Critical Race Theory: Special Issue

inside this issue

Critical Race Theory and Teacher Education

Racial Identity and Teacher Preparation: How They Matter to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Urban Learners

Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCRT) to Examine the Schooling Experiences of Puerto Rican Youth in a Large Comprehensive High School
# Table of Contents

## 2  Special Issue: Critical Race Theory

Gary L. Williams, Ph.D.

## 8  Critical Race Theory and Teacher Education

Thandeka K. Chapman, Ph.D.

## 18  Racial Identity and Teacher Preparation: How they Matter to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Urban Learners

Festus E. Obiakor, Ph.D.
Satasha L. Green, Ph.D.

## 23  Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCRT) to Examine the Schooling Experiences of Puerto Rican Youth in a Large Comprehensive High School

René Antrop-González, Ph.D.
James Sokolowski
Zoraida Maldonado

## 39  Selected References
Critical Race Theory (CRT) holds the view that racism is permanent, pervasive, and persistent in America and possibly the world. An outgrowth of critical legal studies, CRT acknowledges that we are not a colorblind society: that justice is not blind, and that scales of justice are not balanced. Additionally, CRT validates voices and experiences of those who are victims of the “isms” and other forms of subordination, especially at the institutional level. This special volume of Myriad focuses on topics that are tied to CRT in a meaningful way.

The legacy of slavery and racism in America and the history of the ‘peculiar institution’ have not gone unnoticed nor has the psychological damage that remains as baggage carried by the descendents of both the slave and the slave owner (Berry & Blassingame, 1982; Franklin & Moss, 2000; Fredrickson, 2003; Quarles, 1996). The legacy of this ‘peculiar institution’ is currently reflected in the policies and practices of various social institutions; hence, it is not uncommon to hear allegations of institutional racism practiced by educational, healthcare, criminal justice, and other social institutions. Writings on racism identify various manifestations of behavior both at individual and institutional levels. Lawrence (1987) argued that racism is influenced in large part by factors that can be characterized as neither intentional (certain outcomes are self-consciously sought) nor unintentional (the outcomes are random, fortuitous, and uninfluenced by unconscious racial motivation).

Hernandez (1990) acknowledged that while unconscious (or unintentional) racism is embedded in law and statutes and consequently in the prosecutorial outcomes for victims of racially motivated violence, proposed solutions or remedies should include empowering victims and monitoring the discretionary behavior of prosecutors (i.e., give ‘voice’ to the victim and consider the context of the situation).

As it appears, unconscious bias/racism has developed into what some have referred to as a subtle and, perhaps, a more insidious form of racism called aversive racism (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000, 2004; Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986; Pearson, Gaertner, & Dovidio, 2009). This colorblind unintentional form of bias is nonetheless as damaging and devastating as the more direct and overt forms of racism and discrimination. “Many aversive racists explicitly support egalitarian principles and believe themselves to be non-prejudiced [but] also unconsciously harbor negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks and other historically disadvantaged groups” (see Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000 p. 315).
Another form of bias is called structural inequality (i.e., socially structured differences found primarily in social systems). This results from inequalities in society and is based on issues of value and entitlement. Liao (2009) defined structural inequality as the degree to which social groups such as race, gender, and class differ group-wise or by individual members between groups—terms of rewards and attributes, such as income, wealth, and health. Often found in social institutions, structural inequality is sometimes referred to as institutional racism, deeply embedded in medical, political, economic, educational, and religious policies and practices. Institutional racism as with other forms of racism is sometimes viewed as unintentional, color-blind, or disguised in history or ideology (Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). More recently the term racio-ethnicity has been used to discuss a component of institutional racism from the perspective of the individuals in the institution subjected to among other things, structural inequalities (Friday, Friday & Moss, 2004 (a); Friday, Moss & Friday, 2004(b); Martins, Milliken, Wisenfeld & Salgado, 2003; Tomaso, Post, and Parks-Yancey, 2007).

**Reducing Racism: Any Hope?**

Lawrence (1987) stated that racism in America is much more complex than either the conscious conspiracy of a power elite or the simple decision of a few ignorant bigots. It is a part of our common historical experience and, therefore, a part of our culture. It arises from the current assumptions we have learned to make about the world, ourselves, and others as well as from the patterns of our fundamental social activities. While admitting that we have made tangible progress in the area of racial justice, Bell (1987) concluded that there is a discrepancy between the nation’s deeply held beliefs and its daily behavior. He employed metaphorical storytelling to provide the voice, context, or situation of the victim into legal proceedings. He combined fact, fictional statistics and fictional characters in metaphorical sketches and ominous allegories to convey the message that racism is integral and permanent. Bell (1992) reiterated that African American people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary “peaks of progress,” short-lived victories that slide into irreverence as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain White dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. In Bell’s mind, racism must be acknowledged, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance. In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate supported and expanded on Bell’s notion of the

**CRT challenges the universality of the White experience/judgment as the authoritative standard that binds culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) people’s normative measures.**

Clearly, while we are all consciously aware of the prevalence and impact of racism in our society, the role of property rights represents a more subtle and historical proposition to include in a discussion of CRT. According to Calmore (1992), CRT challenges the universality of the White experience/judgment as the authoritative standard that binds culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) people’s normative measures. In addition, it disagrees with the authoritative testing white standard that directs, controls, and regulates the terms of
proper thought, expression, and behavior. The difficult task is to identify clues and norms that have been disguised as subordinated in the law. As CRT scholars, we seek to demonstrate that our experiences as CLD people are legitimate, appropriate, and effective bases for analyzing the legal system and racial subordination. According to Tate (1997), and other traditional CRT scholars (e.g., Bell, 1992; Crenshaw 1995, Delgado & Stefancic 2000, 2001) CRT is a theory that:

1. Recognizes that racism is endemic in U.S. society, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically.
2. Crosses epistemological boundaries. It borrows from several traditions, including liberalism, law and society, feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, cultural nationalism, and pragmatism.
3. Reinterprets civil rights law in light of its limitations, illustrating that laws to remedy racial inequality are often undermined before they can be fully implemented.
4. Portrays dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy as camouflage for the self-interest of powerful entities of society.

**CRT and Institutional Obligations**

Ladson-Billings (1998) noted that critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script. This master scripting [she goes on to say] means “stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power” (p. 18). As she noted, current instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient and cast in a language of failure. To a critical race theorist, intelligence testing has been a movement to legitimize African American students’ deficiency.

Inequalities continue to exist, not just in testing but in funding. Perhaps no area of schooling underscores inequity and racism better than school funding. To a critical race theorist, inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism. According to Ladson Billings, “almost every state funds schools based on property taxes. These areas with property of greater wealth typically have better funded schools” (p.20). She gave an example using a school district in which Whites were happy with access to special magnet school programs and “African American student achievement failed to improve, while suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates continued to rise” (p. 21).

**The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Experience**

About five years ago, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee instituted a task force to deal with climate issues. In the Executive Summary, the task force noted that—“our climate issues are real, we have an urgent need to create a new culture that welcomes and respects all” (Executive Summary, Task Force Report, 2005). One of the key propositions of CRT is that racism, regardless of the form it takes (i.e., structural, institutional, aversive, unconscious, or unintentional), is permanent, pervasive, and ‘normal’ in American society. By way of policies and practices, institutions and social structures preserve and maintain behaviors and environments that support the status quo and, consequently, the subordination or marginalization of racial groups.

By way of policies and practices, institutions and social structures preserve, and maintain behaviors and environments that support the status quo, and consequently, the subordination or marginalization of racial groups.

The Task Force identified a serious and complex picture of the university’s climate problems. Its conclusions were that:

1. A campus climate existed that marginalizes CLD people.
2. There was race and ethnicity-related bias in the discretionary enforcement of rules and policies.
3. There was under-representations of CLD people among faculty and staff.
4. There was apparent lack of university commitment to race and ethnic diversities.
Based on the report, the Task Force plans to:

1. Offer a leadership training program to support CLD persons in preparing for leadership positions and develop a coherent, university-wide, five-year strategic diversity plan that addresses the major challenges identified in the report via the development of specific diversity goals and action plans/strategies.
2. Create a campus-wide advisory committee and an ombudsman position.
3. Increase recruitment, hire and promote CLD people.
4. Revise mission statement to include valuing race and ethnic diversities.

The aforementioned plans are encouraging. CRT scholars will be pleased with University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee intentions. This university’s response to so-called post racial America seems to be that racism, like motherhood and apple pie, is as much a part of America as Old Glory. As a result, something must be done to shift this retrogressive tradition. Clearly, where racism and discrimination thrive, voices are silenced, students are mis-educated, CLD faculty/staff members are traumatized, and leadership becomes untrustworthy.

The Current Myriad

The Myriad is one way the University is committed to listening to all voices. Typically, the Myriad does not undergo serious peer-review processes. However, this Special Issue did! The goal was to involve scholars in review of the manuscripts. We were successful in this regard.

The articles in this Special Issue illuminate the realities of bias and racism while utilizing the critical race theoretical lens to expose the voices of experience in context and content. In the article by Obiakor and Green, they address the issue of culturally responsive teaching environments that consider racial identities of teachers/service providers and students. They challenge teacher preparation programs to respond to racial identities if they are to play a role in uplifting humanity. Chapman identifies policies and practices that prevent the transformation of teacher education programs. She further illuminates a structural component that must be adopted in order to combat institutionalized bias and racism. Anthrop-Gonzales, Sokolowski, and Maldonado echo the voices of Puerto Rican high school students as they chase the American dream. Hopefully readers will find these articles informative and useful in addressing individual and institutional challenges on race and culture.

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References


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Calls for teacher education reform remain fixated on increasing content knowledge, exit examinations, and greater homogenization among standards for teachers. The skills that would cultivate culturally relevant teachers for United States schools have been minimized and overshadowed by more conservative educational discourses (Grant, 1994; Zeichner, Grant, Gay, Gillette, Valli, Villegas, 1998). Struggles in teacher education programs speak to issues of race, class, and gender that are deeply embedded in questions of the nature of education and the role(s) of the educator in the United States. Using the tenets of CRT, this article explores how current and historical contexts of higher education and teacher education policies limit the reform of teacher education in order to maintain the core assimilationist principles of Whiteness and middle-class morality. One limitation is the continuous production of teachers who marginalize culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children, particularly “poor” CLD children, in public schools. And another related limitation is the consistent failure to recruit CLD students and non-traditional White students into teacher education programs.

