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Above: “So Happy to See You” (2019) by Angelina Medina. Clay, 6 in. x 6 in. x 3 in.
Sponsored by the University of New Mexico’s Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies, *Intersections: Critical Issues in Education* is an online, peer-reviewed, open access academic journal. We seek to deepen understanding of how race, class, gender, sexuality, exceptionailities, power, well-being, and other subjectivities play out in educational settings as a means of advancing social justice for all people. *Intersections* serves as a forum for diverse voices and perspectives reflecting a variety of disciplines, focusing on work that interrogates, disrupts and challenges oppression. We welcome a range of materials, including academic papers, personal perspectives, and other innovative forms of scholarship that may speak to an audience beyond academia.

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**Cover Artist:**
*Angelina Frances Medina, Ph.D.*

Angelina Frances Medina is a member of the Acoma, Zia, and Zuni Tribes of New Mexico. She has been a secretary, a teacher, a principal, a lecturer, a demonstrator, a published author, a poet, a storyteller, an aerobics instructor, a healing facilitator, and an artist. In 2016, she earned a Ph.D. in Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies at the University of New Mexico. Angelina seeks to convey history, culture, and spiritual ways of being through her art. She is presently making a “come-back” to art because, as she states, art places her in the “Center of the Universe of harmony and peace. My clay sculptures are lovingly shaped by my hands to express my personal healing and spiritual fulfillment as they are my connections to all that is the Creator.”
Editor’s Introduction:
A Memorial Tribute to Ruth Trinidad Galván

Tryphenia Peele-Eady, University of New Mexico

On behalf of my colleagues at the University of New Mexico’s Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies (LLSS), I would like to offer a few words of remembrance and in celebration of the life of Ruth Trinidad Galván. A professor in LLSS and faculty in the Educational Thought and Sociocultural Studies concentration (ETSS), as well as the associate editor and faculty sponsor of this journal, Intersections: Critical Issues in Education, Ruth was an esteemed leader, whose brilliance, generosity, and compassion touched the lives of all who knew her. Specializing in decolonial and global feminist epistemologies and pedagogies, globalization, and transmigration, Ruth worked with a fierce passion and critical lens, fighting for women’s equality and equity for all peoples.

Born May 23, 1967 in El Paso, Texas and raised in Los Angeles, California, Ruth was daughter to two Mexican immigrant parents and sister to four younger siblings. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); a Master’s degree from California State Los Angeles; and a Ph.D. in Education, Culture and Society from the University of Utah. Ruth received numerous recognitions and awards for her work over the years; among them, the American Educational Research Association (AERA)/Spencer Dissertation Fellowship, two Fulbright grants, and several awards from the University of New Mexico (UNM) for her research, teaching, mentorship, and service.

Her repertoire of work features two books, several refereed journal articles, and numerous book chapters, underscoring her real-world commitments to the education of Latinx youth and the celebration of life, learning, and criticality in communities often overlooked in the everyday discourses framing humanity. Ruth was probably best known for her book, Women Who Stay Behind: Pedagogies of Survival in Rural Transmigrant Mexico (2015), an ethnography of women affected by migration. Her work transformed previous thinking about historical views of poor and working-class people in Mexico. She lived a life that demanded notice and inspired others.

Ruth was a trailblazer in border and immigrant studies. Her research in Zacatecas, Mexico, called much-needed attention to immigration reform and economic recession in the U.S. and to the experiences of immigrants returning to their community of origin. “One does not merely survive domination,” she wrote, “but choses to saciar (satisfy) one’s hopes and dreams in creative and joyful ways” (2015, p. 4). In short, her work is a reflection of her story, the stories she was destined to tell, and the legacy she was destined to leave behind.

She was a teacher, scholar, mother, daughter, sister, and a friend. To cherish her memory are her devoted husband, Bradley Neu, and three daughters, Xiomara, Anayansi, and Nemiliztli Ortega-Trinidad.
The UNM Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies and the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute have established a scholarship fund in her honor. Plans are also underway for a special issue of Intersections dedicated to Ruth’s legacy as a teacher and scholar, and more information will be provided in our spring 2020 issue.

In peace, in love, and in eternal solidarity—rest well, Ruth Trinidad Galván.

