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Critical Race Theory



Critical Race Theory: A Pair of Eyeglasses

Michael Dominguez, San Diego State University, puts it best:

“Theory and theoretical lenses are used and applied in all academic fields of study. They are tools that all scholars and students use constantly to pay attention to aspects of phenomena in a variety of contexts. Like different colored lenses in a pair of eyeglasses, we are all constantly seeing and understanding the world with certain perspectives and values and ideologies.”

Critical Race Theory is one of the many theoretical lenses used in Ethnic Studies. Critical Race Theory argues that a students’ every day experience is informed by their encounters with racism. Someone with a critical race lens would reason that changing racist educational structures requires students to embrace their racialized identity and other forms of identity, including gender and/or immigrant status. Since Ethnic Studies is an anti-racist project, students are encouraged to develop counter-stories or counter-narratives to the dominant voices in traditional curriculum.

What is Critical Race Theory?

Critical Race Theory arose after legal scholars of color questioned why majoritarian legal scholars insisted that legal decisions, policies, and practices were based on objectivity or neutrality. Legal scholars of color also wanted to point out the role that race plays in the hiring, retention, scholarship and promotion of faculty of color. Critical Race scholars maintained that race was/is central to every decision made by those in power. In other words, there is no colorblind decision-making when deciding legal cases, deciding curricular standards, or determining public services. Educational scholars of color were intrigued by the ideas contained in Critical Race Theory (Tatum, Ladson-Billings, Solórzano, etc.) and began to apply it in the field of education to expose the racial inequity in education.

Critical Race Theory

1. Argues that race and racism are a part of everyday life for communities of color where every day experiences are informed by their encounters with racism.
2. Asserts that racism and injustice today directly relate to the historical trajectory experienced by People of Color in the U.S.
3. Maintains that historical and contemporary experiences are also influenced by other intersectionalities (gender, class, etc.) and that intersectionalities further marginalization and inequity.

engagement in systemic change requires them embrace their racialized identity and their intersectional positionality.

Many scholars use Critical Race Theory in their research and pedagogy. The development of the counter story is an indispensable element of Critical Race methodology in that it becomes a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege and can be used to shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform (Solórzano & Yosso).

Critical Race theory is interdisciplinary, used by sociologists, environmentalists, gender studies and ethnic studies scholars. Many scholars apply the experiential tenet of Critical Race Theory in their research by centering the counter narratives of marginalized communities.

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