Contextual Discourse

Over the past three decades, much of the work focused on changing teacher education to reflect preK-12 students’ racial, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds has been championed by critical multicultural teacher educators who believe teacher education students need to be properly prepared to address issues of race, culture, class, and gender in curriculum and instruction (Gayles, 1979; Grant, 1994; Haberman, 1991; Hilliard, 1974; Lesko & Bloom, 1998; Sleeter, 1985; Zeichner et al., 1998). In a related fashion, CRT can be used to explore how preservice students and teachers learn to teach in critical multicultural ways or to maintain the status quo. As Ladson-Billings (2004) stated,

*Of course, critical pedagogy must be performed by critical pedagogues, and few, if any, teacher preparation programs systematically prepare such teachers. CRT’s project is to uncover the way pedagogy is racialized and selectively offered to students according to the setting, rather than to produce critical pedagogy. (p. 60)*

When CRT scholars ask questions concerning teacher education, the inquiries must explore multiple facets of the context to provide answers that can lead to reform. Teacher education cannot be interrogated at the individual or classroom levels without an analysis of how race and racism work in the larger contexts of (a) institutions of higher education, (b) teacher education policies, and (c) state and federal mandates. There are three large areas of research in teacher education that call for a CRT analysis: the contexts of teacher education programs with regard to schools of education and institutions of higher education, the cost (in)effective nature of certification programs, and state and institutional policies in teacher education. These three areas beg the larger questions asked below by Solorzano and Yosso (2001a):

- How do educational structures function to maintain racism, sexism, and classism?
- How do educational processes function to maintain racism, sexism, and classism?
How do educational discourses function to maintain racism, sexism, and classism? (p.3)

In answering these questions with regard to higher education and, more specifically, teacher education, the articulated debates concerning what knowledge is of most worth are old. However, positioning race at the center of the analysis may contribute a new perspective to the literature. Lopez (2003) suggested four concepts (i.e., power, policy, government, and conflict) that are valuable ways to analyze articulations of race and racism in educational institutions. After discussing the use of conceptualizations of Whiteness in CRT, these four concepts can be used to frame the discussion of ways in which majoritarian ideologies, beliefs, and behaviors valued by White middle-class America are given societal privilege over other racial and cultural groups’ values, then manifested and reinforced in teacher education.

It is important to note that much of the teacher education research that uses CRT has reduced the conversation to a focused look at the way Whiteness functions in teacher education programs (Boyce, 2001; Cooper, Massey, & Graham, 2006; Marx, 2004; Marx & Pennington, 2002, 2003; Pennington, 2007). These articles frame the pre-service teacher as an ultra-powerful entity that must be re-programmed through an understanding of Whiteness and the prevalence of racism before he/she is allowed to teach children (McCarty, 2003). This force of nature (a) makes it difficult for CLD professors to feel successful or relevant in their classrooms, (b) makes White teachers fail to accomplish their own social justice goals, and (c) calls into question that nature of multicultural course work at the program level (Dixson & Dingus, 2007; Dowdy, Givens, Murillo Jr, Shenoy, & Villenas, 2000; Scon, 2003). While the scholarship attacks significant issues in teacher education, they privilege the experiences of White female pre-service students and overshadow the larger systemic questions concerning the nature of teacher education programs as reproducers of the status quo. In the realm of CRT, the quest for social justice is about changing the institutions that allow manifestations of Whiteness to maintain power and disrupting the uncontested discourses that prevent radical and necessary reforms in teacher education that would help preK-12 children reach their full academic potential. How multiple processes of teacher education continue to maintain White supremacist constructs of knowledge and professional status, and what steps educators need to take to push teacher education programs to significantly change are articulated in the next sections.

Higher Education, Schools/Colleges of Education, and Teacher Education

In the realm of higher education, Schools/Colleges of Education have always held a precarious, powerless position in universities and colleges. Goodlad’s (1991) five year study of educator and teacher education sparked extensive conversations about the status of teacher education programs and the faculty members administering them. This plight is shared by many departments, such as those in the humanities, social sciences, and arts. High status in higher education is based on a number of tangible and intangible factors such as patent generation, research paradigms, and occupational status in society. The hierarchy of university departments and programs is strongly tied to the generation of outside grants and funding; yet there are faculty issues of race and gender that impact the status of college departments and programs. The subtle hierarchy of departments and programs, coupled with society’s views of particular professions, affects how college disciplines are viewed by students.

It is not accidental that many departments that struggle with low status in universities are also the departments with high numbers of CLD scholars and women. In a study of efforts to diversify faculty at three top-tier institutions, scholars found …that the long-standing use of the term ‘excellence’ in opposition to ‘diversity’ has reflected less a commitment to academic quality than an enactment of academic privilege; that is, it reflected the power of established elites to control the norms of the academic enterprise to keep new people, new topics, and new methodologies at bay. (Maher & Tetreault, 2009, p. 17)

Under the Equal Protection Clause, universities and colleges are mandated to have non-discriminatory affirmative action plans that can be employed when the institution can show that
the race-based policy is a compelling state interest and that the policy is narrowly tailored to achieve the compelling state interest. For instance, according to Executive Order Number 11246 (1964-65), “universities receiving federal funds are required ‘to take affirmative action’ regarding race as a factor in employment” (Igwebuike, 2006, p. 197). Affirmative action plans have led to greater numbers of White women, African American and Latino scholars in the social sciences and humanities. But, because the various academic gate-keeping policies and practices that narrow the funnel of higher education attainment become even more minute in the applied sciences, women, African American and Latino scholars are rare in departments with high university status. For example, in a study of over 500,000 full-time faculty members, Finkelstein, Seal, and Schuster (1998) found significant increases in the numbers of CLD scholars and White women over the past two decades in higher education. However African American and Latino scholars and White women remain over-represented in the social sciences, humanities, and education fields and Asian American scholars overrepresented in the applied sciences (Bradley, 2000; Eckes, 2005). To maintain their elitist racialized status and to seemingly comply with affirmative action policies, the applied sciences hire Asian American professors through special diversity initiatives called “targets of opportunity” and continue to hire White scientists through regular application processes. As part of the university backlash of perceived racial preferencing, two White plaintiffs have attempted to overturn university hiring decisions that were made with race-based justifications without success.¹

Women faculty members often run teacher education programs, with the majority of the leadership being White women. The field of education is home to significant numbers of Black and Latino scholars, with White women and CLD women being over-represented in programs tied to teacher certification. “Teacher educators are little respected within higher education, where teacher education remains an embarrassing poor relation who nonetheless subsidizes those better off” (Bullough Jr 2002, p. 237). Their compliance and allegiance to the university is taken for granted, leaving these programs virtually powerless in the university structure (Shipp, 1999). Students are not blind to the subtle and overt status hierarchies in their universities and colleges and relate these hierarchies of career status to the larger society based on career salaries, media depictions, social status, and a host of social markers students deem as important. Their interpretations of the physical signs and university discourses influence their choice of major and career pathways. Goodlad (1991) observed that:

Increasing attention to research has not brought professors of education greater prestige on campus, nor improved the image of teacher education within schools and colleges of education. A few stars in education enjoy personal prestige, quite apart from the widespread denigration of their field, but students do not enjoy daily association with them as they do with the shadow faculty of adjunct, temporary, part-time personnel who teach the courses required for certification and have little or no say about the conduct and well-being of the enterprise, even though they keep the programs alive. Many students resent this situation. (p.3)

Students, especially those who have reaped the rewards of academic success, may want to embrace preK-12 teaching, but the status and lack of tangible rewards that are an integral part of the profession lead them to reject the career choice. Programs such as Teach for America offer students a chance to teach on emergency licensure, with the understanding that they are in a temporary position. These teachers are expected to move on to other careers that are more in-line with their Ivy League degrees and high GPAs. Additionally, researchers found that students with higher ACT and SAT scores and stronger grade averages tend to leave teaching more quickly than their counterparts with average scores and grade point averages (Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004; Shipp, 1999).

The low status of teacher education programs has been linked to the lack of professional standards and sets of common practices in the teacher certification programs. In the 1990s, various teacher educators sought to create “rigorous” standards for teacher education in an effort to improve the status of the...

¹56 F.Supp.2d 419
departments. Geiger (1993), a former National Association of Education (NEA) President stated that, “Our profession lacks a commonly accepted quality control mechanism. And that’s one reason—in fact, a primary reason—we lack the full public confidence that is essential to the success of our mission” (p. 2). The teacher standards that have been pushed by professional organizations such as the NEA, the National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE), and the American Association of Teacher Education (AACTE) were primarily content-based and standardized test-driven. Standardized assessments do not address the (a) pedagogical dispositions for cultivating cultural empathy; (b) ability to teach the historical and present-day circumstances that are complicated by issues of race, gender, and class; and (c) ability to maintain positive relationships between teachers and families, a substantial knowledge of diverse cultures, or an attention to community contexts (Sleeter, 2001; Yosso, 2002). Not long ago, the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (2009) reiterated this promise to change the status of teaching through higher education standards and assessments. He promised that *The American Recovery and Reinstatement Act of 2009: Education, Jobs, and Reform* would “…invest heavily in teacher quality and principal quality initiatives that both elevate the teaching profession and help retain great teachers and principals for underserved schools and communities.”

As it stands, pre-service teachers now develop performance portfolios with evidence of instructional techniques and lesson planning. The professional standards incorporate issues of culture, community, and language into their standards, but do not address the challenges of teaching students who are not the same race as the teacher. These points of inclusion are broadly constructed and are applied in a generalizable fashion for teachers. For example, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2005) proposed five benign teaching propositions with only one possible reference to cultural diversity. In Proposition I, “Teachers are committed to Students and Their Learning,” it states that teachers should be able to “respect the cultural and family differences students bring to their classroom” (http://www.nbpts.org/the_standards/the_five_core_proposition).