Reference


Author

Tryphenia B. Peele-Eady is Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies in the College of Education at the University of New Mexico. Her research focuses on the Black church and the role of language, culture, and community in African American student learning. She also studies the broader relationship of social context to the academic achievement of learners from historically marginalized groups. Her email address is tbpeele@unm.edu.
Disrupting Dis/abilization: 
A Critical Exploration of Research Methods 
to Combat White Supremacy and Ableism in Education

Sara H. Petit-McClure, Syracuse University
Chelsea Stinson, Syracuse University

Abstract
In this article, the authors explore the way scientific research, as it is commonly defined, has been used to continue the marginalization and subsequent dis/abilization of students based on racial, cultural, and linguistic identities. Starting with a historical perspective, we trace the role of scientific research in the support of white supremacist, ableist societal mechanisms, as well as the emphasis on scientifically-based research in educational policy and practice. We call for an expansion of the definition of scientific research to emphasize mixed and multiple methods guided by the principles of participatory, emancipatory, and decolonizing methodologies.

Keywords: DisCrit, research methodologies, critical disability studies, critical race theory in education

Introduction
Scientific research is built on a white supremacist, ableist legacy which has dis/abled people through pathologizing racial, linguistic, and cultural identities. This legacy has left an indelible mark on the U.S. education system, which continues to promote inequities through segregation and other oppressive institutional mechanisms supported by scientific research (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Powell, 2003). Historical analyses trace the development of these oppressive mechanisms and how they have been preserved—with arguably imperceptible disruptions—using the justification of scientific research (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010). Scholars across disciplines have illustrated how scientific developments, such as the eugenics movement, intelligence testing, and the adoption of the normal curve as a lens for quantifying and analyzing human difference, have been designed—or commandeered—to justify the marginalization of diverse groups (Ferri & Connor, 2006).

As an example, the development and application of new disability categories, such as the label “specific learning disability,” has created a legal mechanism for establishing...
differences among racial groups in the provision of disability-related services and education placements in schools (Ferri, 2010; Ferri & Connor, 2006). Further, the continued use of norm-referenced assessments to identify students labeled with disabilities contributes to the dis/ablement of racial, linguistic, and cultural minority groups in U.S. schools (Shifrer et al., 2011). Another example is found in the prioritization of “scientific” establishment of evidence-based practices to support these students once they are in special education programs. Often, the findings and implications of this “scientifically-based research” (SBR) are in contention with evidence drawn from ethnographic and case study research (Artiles et al., 2012). Because such studies are contextualized and often rely on qualitative research methods, many scholars have suggested that they have limited appeal to policymakers who work within white supremacist systems in education (Christ, 2014; Cosier, 2012; Riehl, 2006; Smith, 2003).

This article focuses on the narrow definition of scientific research used by education policymakers and educational leadership, including the U.S. Department of Education (Hale, et al., 2016), and how it remains uncritical of its history of dis/abling policies of oppression and marginalization. Further, we examine how education policy’s emphasis on quantitative, scientific evidence continues to serve as a tool to support problematic understandings of race and ability difference despite the availability of participatory and emancipatory education research methods (Annamma et al., 2016; Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014; Ferri & Connor, 2006; Osher et al., 2002). However, because narrowly-defined scientific evidence is considered objective, generalizable, and “fundable,” it is often prioritized over qualitative interpretivist methods—even when the findings of such complement the other to provide more comprehensive perspectives of education that highlight inequity and possible solutions (Artiles et al., 2012).

We present a critique of research methods which have historically contributed to the dis/ablement of multiple marginalized students. To this end, we propose an expansion of the definition of scientific research to emphasize using mixed and multiple methods guided by the tenets of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016). We argue that these methods have the potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which educational institutions react to and reproduce white supremacist, ableist systems, especially when the data is interpreted using analytical frameworks such as DisCrit, which focus on systems and their individual impact rather than solely on the individuals themselves.

This discussion is organized into four sections. We begin with a critical analysis, situated in the work of interdisciplinary scholars, historical development, and the use of scientific research to dis/able minoritized groups. Our analysis links scientific research methods with oppressive institutional mechanisms in public schools. This includes the ways professionals both identify and “serve” students with disabilities, often based on a view guided by the pervasive values of white supremacy and ableism which justify their segregation (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016; Harry & Klingner, 2014).

