reflected the racialized nature of American society. In other words, educational institutions in America have historically reflected the same types of institutionalized racism that exist within multiple contexts of American life. Racism and education are thus tightly interwoven in a manner that is complex, pervasive and constantly evolving within and across a variety of social contexts. It is an understanding of these complexities that is necessary precursor for the existence of any Critical Race Pedagogy. This is not meant to establish race as the only construct of importance when critiquing the oppressive nature of schooling in American society. Any form of Critical Race Pedagogy must be intimately cognizant of the necessary intersection of other oppressive constructs such as class, gender and sexual orientation. Theorizing these intersections is of high importance because individuals prioritizing one facet of their identity over another can create a false dichotomy that does not address the reality that we exist within society as subjective entities whose identities are negotiated through multiple lenses that privilege certain race, class, gender and sexual “norms.”

A second important component of Critical Race Pedagogy is recognition of the importance of understanding the power dynamics inherent in schooling. Delpit (1995) writes extensively about the existence of a “culture of power” within schools. This culture of power often divides communities of color from well meaning whites who wish to contribute to those who they consider to be less fortunate. Delpit (1995) characterizes this culture of power as having five broad characteristics. First, issues of power are enacted within classrooms. These issues take on many different forms and include the power of students, teachers, administrators, the state, etc. All of these entities hold certain degrees of power that are constantly negotiated, defined and enacted in relation to other power brokers within and outside of the classroom. Second, there are “rules” regarding participation in the culture of power. These rules relate to such things as communicative strategies, speech patterns, hygiene and dress, ways of writing, etc. Third, these rules related to the culture of power are created and implemented based on the culture of those who hold power in the larger society. This characteristic emphasizes the importance of understanding the majority culture as a means for understanding and negotiating the discourse of power. Fourth, those who are not participants in the culture of power are better enabled to participate if they are explicitly aware of the rules that govern the culture of power. Members of cultural groups often transmit information implicitly to one another thus making it difficult for non-group members to negotiate the culture of power. Lastly, those who possess power are frequently least aware of this power and are frequently least willing to relinquish this same power. Acknowledging and understanding one’s privileged

place in the culture of power can be difficult given the quest for egalitarianism professed by many professionals in the field of education.

In summary, Delpit (1995) emphasizes the existence of power in schools and defines why such power is difficult for students of color to negotiate and for white faculty to acknowledge. This conception of power in the classroom is largely grounded in an understanding of whiteness that makes explicit the privilege of being white in America. Delpit's (1995) understanding of power illuminates important issues in the attempt to put critical pedagogy into actual practice. However, she does not go far enough in delineating how power and identity are negotiated amongst teachers and students of color. An understanding of this dynamic is important because the complex identities associated with people of color are multidimensional and extend beyond race in defining their place within the school community.

A third important component of Critical Race Pedagogy emphasizes the importance of self-reflection, or reflexivity. Reflexivity is autobiographical by nature, therefore exploration of one's "place" within a stratified society has power to illuminate oppressive structures in society. For this reason, narratives constructed by people of color can act as forms of resistance to "othering" that move readily from the private to the public sphere in an effort to examine race, class, identity and other expressive structures (Burdell & Swadener, 1999). This focus on the self is especially important for scholars of color because of the enormous power and privilege that is embedded within our position as researchers and faculty members. In the past two decades social science researchers have frequently cited a need for reflexivity in regards to their privileged positions in relation to those they study. However this emphasis on reflexivity embodies a potentially different meaning for researchers of color. First, reflexivity means that minority scholars must continually re-theorize the "we" that is frequently discussed when identifying the place of the researchers in the literature (Villenas, 1996). In doing so, scholars of color grapple with our identity/role as scholars of color who cannot be easily described in terms of being "privileged" researchers in the same way that white scholars define their role as privileged. The complex interactions of class, gender, geography, and even skin tone can reflect a specific positionality that denotes a complex sense of privilege within our own communities. Villenas (1996) expands upon this idea by poignantly addressing the issue of how easily critical scholars of color are co-opted by the majority community so as to be complicit in their own marginalization and the marginalization of others. In this same way, researchers from the majority society should move beyond the "researcher-as-colonizer" paradigm and examine their own histories of complicity and oppression in an effort to "mark the points of their own marginalization" (Villenas, 1996). An emphasis on the narrative voice of people of color (both research consultants and researchers) helps define Critical Race Pedagogy as a valuable tool in understanding our own worldview while simultaneously helping to better illuminate the world of those we study.

Lastly, a Critical Race Pedagogy must encourage the practice of an explicitly

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liberatory form of both teaching and learning. The primary characteristic of a liberatory pedagogy is its goal of advocating for justice and equity in both schooling and education as a necessity if there is to be justice and equity in the broader society. Some researchers have argued that this type of advocacy is anathema for teachers and researchers of education. Instead, they opt for a “neutral” apolitical teaching and scholarship that seeks only to provide facts, figures, and mechanistic skills. Such scholarship is often showcased as a foil to a politicized form of critical scholarship that advocates a liberatory pedagogy emphasizing what bell hooks calls “teaching to transgress” (hooks, 1994). The seemingly oppositional nature of these two methodological orientations serves to create a false dichotomy that benefits the status quo. With the power to define what so-called facts are and how they are conceived, shaped, and communicated, those supporting the status quo have a distinct interest in urging critical scholars and practitioners to consider a “less political” worldview.

In summary, the concept of critical pedagogy, although problematic in its treatment of race, is a valuable tool in conceptualizing a pedagogy of possibility that challenges the hegemony and counteremancipatory practices in schooling. The construction of a Critical Race Pedagogy both contextualizes and problematizes the role of race and education. This allows the critical impulse in contemporary educational thought to uphold its original mission to promote educational practice that is transformative in nature and allows the voice of teachers, students and researchers to bear witness to the possibilities of a liberatory pedagogy that encourages an interrogation of race and identity that is both multiple and democratic (Murillo, 1999).

Note

¹ See the work of Paulo Freire, Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, Antonia Darder, Barry Kanpol, Adrienne Wing, Stanley Aronowitz, and Joe Kincheloe for more detailed analyses and explanations of Critical Pedagogy.

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