In some content areas, such as the Language Arts, teachers are encouraged to discuss issues of culture, stereotyping, morals, and values. These discussions remain at the lower levels of multicultural education as discreet or linear knowledge through the inclusion of books, historical events, and various thematic topics. Similarly, the National Board references to students’ community ties obfuscate the conflict between schools and communities with regard to community perceptions of and relationships with formal educational institutions. According to the National Board, 

“Accomplished teachers know that a school is not isolated from the larger community, and they recognize the pervasive influence the community can have in shaping and enhancing a student’s education. Their awareness of the importance of community relations leads these teachers to inform the community about school goals, projects, and successes. Accomplished teachers also seek opportunities within the community to expand students’ experiences, especially when thinking about future careers.”

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The “professionalization” of teacher education actually supports color-blind discourses of content and pedagogy and ignores the challenges of teaching and learning in classrooms where the teacher does not share the same race or cultural background as all of her students; therefore, it re-instantiates teacher performances that are discursively White. When discussing conceptions of multiculturalism that appear in national policy, Hobbel (2003) explained that: 

**Naming professional knowledge as a social operation and illuminating the ‘rites of institutions’ through which it is vivified outline how the cultural struggle to maintain the professional teacher as a class of person takes place. This cultural struggle is particular to the maintenance of Whiteness as a class in this field: the shield of difference acts to “make” the good teacher. Whiteness is**
at the center of professional knowledge so long as the good teacher must know her own privilege and racial characteristics and how they collide with those characteristics of her imagined students. (p.1884)

Thus, the unspoken convergence of interest in teacher education between the government that wants highly trained teachers and the programs that wish to raise the status of the teaching profession is the creation of standards and testing that maintain and solidify White supremacist ideals of a contextualized teaching and learning.

**Nature of Certification Programs**

CRT examines the multiple contexts of events and circumstances to create a more comprehensive and descriptive picture of what has occurred. In the case of teacher education, the design of the programs inhibit working class students, first generation students, and low income students from matriculating through these programs. Because a significant number of the students with these class and income demographics are CLD students, the reason the pre-service teaching population is White and middle-class is all too apparent. Teacher certification programs are at worst elitist, and at best designed for the exceptionally independent, highly focused college student. Students who need to work during college find it difficult if not impossible to complete their certification. Field work curriculum components require that students spend substantial amounts of time in schools during the day, or perhaps during the early evening for tutoring programs. This critique does not lie with the need for field experiences, but problematizes the assumptions that underlie unpaid work. Students who cannot afford to lose work hours to unpaid labor struggle to remain in these programs. Those who try to complete their student teaching during the day often work nights and weekends to generate income. Many of these students drop out or fail because they do not have enough time to do either task properly. Additionally, students with small children share these same challenges and possibly more if the student is a single parent with little home support.

The challenges of completing the field curriculum in teacher education programs are only one aspect of a flawed design. Certification programs require an extensive number of credit hours to be completed before students start their practicum. Students who have not had career counseling in college or before they enter higher education often have to add a fifth year to their program of studies to complete teacher certification. These students may have been able to take particular pre-service courses as electives to defer the need for additional semesters, but they did not have proper guidance during their first and second years of college. Many savvy pre-service students (i.e., middle-class students whose parents are college educated), take classes at the community college in the summer, and at a lower price point, to avoid extra semesters. Even if students who are new to higher education were to take the community college route, these classes, which also cost money, must comply with busy summer schedules that are filled with work and perhaps care giving for younger siblings who are out of school or family members who need one-on-one care.

Over the past thirty years, some scholars (e.g., Podgursky, 2005) have pointed to alternative certification programs or Masters/ certification programs as a means to widen the teacher education funnel. These programs often require students to have a bachelor’s degree; and some students are more eligible than others for the program depending on their initial degree. Students with degrees in traditional subject areas are easily placed into alternative certification programs, but students with degrees in social science and human service areas may find themselves close to doing a second bachelor’s degree. It has been noted that alternative certification programs are not drastically different from traditional programs in course requirements and field experiences (Podgursky, 2005; Walsh, Jacobs, & Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2007). These programs range from no cost to $30,000 for students (Walsh et al., 2007). Unless the program is tied to a funding stream, the participants may pay the equivalent of a Master’s program without gaining the actual degree. From a CRT perspective, the financial burden of obtaining the degree, coupled with low teacher salaries comparable to other career options for a baccalaureate degree, significantly dissuades CLD students from choosing to be teachers. This institutional structure creates an uncontested barrier to creating more CLD teachers. Clearly, students who look toward teaching as a career must weigh the amount of loan monies they will incur over four to five years against the salary they would make as a teacher. For students in higher paid professional fields, the end justifies the means; however, this may not be the case for teachers. Low-income students are more hesitant and less-willing to attend college when faced with twenty years of high loan payments (Horwedel, 2006). The majority of students who are willing to accumulate significant debt decide to get their degree in...
a more financially lucrative field that will help them manage the loan payments.

At the state and federal levels, funding for undergraduate scholarships across higher education has dwindled over the years, only to be replaced with public and private loans. State and federal loan forgiveness programs for teaching in areas of need have also become a minimal means of addressing teacher shortages and the dearth of CLD teachers. According to a study by the Project on Student Debt, high-level borrowing to fund higher education has grown much faster than low-level, or supplementary, borrowing (Horwedel, 2006). To a large extent, economically disadvantaged students of all races are worse off if the only aid they receive comes in the form of student loans. Many students graduate only to face immediate and staggering loan debt. Additionally, the processes for applying for and receiving state and federal funds for college tuition need to be streamlined and more transparent to encourage the maximum student access (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Thomas, & Chunyan, 2008). These circumstances beg the question, whose lifestyle is a teacher education program geared to serve? In a patriarchal society such as the United States, the clear answer is women—women whose jobs contribute to the household budget, but do not financially surpass or career supersede that of a male spouse. Following this line of reasoning leads to the question, who gets married in college or the U.S. society most often—White men and women? According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 72% of White, non-Hispanic men have been married, with 16% of those marriages taking place between the college years of 20 to 24 and 52% right after college between the ages of 25 and 29 (Krieder 2001). 80% of White women have been married with 29% of those marriages taking place between the ages of 20 to 24 and 66% between the ages of 25–29 (Krieder, 2001). These statistics compare to 57% of Black men, 60% of Hispanic men, 58% of Black women and 70% of Hispanic women ever being married. Black and Hispanic populations have similar percentages of marriage to White populations for the two age periods; however, the differences in population numbers demonstrates that significantly more White families are being created.

Given the connection between the creation of new White family units, the flexibility of teaching careers, and ever prevalent gender roles assigned to women, it seems likely that teacher education programs are designed for White heterosexual women who wish to start families after college. The choice for White women to become teachers, or choose other low-status careers, is supported by research that examines the social and economic factors affecting the career choices of men and women. Bradley (2000) posited that men and women’s career choices have remained virtually static due to societal norms that place value on women being care-givers and home-makers rather than primary bread-winners. The issue of race complicates and intersects with gender dynamics because Black and Latino women who have completed higher education are less likely to marry for reasons too complex to explain in this article.

**Teacher Education Program Design**

Concerns with the costs of teacher education programs are associated with the design of those programs. The step-by-step process to complete teacher education programs often prevents non-traditional, working students from being able to afford the program. However, within teacher education curricula lies a significant problem as well. Many teacher education programs that wish to create multicultural programs do not successfully implement the necessary curricula to infuse multicultural education into the program. Barriers such as limited multicultural education course offerings, qualified teaching staff, marginalization of CLD faculty, limited exemplary cooperating teachers, limited quality field placements, service learning programs with deficit ideologies all contribute to the under-education of pre-service teachers.

Multicultural teacher education asserts that programs must infuse the teaching of race, class, gender and culture throughout the program curriculum. The “infusion discourse” (Dixson & Dingus, 2007) assumes that every instructor understands con-
cepts of race, class and culture, and how they are manifested in students’ learning and teacher pedagogy. It assumes that teacher educators are not passing on deficit notions of CLD students and students living in poverty that are often revealed in teacher education research. It assumes that teacher educators share a definition of multicultural education that moves toward social critique and societal change, when in fact, most teacher educators espouse more color-blind than color-conscious ideologies that further submerge issues of race and racism in the curriculum. Teacher education programs often have large numbers of adjunct instructors who are not privy to internal conversations about the mission and vision of programs and the process of multicultural education infusion.

The most common program accommodation for multicultural education is the insertion of one “diversity” course that is mandated by the state. This course is often taught by a CLD faculty member who has been hired to facilitate the multicultural portion of teacher education curriculum (Dixson & Dingus, 2007). Given other stressors on the curriculum, the course becomes the sole space for discussing a host of diversity issues that are conflated with race, class, gender and national origin in a way that dilutes the impact of issues of racism, sexism and classism in preK-12 classrooms. Dixson and Dingus argued that “moreover, given the limited experiences of faculty with these issues, and the limits of the infusion model, students may not have the opportunity in their other courses to further interrogate their understanding of and discomfort with the issues and topics in the token multicultural education course” (p.650). Students may engage with difficult issues of racism in the diversity class, but subsequent courses do not build upon the diversity course. The lack of infusion of multicultural education prohibits students from developing a more comprehensive knowledge of students’ lives and teacher pedagogy.

Similarly, students are unable to unpack the experiential information they gain through field experiences. At the pre-service level, teacher education programs suffer from a lack of exemplary cooperative teacher placements where students can observe quality pedagogy. The majority of cooperative teacher placements are with White female teachers whose teaching styles resonate with teacher educators in charge of placements, but these programmers may not be the best judges of culturally relevant placements or successful African American and Latino teacher practices (Swetnam & Blocker, 1995). In addition, unsuccessful field placements occur in service learning programs. Many teacher education programs use service learning programs to connect their pre-service students with field experiences in CLD communities. Poor field experience placements station students in community organizations and after-school programs where the White student helps the unsuccessful CLD person become successful. This dynamic does not provide White students with the opportunity to observe the beauty and strengths of different communities; rather it reinforces their deficit notions of these communities and the people living in them (Cipolle, 2004). CRT advocates for pre-service students to have experiences that promote a discourse of difference and community strength, while many of these programs reinforce a deficit perspective of CLD students and their communities (Solorzano, 1997).