Then, we offer a critique of the conceptualization of scientific knowledge, as well as a critique scientific research as it is often defined by researchers, policymakers, and education professionals, highlighting critical issues related to this narrow conceptualization. Next, we discuss mixed and multiple methods research, focusing on the potential in these methodologies as forms of research which provide “hard numbers” data that legislators and policymakers seek, while providing context for data and results which include important counter-narratives, thereby minimizing the essentializing of participants. We explain that these methods could ensure that important information is not lost in the application of research to practice and can serve as a mechanism for disrupting the narrative which allows segregation and inequity to continue for certain groups. We then briefly explore participatory, emancipatory, and decolonizing research, using examples with which educational
researchers can build. To this end, this article proposes a new, expansive definition of scientific research to be considered by educational policymakers and leadership which includes mixed- and multiple-methods designs which incorporate high-quality inductive investigation through varied forms of qualitative research.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this section, we elaborate on the theoretical orientations which informed the critical exploration of research methods and dis/ablement. We base our analysis in DisCrit, which has its roots in both Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Most scientific research relating to dis/ability views ability and disability as a binary wherein the individual is positioned as the site of either deviance or normalcy. In other words, an individual demonstrates qualities in fixed alignment with being considered able or dis/abled. This individualized deficit model of disability has provided justification for denying opportunities to many students who perform—or are positioned—beyond the limits of the “norm.” DSE scholars have broadened academic perspectives of dis/ability to examine ability labeling as a scientific, social, and discursive issue which creates barriers and labels that are dis/abling for people. DSE scholars strive to “[bring] diversity in thought and plurality of perspectives about disability into the educational arena long dominated by traditional conceptualizations of disability that continue to justify and thus provide consent to the current field of special education” (Connor, et al., 2008, p. 447). That is, the very purpose of DSE is to promote and provide opportunities for educational inclusion.

In a similar vein, CRT in education has broadened the lens used to examine issues of race and its impact on education in the United States. This, in part, emerges from the longstanding inequities in educational expectations and opportunities for students of color in the U.S. in the wake of problematic social construction and regulation of race and humanity. CRT scholars use counter-narratives as method to disrupt the social construction of people of color in schools and society. Using these methods, rather than quantitative methods, helps capture context and illustrate concepts such as “civil rights advances for blacks always seemed to coincide with changing economic conditions and the self-interest of elite whites” (Delgado & Stefanie, 2017, p. 22).

One critique of CRT scholars is that they often neglect issues of dis/ability and special education. Likewise, race is often ignored or overlooked by DSE scholars. Issues of race, culture, language, and ability are inextricably linked in our education system and in society, yet the interactions of how these identity markers impact people’s lives are often overlooked. In the past 15 years, however, scholars such as Erevelles & Minear (2016), Ferri (2010), and Harry & Klingner (2014) have begun making connections between the two fields to examine the interactions between race and ability as they relate to educational experiences of children. This has contributed to a deeper understanding of the implications of the power structures that influence individual students’ experiences in education settings. One outcome of this deeper understanding is the theory of DisCrit, an emerging theoretical framework that combines tenets of CRT and DSE and calls for a wider intersectional look at systems based on race and ability, among other factors, particularly in education (Annamma, et al., 2016).

DisCrit is built on the premise that, “both race and ability are socially constructed and interdependent” (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 5 in Annamma et al., 2014, p.55). In their foundational publication on Dis/Crit, Annamma, Ferri, and Connor claim that, “racism and ableism are normalizing processes that are interconnected and collusive” (Annamma, et al., 2016, p. 14). These scholars drew upon “research that relies upon the statistical categories of ability and race because these categories result in socially constructed inequities, not because [they] believe they are necessarily biological realities” (Annamma,
et al., 2016, p. 17). The tenets of DisCrit, as seen in Table 1, guide our analysis of scientific research throughout history and how it has been used to “other” people by defining the norm based on a white supremacist, ableist perspective of the world. Whiteness and ability are property, and the way these power systems play out in the field of education creates our inequitable, oppressive system. We refer to these tenets throughout the following discussion with the intent of disrupting the power structures that govern education and educational research.

Table 1. Tenets of DisCrit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenet</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 1</td>
<td>DisCrit is focused on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 2</td>
<td>DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 3</td>
<td>DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability, yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the Western cultural norms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 4</td>
<td>DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 5</td>
<td>DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 6</td>
<td>DisCrit recognizes whiteness and ability as property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of white, middle-class citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 7</td>
<td>DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table adapted from Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2016, p.19).

Historical Development

Because DisCrit emphasizes the “legal and historical aspects” of disability and race in the U.S. (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016, p. 19), we focus on the historical developments of dis/ability and race as co-constructed social identities, starting with the 19th century. Although the use of scientific research by white Americans to dehumanize people of color preceded the 19th century, this period in U.S. history provides the most compelling evidence of the co-construction of race and disability through science, medicine, and immigration policy (Dolmage, 2018). This historical context contributes to the foundation of a critical perspective of contemporary issues related to scientific research in education because, as DisCrit affirms, ableism and racism circulate interdependently and “have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens” (p. 19).