**Government Involvement in Teacher Education**

Many teacher education program operations can be directly linked to state government accountability measures for teacher certification and professional development. When discussing the limited role of multicultural courses and the faculty who teach them, Dixson and Dingus (2007) explained that “this limitation of course offerings, coupled with increasing state licensure requirements, constrains the course schedule and thus devalues and limits time for students to engage in meaningful experiences with difference other than the interactions with us [CLD faculty], which they resist” (p.649). Programs that desire a multicultural education focus struggle to accommodate state certification requirements and to attend to a more extensive exploration of race and racism.

The unsupported policies of the state and federal governments concerning diversity in teacher education further marginalizes
The primary thrust of teacher licensure standards is the need for Wisconsin's 10 standards do not specifically address culturally diverse fieldwork experiences and some course work focused on diversity, their teacher licensure standards do not discuss the teacher’s need to understand race and racism, marginalization, classism, or sexism as an integral set of skills for teaching children in the U.S (Morrier, Irving, Dandy, Dmitriyev, & Ukeje, 2007). The primary thrust of teacher licensure standards is the need for teachers to develop diverse instructional tools to facilitate students learning substantial amounts of content. This point is difficult to defend without producing a massive document showing the various states and their teacher certification standards. Here are examples that demonstrate this point. California is in the process of revising its 1997 teaching standards document. The outdated document mentions students from diverse backgrounds several times at the forward, but does not further articulate issues of race, culture, or class in the six overarching standards (Credentialing, 1997). Wisconsin’s 10 standards do not specifically address culturally relevant teaching; instead, the standards reference good teaching practices to serve all students (Burmaster, 2008). Virginia’s six standards for professional practice are broadly conceived, with minimal references to students’ communities and families in two of the standards and an overall emphasis on differentiated instruction and assessment (Virginia Standards for the Professional Practice of Teachers, 2008).

**Conclusion**

It is clear that Eurocentric standardized educational propellores prevalent in traditional teacher preparation programs. At a time when state and federal institutions want to make standardized tests more difficult and instruction and content more homogenous, a CRT perspective calls for more diversity in teacher certification and programming, not less. This means searching for students who hold academic possibilities and unproven potential, rather than those who have proven themselves successful. Students with potential may be struggling in community colleges or not in a higher education program. They may need academic and financial support. These are teachers that many urban students might identify with as community members, family members and mentors. These are the teachers who will likely understand the financial struggles of low-income students and do not see their communities as deficit spaces devoid of rich cultural practices.

Programs need to be created that allow students’ flexibility and provide them with financial incentives. More loan forgiveness and scholarship monies need to be attached to programs of teacher education. Information on current loan forgiveness programs, by state and federal governments, can be accessed through the American Teacher Federation website (Teachers, 2009). Currently, Stafford and Perkins loan forgiveness programs only forgive a percentage of the loan, with Stafford not to exceed $17,500. Other programs such as the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program only dissolves a person’s loans after he/she has served the public good for 10 years and made 120 loan payments. The dollar limits on the programs do not encourage students at highly ranked and more expensive col-

At a time when state and federal institutions want to make standardized tests more difficult and instruction and content more homogenous, a critical race theory perspective calls for more diversity in teacher certification and programming, not less.

Diversity in teacher education means more racially and ideologically diverse faculty to teach all courses, not just the one or two courses that focus on diversity. In critiquing institutional structures and daily unexamined practices of teacher education programs, CRT questions who decides how adjunct instructors, cooperating teachers and field work supervisors are solicited, and if these teachers are diverse in race, gender, religion, sexuality, or ideology (Ladson-Billings, 2000). These are difficult conversations to hold in Schools/Colleges of Education where certain aspects of programming are seen as the freedom of particular faculty members. Program diversity also means creating programs that fit the lives of nontraditional students who have family responsibilities and/or are responsible for their own financial situations. Additionally, teacher educators need to reject the idea that students with average academic performance cannot be quality teachers, and re-introduce the concept of the good educator as someone who cultivates a host of academic and non-academic skills that make children and young adults want to learn with him/her. This means searching for students who hold academic possibilities and unproven potential, rather than those who have proven themselves successful.

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leges to become teachers. A better opportunity for teachers is the TEACH grant. TEACH grants pay for student tuition with a contractual agreement that students will teach for four years in high need areas (Teachers, 2009). An alternate suggestion for decreasing the financial burden associated with teacher certification is to decrease the number of program course credits required and/or provide paid internships that can be completed in various educational settings (Podgursky, 2005). Additionally, monies for increasing the numbers of students in teacher certification programs must include the dissemination of information to junior high and high school students that highlights the strengths and joys of the teaching profession. Teachers should be financially rewarded for creating and maintaining programs to support different groups of students that go beyond traditional extra-curricular clubs and sports.

Here, in Wisconsin, law students do not take the bar exam to practice in the state. The state has shown incredible trust in the Wisconsin university system to produce quality lawyers without an exit exam. Why can’t this same relationship be extended to Schools/Colleges of education? If students maintain a B+ average or better in both their content and pedagogical courses and received similar grades on their performance assessments, why aren’t they exempt from the exam? Only those students who have not proven themselves competent through their course work, and students who wish to move to a different state, should be made to take an exit exam. In addition, the binary between quality and diversity must be aggressively challenged and dissolved so that more students will enter the ranks of the teaching profession. As Stovall (2005) observed, “Referencing this work [CRT] as a ‘challenge’ to traditional theoretical constructs critiques the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to education” (p. 106). CRT sees the official curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). In the case of teacher education, the master script discourse of standards and rigor is designed to maintain ideological privilege over the K-12 curriculum. If teacher education scholars continue to align “rigor” and “high standards” with homogenous ways of knowing and teaching children; and “low-status” and “low-standards” with diversity and flexibility, teacher education programs will remain rigid programs that continue to produce White, female candidates who have very little understanding of racism, sexism, and classism. If teacher education scholars continue to align “rigor” and “high standards” with homogenous ways of knowing and teaching children; and “low-status” and “low-standards” with diversity and flexibility, teacher education programs will remain rigid programs that continue to produce White, female candidates who have very little understanding of racism, sexism, and classism.
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References


Racial Identity and Teacher Preparation: 
HOW THEY MATTER TO CULTURALLY & LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE URBAN LEARNERS

by Festus E. Obiakor, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Exceptional Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Satasha L. Green, Ph.D., Associate Dean, College of Education, University of Alaska-Anchorage

What are the real identities of teacher preparation programs in the United States? Do these preparation programs reflect racial and socio-cultural identities of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) urban learners whom their own students are supposedly prepared to educate for life’s realities? How can these urban learners maximize their fullest potential when their teachers and service providers are unaware of their racial identities, home environments, and immediate and surrounding communities? This article responds to these questions using the critical race theory (CRT) as a conceptual educational framework.

Over the last three decades, urban schools have become increasingly diverse (Piana, 2000); and these schools continue to have teachers who are overwhelmingly White, middle-class, and female (Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999). Similarly, in most urban Colleges/Schools of Education, teachers, staff, and students are mostly White, middle-class, and female; yet colleges are expected to prepare their graduates to teach CLD urban learners. The question then is, How can these urban learners maximize their potential when their teachers are unaware of their racial and cultural identities CHARACTERISTICS, home environments, and communities? Despite the rhetoric of equal educational opportunity in the United States, a resource-rich education remains a privilege while poor and urban children from CLD backgrounds continue to experience exclusion and inequity in today’s educational systems (Williams & Obiakor, 2009). Using CRT as a conceptual educational framework, this article addresses how racial identity and teacher preparation matter to CLD urban learners.

CRT: Theoretical Framework

Even though the color line appears to progressively diminish in today’s society, there continues to be issues based on race, culture, and language. As a result, in 1987, some law professors who were dissatisfied with the inability of critical legal studies to address societal and racial inequities created the Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Rabaka, 2006). In the field of education, CRT is an analytical and theoretical tool used to address societal and racial dilemmas in schooling. It has been beneficial in investigating the integration of multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching in teacher preparation programs (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Abrams & Moio, 2009).

It is common knowledge that race is socially constructed. Arguably, it has been inaccurately applied through biological characteristics (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007). Many CLD individuals operate in institutional structures that pose unjustifiable obstacles because their race (Hansman, Spencer, Grant & Jackson, 1999). Most school systems work within the framework of European American mod-
els (Conrad, Gong, Sipp & Wright, 2004); and they tend to ignore the racial identity of CLD urban learners. It becomes very important for teacher preparation programs to emphasize to pre-service teachers the benefits of advancing their students’ racial identities in the classroom. Put another way, pre-service teachers must themselves recognize how their racial identities affect what they see and do in their respective classrooms.

The process of racial identity development among CLD urban learners follows a general socialization process, which begins at birth and continues throughout adulthood (Rhee, 2002). Most children have a sense of their own identities and those of others by the time they enter school (see Rhee). Their cultural frames of reference are established early in their lives and continuously evolve over their lifespan (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). This makes the traditional concept of assimilation to be very unproductive for these CLD students—this concept of assimilation forces them to deny who they are, thereby downplaying their self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-ideal (Obiakor, 2001, 2008). For example, junior and senior students from an urban high school were asked to complete a questionnaire to determine their attitudes about race, identify their coping styles, and reflect on their personal moods and emotions. It was found that there was an association between their negative beliefs about their own culture and low academic performance to the point that they felt often unwilling and/or unable to relax among their own racial peers (Steward, Murray, Fitzgerald, Heil, Rear, & Hill, 1998). Racial identity crisis can constitute a serious problem for CLD urban learners. In some cases, some CLD learners try to “act white” and associate educational success with “whiteness” (Ogbu, 2000). The learners with positive self-images about their ethnicity tend to be more successful in school than those without (Oyserman, Harrison & Bybee, 2001). Therefore, those who have adapted well to their social environments have been found to be more academically successful.

**Challenges Facing Teacher Preparation Programs**

To produce successful educators in a CLD urban school takes a different type of teacher preparation. According to Haberman (1996), this teacher preparation must be one that understands that race, racial identity and levels of urbanness must be addressed in course offerings and training. Preparing effective teachers for urban schools is a challenge and becomes more complex for many teacher preparation programs because of the unflattering visible homogeneity (Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999). These programs must realize that pre-service teachers need more than traditional methods of education. They need first hand experiences in urban schools, an understanding of their students’ racial identities, and an understanding of the communities from which their students come (Williams & Obiakor, 2009). Many times, novice teachers are placed in suburban areas for their field experience and/or student teaching but are hired to teach in CLD urban schools with little preparation to serve such a diverse population of students (see Williams & Obiakor). Interestingly, these “new” teachers do not reside in their students’ neighborhoods and feel socially isolated from them (Stairs, 2007).

Some years ago, Pang and Sablan (1998) noted that many pre-service as well as in-service teachers are ambivalent about their ability to teach CLD students in urban areas, and their feelings of efficacy seem to decline from the pre-service to the in-service stage. Clearly, a richer understanding of race, racism, racial identity, levels of urbanness, and multicultural knowledge base is needed by all teachers. In addition, White pre-service and in-service teachers must be taught about the painful experiences of racism to avoid its perpetuation within classrooms (Kohli, 2009). Within teacher preparation programs, it is important to create research and teaching strategies that acknowledge CLD teachers as insiders to the
experiences of racism in school, and as valuable assets in the fight for educational justice (Rios & Montecinos, 1999). Generally, CLD pre-service teachers may be more committed to multicultural teaching, social justice, and providing CLD urban learners with an academically challenging curriculum. However, knowledge of pedagogical practices may not be demonstrated more by CLD pre-service teachers than their White counterparts (see Obiakor, 2008; Rios & Montecinos). To a large measure, both groups need well-designed urban education teacher preparation programs. Clearly, institutions of higher learning must make a conscious effort to recruit CLD pre-service teachers to reflect the nation’s racial and cultural makeup. Schools should not be a place where European American and CLD learners are confronted with almost exclusively European American authority figures. Without CLD educators in positions of authority within schools (e.g., teachers and principals), CLD learners may be denied the opportunity to see people of their own race/ethnicities and cultures as positive role models. Additionally, when CLD educators are not a part of schools, European American children are less likely to (a) be exposed to daily positive interaction with adults from diverse populations, (b) obtain realistic views of others’ cultures, and (c) get accurate historic information and practical realities of CLD persons.

Many educational institutions today claim to be objective, color-blind, race neutral, and believers of meritocracy and equal opportunities. However, in these systems, there are rampant manifestations of self-interest, power, and privilege by the dominant group (Obiakor, 2001; Williams & Obiakor, 2009). As Fuller (1992) found many years ago, White faculty and students make up 95% of the teacher preparation programs based on a study of 19 Mid-west Holmes Group teacher preparation programs. In addition, a little over half (56%) of these institutions required elementary education students to take an urban education course; and one institution in the survey did not even offer such a course. This study also revealed that though pre-service teachers showed receptivity to learning about race and diversity, the multicultural content lacked continuity and was individual professor dependent. Today, the trends exposed by Fuller’s study have not changed. Sleeter (2001) concluded that continuing “business as usual” in teacher preparation programs will only continue to widen the gap between teachers and CLD urban learners in schools. Much of what pre-service teachers do fail to “reflect social reality and is therefore derelict in preparing them to function in a racially and culturally pluralistic and global society” (Sue, Bingham, Porche-Burke, & Vasquez, 1999, p. 1066).

### Culturally Responsive Preparation and Teaching

What can teacher preparation programs do to help their pre-service teachers become successful in urban schools? There are differences in the teaching and learning that take place in urban schools (Stairs, 2007). Urban education teacher preparation programs are needed to successfully train pre-service teachers to teach in urban areas. These programs cannot just focus on urbanness in isolation—they must assure that individuals who have historically been oppressed and underserved in our educational system have equal educational opportunities. In addition, they must ensure that educators provide culturally relevant instructional practices (Green, 2007, 2009). Clearly, these programs cannot continue to use traditional Eurocentric models of education that have consistently produced ill-equipped educators and service providers (Green, 2007; Obiakor, 2001, 2007, 2008; Obiakor & Beachum, 2005; Williams & Obiakor, 2009).

Culturally responsive teaching has been recognized as an approach particularly suited to urban schools where educating linguistically, culturally, and racially diverse students is a reality that some teachers find challenging. Some teacher educators are often unfamiliar with effective culturally responsive teaching strategies and practices.

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95% of a study of 19 Mid-west Holmes Group teacher preparation programs were made up of white faculty and students

Only 56% of these institutions required a class in urban education

Urban education teacher preparation programs are needed to successfully train pre-service teachers to teach in urban areas. These programs cannot just focus on urbanness in isolation—they must assure that individuals who have historically been oppressed and underserved in our educational system have equal educational opportunities.
to provide beneficial instruction to their pre-service teachers. As a consequence, many pre-service and in-service teachers seem insufficiently prepared to teach CLD urban learners (Fogel & Ehri, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). It is important to remember that one of the critical roles as a teacher is to incorporate the daily experiences of students’ prior knowledge within the teaching of new concepts (Irvine, 2002). Teachers must connect students’ personal cultural knowledge to learning objectives. By utilizing culturally familiar ways of instruction, teachers and service providers have the opportunity to encourage CLD learners to maximize their fullest potential (Gay, 2000).

How teachers and service providers are prepared affects how they teach and learn. Pre-service professionals need to be aware that CLD urban learners struggle for acceptance and acknowledgement of their strengths. This situation becomes extremely problematic when educators interpret cultural and linguistic differences of these students as academic deficits (Obiakor, 2007). These CLD learners can easily become outsiders in the existing educational system that is fundamentally developed and implemented, to a large degree around European American-middle class values and perspectives (LeCompte & McCray, 2002). Teacher preparation faculty must begin to deconstruct their own cultural experiences from their teacher preparation programs. They must examine the cultural divide between being faculty and the experiences of K-12 students their pre-service teachers will serve. Any mono-cultural approach to teacher preparation is counter-productive to the academic health, well-being, and future aspirations of CLD student populations. Narrow mono-cultural approaches perpetuate the narrow idea that the mainstream culture is the “standard bearer” and model for academic success (Pierre-Pipkin, 2004). Teacher educators must begin to understand that culture, characteristics, language, attitudes, and belief systems are significant parts of educating the whole student (Obiakor, 2001; 2008). Therefore, developing a “critical cultural consciousness” entails an awareness of what it takes to be an effective educator (Gay, 2002). For these reasons, teacher educators must address cultural consciousness so that they can begin to reflect on and assess their own values, biases, and stereotypes that they bring into college course teachings (Lane, 2006; LeCompte & McCray, 2002).

The goal is to encourage children from diverse backgrounds to develop a “cultural personality” and help them focus on academic excellence.

It is critical to understand the benefits of culturally responsive teaching. While it is a pedagogy of opposition similar to critical pedagogy, it focuses on collective and individual empowerment. Empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p.382). Shujaa (1995) added that it helps “students to develop the skills to achieve economic self-sufficiency and to develop citizenship skills based on a realistic and thorough understanding of the political system” (p.200). Clearly, professional development must be directed toward enabling teachers to focus on their conceptions of themselves and others, their cultural knowledge, and their classrooms’ social structure. In addition, teachers must recognize who they are racially, culturally, and economically and how they view others who are racially, culturally, and economically different. They must have the kind of cultural understanding that incorporates a person’s knowledge of and experiences with the values, mores, beliefs, and traditions of cultures that are different from one’s own (Sleeter, 2001).

Conclusion

In this article, we have focused on how racial identity and teacher
preparation matter to CLD urban learners. While teacher preparation programs have acknowledged the inevitability of change, their responses have been half-hearted and half-baked. Clearly, some programs have attempted to fit in “urban education” content into courses and field experiences; however, they have not been consistently and thoroughly incorporated. In fact, expansive multicultural perspectives have been rarely presented in the majority of these programs. They view discussions on race, racial identity, power, privilege and discrimination as controversial discussions; and faculty members who are viewed as controversial and “trouble-makers” are rarely recruited, tenured, and promoted. As a result, mediocrity and traditional Eurocentric values are perpetuated. We believe teacher educators must challenge themselves to examine their beliefs, attitudes, and instructional practices. They must develop racial awareness and cultural competence; and they must understand that what they do reflects and influences what is done in CLD urban schools. Finally, they must involve their immediate and surrounding communities in building innovative race-conscious and culturally responsive programs.

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References


Since Puerto Ricans began migrating to the Diaspora as United States citizens and filling up seats in her schools, they have been the recipients of schooling programs that have worked to assimilate them to United States values, traditions, and cultural norms. This attempted assimilation process has been largely carried out through public schooling (Negrón de Montilla 1975; Nieto 2000; Solís Jordán 1994; Spring 2001; Walsh 1991). Historically, by and large, educational experiences of Puerto Ricans in the United States have been wrought with tensions created by the assimilation strategies of schools where students from this ethnic group are alienated by monocultural and Eurocentric curricula, sharp contrasts of socio-cultural norms between students and teachers, and exhibitions of linguistic and cultural racism in school policies and practices (see Nieto, 1995, 2000). While there is a significant and growing body of literature that highlights how schools are meeting or not meeting the needs of Puerto Rican students in these schools, it has mostly been focused on Puerto Ricans in the Northeastern and Midwestern United States. Therefore, there is a much greater need to explore educational experiences of Puerto Ricans in other areas of the United States. Hence, the Central Florida region presents a prime location to extend this research. The Puerto Rican population in the last 10 years has grown exponentially in Central Florida, which has the fastest growing Puerto Rican population in the United States (Duany & Matos-Rodríguez 2006) and is radically changing the once homogenous identity of this geographic region. Moreover, Puerto Ricans are now the largest Latina/o group within Florida’s Orange and Osceola Counties with Orange claiming the largest number of Puerto Ricans in the state and Osceola, the largest percentage. In 2005, 62 percent of all Latino students in Central Florida PK-12 schools were enrolled in either Orange or Osceola County (De Jesús & Vásquez 2006). Additionally, in the district where this study was conducted, 27
percent of the students are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). The increasingly large population of Puerto Ricans and Latinas/os in the Central Florida area behooves the exploration of their schooling experiences in this region.

Therefore, in this qualitative study, we explore and analyze the experiences of Puerto Rican high school students enrolled in a Central Florida high school. More specifically, we elucidate the voices of a group of Puerto Rican youth in order to examine the extent to which one Central Florida high school is meeting or not meeting the needs of this ethnic population. We were interested in exploring how school based policies and practices were accommodating the rapidly increasing population of Latino/Puerto Rican students and their CLD identities. To what extent, if any, did students feel alienated or included at school and in the community at large? While this is only one qualitative study in a unique and specific locality, findings provide insights for other schools.

**LatCRT as a Theoretical Framework**

LatCRT stems from Critical Race Theory, a theoretical framework that is largely credited with African American critical legal scholar Derrick Bell. Hence, CRT focuses on several central tenets that include the notion that (a) racism and its ensuing power relations over subjugated peoples are common facets of life in the United States, (b) individual and community identities are informed by complex, multilayered contingencies like race, class, gender, sexual orientation, immigration, and able and non-ablebodiedness, and (c) counterstorytelling is important to make sense and act upon the experiences of marginalized people (Chapman & Antrop-González, 2011; Dixon & Rousseau, 2006; Knight, Norton, Bentley and Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Quiñones, Ares, Padela, Hopper, & Webster, 2011; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Thus, LatCRT extends the critical work of African American scholars to the lived experiences of Latinas/os in the United States in such fields as anthropology, education, political science, and sociology. Additionally, LatCRT scholars not only employ research methods that attempt to counter the dominant way of describing the history of marginalized groups but also to center the lived experiences and voices of CLD people to counter dominant, master ways of knowing the world. Hence, this article applies a LatCRT framework to offer a brief historical analysis of the schooling of Puerto Ricans in the United States in addition to describing the schooling experiences of Puerto Rican students enrolled in a large, comprehensive high school in Central Florida, which has recently become a major destination area for Puerto Ricans.

**Unique Position of Puerto Ricans in the United States**

It is important to understand the context in which Puerto Ricans are educated in U.S. schools. Unlike other im/migrant groups, Puerto Ricans, under colonial rule of the United States, have been subjected to U.S. educational policies since 1898. Additionally, all Puerto Ricans are United States citizens by way of the Jones Act of 1917. Thus, they have the right to travel, without restriction, between Puerto Rico and the continental United States. This has caused many Puerto Ricans to become circular migrants who are able to seek economic and educational opportunities in the U.S. and maintain close ties with their homeland. Nieto (2000) noted that:

> … because of the ease of getting back and forth, there has been no need to sever ties with the home country, contrary to the experiences of most immigrants. This experience has provided a cultural and linguistic continuity not afforded previous or even more recent immigrants, and it has been manifested by a practical need for continued use of the Spanish language and the maintenance of cultural patterns. (p. 11)

This necessity to maintain their linguistic and cultural identity, when met with the assimilationist education policies that are frequently present in US schools, has the potential to create an atmosphere of alienation and/or marginalization for Puerto Rican students. Despite the pleas of scholars (e.g., Antrop-González & De Jesús 2006; Irizarry & Antrop-González 2007; Ladson-Billings 1994; Nieto 2003, 2004; Sleeter & McLaren 1995; Walsh 1991; Wiley & Lukes 1996; Valenzuela 1999) for schools to combat this paradigm by adopting language policies and multicultural curricula that facilitate the maintenance and enrichment of the students’ home language and culture, there are many schools and school districts that continue the colonial
While the older and more vicious tactics of “sink or swim” have largely been abandoned, bilingual education programs in U.S. schools commonly do not strive to enrich or maintain the student’s first language. This phenomenon is evidenced by the fact that most English Language Learner (ELL) students experience a transitional bilingual education program that seeks to immerse students in English content courses, such as math, social studies, and science as quickly as possible, while providing only a cursory ESOL course. Thus, many Latino/Puerto Rican youth are victims of inequitable bilingual education programs that continue to be assimilationist in nature (Nieto 2003; Spring 2001). Earlier, Valenzuela (1999), in her study of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, referred to this practice as subtractive schooling, where students are divested of their home language and culture, further marginalized and confronted with the difficult challenge of maintaining their linguistic culture and heritage in the face of linguistically repressive and hostile school climates and less than adequate bilingual education policies carried out by bureaucratic actors. The basic understanding that schools are bureaucratic institutions that inherently serve the interests of White middle class teachers who claim to serve CLD urban youth (Cross 2003; Sleeter & McLaren 1995) underscores much of the research exploring the achievement of CLD students. A finding that is paramount to any discussion in this vein is Ladson-Billings’ (1995) notion of culturally relevant pedagogy that calls for a departure from Eurocentric curricular practices toward curricula that are socially and culturally applicable to the experiences of urban students. While her work largely focuses on African American students, Puerto Rican scholars have extended this theoretical/pedagogical framework to address the schooling experiences of Puerto Rican students (Irizarry & Antrop-González 2007). These researchers’ vision for culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is based on the Freirian ideal that pedagogy must be “authentic, affirming, and liberatory” and also must be flexible and responsive to “variability” within groups. Thus, this research suggests the need for a departure from the pre-packaged curricula that is often pervasive in urban schools.

Using the theoretical framework of Critical Whiteness Studies, Marx (2003) explored the cultural mismatch between students and teachers that often hinder the ability to provide CRP and found that White teachers’ perceptions of Whiteness, masked in the normality of their own cultural norms, and overtly and covertly expressed through their pedagogies, negatively affected their Latina/o students. Incidentally, rather than helping their students, these teachers hinder these students’ learning process by not valuing, respecting, and incorporating their cultures into their teaching. In addition, the lack of these teachers’ success to make students feel valued exacerbates the barriers to creating meaningful interpersonal relationships with students (Antrop-González & De Jesús 2006). Furthermore, these teachers’ behaviors block opportunities for transmitting any social capital to their students/tutees (Muller 2001; Rodríguez 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch 1996; Stanton-Salazar 2004). For example, in her quantitative study of 10th grade student and teacher relationships, Muller suggested ‘teachers’ actions are especially important for setting the tone of the relationship and the foundation for students’ academic progress” (p. 243). The notion of caring teachers vs. uncaring teachers has suggested a similar impact that teachers can have on students (Antrop-González & De Jesús 2006; Valenzuela 1999). Moreover, the transmittance of social capital through the building of social networks with teachers or other adults in the school and community (Flores-González 2002; Stanton-Salazar 2004) and access to institutional support mechanisms (Conchas 2001) have been shown to increase student participation in school and positively affect achievement. Furthermore, through such relations, students are able to obtain access to high stakes information (Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, in press) that have the potential to help prepare them to navigate schools and be better prepared for post-secondary education. This high stakes information includes such things as college admissions and financial aid information. The above
studies highlight and provide insights regarding the experiences of Puerto Ricans in U.S. schools in general.

**High Stakes Testing/FCAT**

During the period of the rapid influx of Puerto Ricans to the region, the state of Florida was undertaking “sweeping educational reforms” that included increased accountability through standardized testing (De Jesús & Vásquez 2006). The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is the state’s high stakes test that has the absolute authority to determine if a student receives a high school diploma. It is currently administered to students in grades 3–11 and the graduating class of 2003 was the first to take the FCAT. Initially, the test could only be taken in English but Senate Bill 2546, passed in 2003, allows for non-native speakers to take the test in their first language. Despite this change, an article in the *Orlando Sentinel* reported that Puerto Ricans are failed by standardized testing and that only 14% of English Language Learners pass the reading portion of the FCAT; and they have less than a 50% graduation rate (Deluzurgiaga, Hay Brown, & Postal 2004). Unfortunately, the deleterious effects that the FCAT have specifically on Puerto Ricans is hard to measure since Florida does not collect disaggregated data for Latinos.

One quantitative study on the FCAT (Borg et al. 2007) shows that Blacks and Latinas/os suffer the most from this test in terms of decreased graduation rates. This statistic is evidenced by the fact that 20 percent less students pass the FCAT than the previous exit exam in Florida. Additionally, the pressure to do well on high stakes tests narrows the curriculum and leaves less time to focus on Spanish language instruction or bilingual education, and ultimately further subtracts from the equitable educational experiences for English Language Learners (Solórzano 2008; Valenzuela 2001). Finally, research has shown that tests like the FCAT only serve to increase the achievement gap because of how well performing schools are rewarded while poor performing schools are penalized (Valenzuela 2005). Thus, such testing reproduces social stratification (Gayles 2007) in addition to leading some districts to “game the system” by purging the student body of poor performing students (Vasquez Heilig & Darling-Hammond 2008).

Hence, the term “high stakes testing” is no misnomer, which is why Valenzuela (2001) called attention to the “high stakes consequences” of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and “challenged the wisdom” of such high stakes testing. Her proposition to move away from single tests that can determine promotion, retention, and graduation to multiple assessment criteria has major implications and invaluable implications for Florida and its FCAT.

**Methods**

This study was driven by our interest in exploring the educational experiences of the rapidly increasing population of Puerto Ricans in the Central Florida region. Therefore, this study focused on Puerto Rican high school students’ stories regarding their schooling experiences in a large comprehensive high school located in Central Florida. This study was guided by two areas of inquiry:

1. How do students perceive their high school’s climate and culture, particularly with regard to its large Puerto Rican/Latina/o population?
2. What are students’ perceptions regarding their teachers and the extent to which they impact their academic achievement?

**Description of Study Site**

This study was conducted at Sunshine High School (a pseudonym), which is a large comprehensive high school in the Central Florida region. This high school houses a student body of 2,900 students in grades 9 through 12. The school was undeniably overcrowded. Portable classrooms filled the entire football field. Nearly 3,000 students were crammed into 3 half-hour lunch periods where students endured very long lunch lines and scrambled to get their food, which many had only a few minutes to eat by the time the bell rang for the next period. Additionally, while the school had a particularly large Latina/o population, there were only a handful of Latina/o teachers and administrators. In contrast, the school had an 88 percent minority enrollment and of the entire student body, 64 percent were eligible for free or reduced lunch. More than half of the 88 percent minority students were Latina/o (58%). While the school does not disaggregate data for Latina/o subgroups, it was reported by a school guidance counselor that nearly 90...
percent of the 58 percent of Latinas/os were of Puerto Rican descent. As all the schools and school districts in this region are graded annually as part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), it is possible to report that the district in which Sunshine High is located received a ‘C’ for the 2006-2007 school year while Sunshine High received an ‘F.’

The majority of our time was spent on the 3rd floor where the guidance counselors and ESL support staff were located. This area had a number of Latina/Puerto Rican women who were secretaries, guidance counselors, and ESL support staff. Interestingly, this area was inundated with posters and brochures advertising every type of military service imaginable. Moreover, there were numerous posters, handouts, flyers, and brochures for alternative high school diploma programs. Such programs, we learned, were an emerging and rapidly growing option for students who were unable to pass the FCAT.

Participant Criteria
Participants for the study were recruited and selected based on several criteria. First, study participants had to self-identify as Puerto Rican. Second, they had to be enrolled in grades 11 or 12, as the majority of Puerto Rican students drop out by the tenth grade (Nieto, 1998). Therefore, the participants in this study are the ones who have persevered through tenth grade and thus, would be more likely to finish high school. There is one exception to these criteria in the study. Emily, a 17-year old sophomore, was included in the study. Although her age would suggest that of a junior or senior, she was eager to be interviewed for this study; thus, she was included.

There were several limitations of this study: First, classroom observations were not part of this study. Second, this study included a biased sample of only junior and senior Puerto Rican students, with the exception of Emily and three Puerto Rican staff members, which limits the perspectives to only this demography of students and staff. Third, the site of the study was chosen because of its very large Puerto Rican population. Other sites in this region may produce contrasting results to those of this study, as it is one study at a particular school with a unique student population. Therefore, findings cannot be generalized to other schools. Nonetheless, they may provide insights for other educators and further research.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures
Once the pool of possible participants was selected, a visit to the school was made to meet the students and describe the intentions of the study. This introduction was held in the school library and involved a presentation of the study design, a question and answer period, and informal conversations over food and beverages. Following the initial meeting, 3 school visits over a period of 3 months were made. Each visit lasted for 3–4 days. During the visits, in-depth interviews with students were conducted. The in-depth interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour each with 12 students. In addition to interviewing students, 3 staff members were interviewed including an assistant principal, guidance counselor, and social worker. Also, we observed several lunch periods. During these observations, we had many informal conversations with school administrators including assistant principals, guidance counselors, and other personnel. We were invited to and attended a meeting between teachers and administrators that involved a conversation about a forthcoming transition of creating small learning communities and dividing the school into two separate schools.

All interviews were conducted in a private room located in the guidance counseling and administration area of the school. Before interviewing each participant, they were debriefed about the interview process and the procedures taken to protect their identities and confidentiality. They were also given the opportunity to choose whether they preferred to conduct the conversation in English or Spanish. All of the interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify recurring themes. Of the 12 Puerto Rican student participants included in this work, 8 of them were females and 4 were males. Also, 2 female and 1 male staff member were included. We should note that interviews with staff members are only marginally included in the analysis, as we wanted this work to distinctly privilege the voices of students (see Table 1 on next page). Thus, staff member voices are only included to provide context and support of the student voices.

Findings
The First Area of Inquiry
While a few of the participants reported being in close proximity to crime and gang activity, the majority of them remarked that they lived in quiet neighborhoods and a few of their parents were homeowners in Central Florida. Without exception, the participants that migrated from Puerto Rico explained that they were happy that they have been able to learn English and that being bilingual has been helpful for their families and in the communities in which they live. However, for many of these students, an overcrowded, often culturally irrelevant, and linguistically hostile school environment has tainted the promise
of greater opportunity in Central Florida. Moreover, the high stakes test of FCAT is making receiving a high school diploma an overwhelmingly daunting task. In the year this study was conducted, only 25 percent of students in the school were meeting the reading standards and 45 percent were meeting math standards as measured by the FCAT. Thus, much work needs to be done in order to better accommodate the educational needs of Puerto Rican high school students at Sunshine High School. Unfortunately, for the youth in this study, our observations in conjunction with the students’ stories provided a picture of an educational atmosphere that was not much different from that of most CLD students in urban schools throughout the United States. As Michelle said, “It makes me feel sad because, like, they don’t care where you come from or appreciate it, they don’t talk

Table 1: Description of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>Years in US/Central Florida</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Career/Post secondary aspirations</th>
<th>Parents’ Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>7/1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>Airplane Mechanic</td>
<td>M: HS F: HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>M: HS F: HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jersey</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>M: Some college F: HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Circular Migrant*/6 months</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>M: Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
<td>M: HS grad F: HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Medical Assistant</td>
<td>M: HS F: Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Not sure/wants to go to college</td>
<td>M: College degree F: Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>5/2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Undisclosed</td>
<td>Neurologist</td>
<td>M: HS F: HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>M: HS F: HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>María</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Circular Migrant*/1 yr</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Possibly TV production</td>
<td>M: HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>12/5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Pediatric Medicine</td>
<td>M: HS Dropout F: HS Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>14/3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>X-Ray Tech</td>
<td>M: HS F: HS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These participants reported moving back and forth between PR and the US, making it difficult to determine how many years they have resided in the US.

Table 2: Description of Staff Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>María</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Puerto Rican/Cuban</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
about my people. It makes me feel bad because you come over [here] for better opportunities and if they treat you like that it’s not worth it.”

The stories told by several of the students strongly suggest that Sunshine High School’s primary role is to reproduce and perpetuate subtractive schooling (Valenzuela 1999). That is, from the moment these Puerto Rican youth enter school, they are subjected to a monocultural curriculum that privileges a colonial Eurocentric perspective. Moreover, they are situated in an often linguistically hostile school climate. The above comment from Michelle is representative of most of the students’ feelings that teachers and class discussions did not incorporate Puerto Rican culture or history in the curriculum. Nena, a guidance counselor, reported that despite the very large Puerto Rican population and the school’s geographic proximity to Puerto Rico, there was not a single class that addressed Puerto Rican history. One of the participants also told a story about two class history projects where students were required to do a report on a “foreign” place and a place in the United States. They, however, were not allowed to report on Puerto Rico for either project. Hence, Michelle expressed feelings of intense marginalization. In contrast to Michelle’s experiences, a few of the students expressed that their Puerto Rican teachers would talk to them personally about their Puerto Rican experiences. For example, Javier reported having a history teacher who “talks a lot about Spanish and mostly Puerto Rican [history]” and Emily said that during Hispanic heritage month they did a “mini project with a timeline” in English class. The testimonies of Javier and Emily are evidence that there are a few teachers that may be making an effort to engage the students through a culturally responsive curriculum (Irizarry & Antrop-González 2007). However, the extent of this effort, and whether the content escapes the typical colonial perspective when discussing the culture and history of Puerto Ricans, needs to be further examined. What is known, through informal conversations with teachers and observations of the school culture in general, is that the few students that did experience some type of inclusion in the curriculum felt more comfortable and respected at the school.

Elisabeth, a multi-ethnic Latina, expressed that if the school has “a party or something [and] they [play] Spanish music we feel good about it because they’re actually thinking about us…we speak Spanish.” This comment from Elisabeth implies that she does not always feel like the school is thinking about her and other Latinas/os who speak Spanish as a first language. Thus, while we cannot generalize the experiences of some of the participants to all Latinas/os in the school, we feel confident in speculating that many of the nearly sixty percent Latina/o population at Sunshine High may at times experience similar feelings of alienation and marginalization. The linguistic culture of the school was, in many cases, repressive for Spanish speakers. Javier, Michelle, and Alex explicitly expressed frustration with being told not to speak Spanish in their classes and throughout the school. According to Javier, “When I talk Spanish in class, they tell me don’t talk in Spanish ’cuz this is America and you know…so I ’gotta talk English. Sometimes I understand English but some of them think it’s disrespectful when I’m talking Spanish in front of them but actually I’m not talking to them, I’m talking to my friends.”

Michelle noted: “It makes me feel, like, kinda sorry ’cuz there’s a lot of people that speak Spanish and they treat us like we’re left out…you know they have their preferences.”

According to Alex, “I don’t understand my teachers in English and most of my classes are in traditional English speaking classrooms.”

Several of the participants even commented that some Puerto Rican Spanish teachers would hardly speak to them in Spanish. It is understood that this may be a strategic attempt to help the students learn English. However, inhibiting the use of Spanish in a school with such a large population of English Language Learners and enforcing English-only policies and practices, even through native Spanish speakers, may serve to explicitly or implicitly send a message to these students that their native language is of no value in this country. It is important to note that in conversations with some of the Puerto Rican staff, we learned that they were also subjected to similar exhibitions of linguistic racism. Both María and Nena shared stories of being told by colleagues that they should not speak Spanish in the school, citing reasons such as “How do I know you’re not talking about me?” Or “We’re in America...English, English, English.” Based on conversations with students and staff about the linguistic culture and climate of the school coupled with a curriculum that reportedly does not do enough to meet the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of students, Sunshine High is perpetuating the traditional, colonial objective of stripping Puerto Rican youth of their identities. The experiences of many of the students at Sunshine High confirm Nieto’s (2003) perspectives concerning Puerto Rican students’ struggle to maintain and/or develop a sense of ‘personhood’ in US schools. That is, these students’ self-esteem, self-respect, level of self-worth, and sense of “belonging and dignity,” are constantly at odds with school policies and practices that often, implicitly or explicitly, view their Puerto Rican “identity” as the major barrier to academic success.
Another perplexing finding in this study revealed that several of the native Spanish speaking Puerto Rican students were enrolled in beginning level Spanish courses that they reported as being very easy. While one cannot presume this to be a deliberate attempt to avoid the students’ heritage language development, we do have to ponder why such practices are taking place. It may be possible that the three guidance counselors are overwhelmed by the 2,900 students in which they are responsible for and unable to effectively make sure that all students are in appropriate courses. Another example of misplaced or misclassified students is that of Kimberly and María. While there were several participants that had questionable ESOL placements, the situations of Kimberly and María were very clear. They are both very fluent speakers of English. María was born and raised in Miami, Florida and spent only three of her early childhood years on the Island. She is from a working class family and lives only with her mother. Kimberly was born and raised in Puerto Rico, educated in private schools, and is from a middle-class family. Her parents own a small business in Central Florida and she has only been in the United States for three years. Despite their command of the English language, they were both placed in the school’s ESOL program. María transferred to Sunshine High from another school and was not only improperly placed in the ESOL program, but also nearly had to repeat the tenth grade due to poor record keeping at the school. She explained that the ESOL class “is a waste of my time.” However, when asked if she ever questioned why they put her in this class, she stated, “Not really, I was just put in the class.” At the time of the conversation with María, she had already been in the ESOL class for almost an entire school year. In contrast, Kimberly’s mother, who transferred her in and out of a number of private schools in Puerto Rico in her attempts to find a school that was a good fit and moved to Central Florida specifically for better college opportunities, immediately took issue with Kimberly’s unnecessary ESOL placement. As Kimberly noted, “When I first came here they put me in ESOL. I told her [mother] and she got mad and she was like, oh no, you shouldn’t be in ESOL. So she came and they had a big meeting, should they take me out of ESOL, they took me out. I took the test, and she came and took me out of ESOL.”

Clearly, research has suggested that Kimberly and her parents’ middle class status has provided them with the type of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) that has instilled a sense of agency, entitlement, and the knowledge of how to effectively communicate with the school while advocating for their child. This finding is not to imply that María’s mother does not care or is unable to advocate for her child’s needs. However, as shown by Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999), parents who do not have a certain type of cultural capital that comes from membership in the middle and upper class may feel at odds with the school, less educated and less knowledgeable of what is best for their children, and ultimately, unaware of the ‘acceptable’ tact and procedures to navigate the system and obtain best results for their children.

Achievement, Aspirations, and College Preparation.

While theories of social reproduction (Anyon 1980; Bourdieu & Passeron 1979; Bowles & Gintis 1976) through schools posit that urban school systems’ policies and practices are constructed in a way that reinforces and maintains current patterns of social stratification for many, such schools offer the only hope for an opportunity of social mobility. Each of the participants’ willingness to stay in school and endure the very conditions that research has profoundly shown discourages students’ desire to participate in school, is evidence that these students believe through education there is hope. Unfortunately, Sunshine High’s curricular practices do not relate to, or include the social, cultural, or historical experiences of these Puerto Rican youth. On the contrary, repressive language policies and practices, lack of important social networks (Stanton-Salazar 2001), and the absence of institutional support mechanisms (Conchas, 2001; Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, in press) have left many of these student participants feeling marginalized and on their own in their journey to graduate from high school and ultimately attend college.

Each of the participants expressed aspirations to attend college. However, very few of them felt that school was challenging or preparing them for college. None of the youth in the study we spoke with admitted to spending more than an hour a day doing homework and a few of them spent as little as 10 minutes to no time at all on homework each night. In fact, the students that spent the least time on their homework were both the highest achievers and lowest achievers in the group. This finding supports the notion that the school is not challenging some of these students and that some of them may simply be bored with, and thus resistant to the curriculum, while others may breeze through assignments with very little effort. Although none of the participants indicated they were enrolled in any Advanced Placement (AP) courses, this finding suggests that some of them may be in the wrong academic track, which is surely limiting the educational opportunities of these students. Needless to say, time spent doing homework is not necessarily indicative of how well one is doing in school (Kohn 2006). Moreover, Carla and Elisabeth were both taking a class about parenthood, where they actually had to wear strap-on baby bellies on occasion to learn about motherhood. As the school had an on-site day care service, students in this class would often spend time interacting
with children in the daycare as well. In addition to poor academic tracking, most of our participants lacked any guidance from school staff in learning how to achieve their post-secondary education goals. Many of them reported that their parents were their major source of information. As most of the students’ parents did not attend college, it seems that many may not have the resources and knowledge to effectively guide their children through the college application process. Moreover, while the guidance counselors, who were all Latina, certainly indicated a desire to help students in this regard, there were only three for the entire school of 2,900 students, leaving those three with a particularly daunting task.

As it appears, the need for students to develop meaningful relationships with other adults and social networks in the school that can help them through this process are greatly needed. Unfortunately, only two of the participants reportedly made those important connections in the school to help them prepare for and navigate the college process. Of the two students that articulated such relationships, one of them was a high achiever. Both Emily, a high achiever and Ashley, a middle achiever expressed relationships with teachers and/or other social networks and support systems that have impacted their academic achievement. Emily, who is a 17 year-old tenth grader with a self-reported 3.0 grade point average, has only recently become a high achiever. It is important to note that she started school late and was held back in the third grade at the request of her father. In our conversation, she expressed a deep sense of pride in her academic improvement and an understanding of the importance of school to her future. In her words, “I’m real happy about this progress report that I got, because I really tried hard and I really want to graduate with a decent GPA and try my best to go where I want to go, like college. I want to go to college, I want to study and be in the medical field.” Furthermore, Emily indicated that a very special relationship with a former teacher and her religious faith are two important factors that helped her to stay focused on her studies and thus, improve her academic standing. Similar to students in an earlier study (Antrop-González, Vélez, & Garrett 2005), when asked about how church has helped her, Emily explained, “going to church keeps me confident” and “it helps me a lot because I know that what I go through [pressure and school work] is going to help me.” In addition to church, Emily was very passionate about her relationship and the guidance she received from her former teacher. As she indicated, “One of the teachers from 9th grade, she made me feel real comfortable in the school. She really had a passion for people to be comfortable around her comfortable around the school…She’s amazing. I keep in contact with her. And I try not to cry. She’s teaching in middle school, in her school, and she’s amazing. She’s the best thing that ever happened to me in this school so far…it’s her way of being. She’s amazing. She never gave up on anybody at all. She gave good advice, she was also there. I told her basically my life story and she knows a lot about me. She was, I always had lunch with her every single day.” Ashley, a junior with a self-reported 2.7 GPA, also expressed having a good relationship and receiving guidance from two of her teachers. Speaking of her Puerto Rican Spanish teacher, she said, “she’s my good friend, yes. She’s always there for me.” When asked if she felt this way about any of her other teachers, she responded that she also had a very good relationship with her chemistry teacher, who is helping her to take the appropriate courses to prepare for college and her pursuance of a degree in the medical field. Thus, she remarked that “she’s always helping me out and telling me to follow this course, that’s what she’s always saying.” Much like the experiences of students in a recent study (Rodriguez, 2008), these students’ voices also emphasized the importance of student/teacher relationships in the schooling process.

Conclusion
This study revisited themes pertaining to the education of Latinas/os, particularly Puerto Ricans. Such themes as linguistic and cultural accommodation and the effects on achievement were explored and analyzed in a largely unexplored region. Research in this region is important and timely. The findings of this study indicate that much work needs to be done in order to better accommodate the educational needs of Puerto Rican high school students at Sunshine High School. Unfortunately, for the youth in the study, what was observed in conjunction with the students’ stories provided a picture of an educational
atmosphere that is not much different from that of most CLD youth in urban high schools throughout the United States. Testimonies of students and staff at Sunshine High corroborate the research of previous studies (De Jesús & Vásquez 2006; Duany & Matos-Rodríguez 2005) that suggest the primary reason why many Puerto Ricans choose to migrate to Central Florida revolves around the perception of having access to better educational opportunities and becoming bilingual. Despite students and their families’ attempts to seek out such opportunities, however, Sunshine High has only marginally accepted and included this relatively new and expanding population of Puerto Ricans. In addition, some students endure explicit attacks on their language and culture while others are left feeling ostracized as an effect of an assimilationist school curriculum and culture. Finally, most of these students, particularly those classified as English Language Learners are at a high risk of never receiving a high school diploma as a result of Florida’s high stakes testing and accountability measures.

The school is very limited in its approach toward bilingual education, applying only the federal minimum in transitional bilingual education standards. The fact that Florida did not have any state regulations in accordance with the Lau vs. Nichols ruling until 1990 provides evidence as to how recent and sudden the need to revisit the way Central Florida does schooling has come about. As history has shown in cases such as Lau vs. Nichols and Brown vs. Topeka, Kansas School Board, individual states are often slow to comply with federal mandates; and when they do, much like what was observed in Central Florida, it is often in the spirit of doing the bare minimum. This study provided a glimpse into how Central Florida is undertaking this most important task. Furthermore, this study adds to the discussion concerning the educational experiences of Puerto Rican youth and finally, explores and critiques high-stakes testing as a sole measure of academic performance.

The implications of this study for policy makers, teachers, and administrators in Central Florida are far reaching. As this rapidly growing population of Latino/Puerto Ricans in the Central Florida area is the first group to challenge the largely homogenous population of this region, it is important that pre-service and in-service teachers and other school agents learn more about their students with regard to their history as a colonized people. Moreover, it is imperative that these school agents honor the lived experiences of their Latino/Puerto Rican youth by incorporating culturally relevant curricular practices into their classrooms. Also, the high stakes consequences of the FCAT, which leaves far too many students behind at Sunshine High and in Central Florida in general need to be critically reexamined and new approaches toward accountability should be eagerly sought after. Vélez’ (1989) recommendation to disaggregate data for Latino subgroups is also reinforced by this study, as it is difficult to determine how Puerto Ricans are faring in schools, particularly at testing, with regard to other Latino groups. Researchers need to continue to explore the educational atmosphere for Latino/Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. However, more importantly, there is a need to communicate findings to policy makers and other key stakeholders in order to advocate on behalf of students that are being left behind and influence more equitable school policies and practices for Latino/Puerto Rican youth. Finally, schools like Sunshine High must also work harder to conceptualize, hire, and retain bilingual parents/caregivers who are employed within the schools to act as liaisons to the Puerto Rican community they purport to serve. These liaisons have the strong potential to serve as bridges between the larger community and schools. In conclusion, this study may provide insights of advocacy and initiate a critical conversation regarding the schooling of Puerto Rican students in Central Florida. By not communicating these findings, Central Florida runs the risk of allowing entire generations of Latino/Puerto Rican students to fall through the cracks of the school system and watch their Florida dream become a Florida nightmare.

Notes
1. Substantial parts of this article were borrowed from: Sokolowski, J., Antrop-González, R., & Maldonado, Z. (2010). Chasing the Florida Dream: Examining the schooling experiences of Puerto Rican youth in a large comprehensive high school. Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 22(1), 219-241.
2. This is the term used in the Lau vs. Nichols case. However, this term has been argued to elicit perceptions of a deficiency in such individuals and the current term that is used, which is used frequently throughout this paper, is English Language Learner (ELL).
3. This is a result of Puerto Rico’s status shifting from the colonial rule of Spain in 1898 to the present colonial rule of the United States.

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To utilize a culturally sensitive racial and ethnic lens to create, organize, assess, and disseminate scholarly knowledge designed to impact policy and quality of life issues in the greater Milwaukee area.