Within the U.S., scientific, medical research in the 19th century reified the racialization and otherness of non-whites and provided justification for the preservation of enslavement
and oppression of racial, linguistic, and other minority groups. As Glenn (2015) states, “Racializing certain groups as insufficiently human serves to justify subjecting them to oppression, subordination, and super-exploitation” (p. 68). This includes the conceptualization of immigration status, language, and ethnicity as proxies for race (Moran, 2005). For example, proponents of polygeny, the theory that humans evolved from many independent groups of ancestors, used data, such as inaccurate skull measurements, to “scientifically prove” that Africans and African Americans were members of a different, inferior species than Europeans were and, therefore, uneducable. This denial of education was in the economic interest of the whites in power. It was illegal in many places to educate an enslaved person, thereby reifying white supremacy and power.

After the abolition of slavery, the structural upheaval in the U.S. led to dominant white groups feeling challenged by the newly freed African Americans, as well as a wave of immigrants from Europe. As a response, Paul Broca and other scientists who studied craniology and phrenology made claims that differences in size and shape of the brain or skull meant that people of color were inferior to white men. Such claims held “true” in the 19th century, since the publications contained numerical data and supported the power structures as they were (Gould, 1996). During the period of Reconstruction following the abolition of slavery Black Americans in the South developed their own schools. Some scholars argue that for a time, these schools were somewhat equitable in terms of funding and other measures, but when Black knowledge and political power began to threaten the white supremacy that ruled, the government began to systematically restrict voting rights; subsequently, this loss of political power led to disenfranchisement in all areas of life, including education (Anderson, 2014; Du Bois, 1962; Glenn, 2015).

Out of this history came a movement pushing for eugenics, a term coined by Francis Galton, who appropriated the normal curve for analyzing human difference, in 1883. Eugenics promoted the elimination of inferior genes in society through selective and restricted breeding. Reproduction was encouraged for those who “fit” normative values of whiteness, socio-economic status, education, language, and ability. For others, sterilization, incarceration, lynching, and institutionalization were encouraged—and, in some cases, mandated by legal action based on subjective evidence. These actions limited the reproductive capabilities of those deemed undesirable. In the work of eugenicists, we again observe ableism and white supremacy in the creation of a narrative about who deserves the right to be human and live a full life and the denial of full personhood to those deemed inferior due to language, ethnicity, and perceived ability. While we can study eugenics from a historical standpoint, the fact is that “these eugenic ideas about the value of [certain] bodies have never gone away” (Dolmage, 2018, p. 4).

The effects of eugenics and the normal curve in social science persisted in the 20th century with Alfred Binet’s development of an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test and still continues today. Binet sought to design a test to help teachers determine which students needed the most academic assistance, and what kind of assistance was needed. Although he did not intend for the test to show static, innate ability or intelligence, it was adopted by scientists like H. H. Goddard, who used it to further the eugenics movement and deny personhood to individuals who did not possess desired characteristics (Gould, 1996). Much of Goddard’s work focused on using scientific methods to justify the labeling of some groups as “others.” Using an English translation of Binet’s test, Goddard posited that the idea of intelligence was stable and hereditary and governed by a single gene which determined not only educability, but also moral character. In addition to institutionalizing those Americans whom he deemed “defective,” Goddard felt that certain immigrants were defective and must not enter the country if the United States was to breed out “feeblemindedness.” As an example, Goddard began testing immigrants who were hand-selected by his own assistants at Ellis Island. Although many of the descendants of these
immigrants are seen as white today, at this time in history, many of these groups were constructed as “non-white others” (Dolmage, 2018; Glenn, 2015).

Based on tenet one of DisCrit, which asserts that racism and ableism work interdependently to establish and reinforce categories of difference, it is clear that Goddard’s test was entirely subjective. As further evidence of this, Goddard triumphantly reported “that deportations for mental deficiency increased 350% in 1913 and 570% in 1914 over the preceding five years,” (Gould, 1996, p. 198). Although whiteness was later consolidated to include formerly excluded ethnic groups originally marginalized by this testing, such as the Irish and Italians, this historical moment supports the notion that race and ability have been socially (re)constructed to secure space at the table of white supremacy (Dolmage, 2018).

In later years, Stanford University psychologist Lewis Terman adapted Binet’s test and gave us the equally biased Stanford-Binet scale to test for “feeblemindedness.” This and similar tests are still used today to provide “science-based” evidence for assigning dis/ability labels which often result in segregation and inferior educational opportunities. According to Ferri and Connor, “[t]hough ostensibly designed to provide appropriate services to children with disabilities, special education was, from its inception, a holding place for society’s deviants who no one wanted to teach” (Ferri & Connor, 2006 as cited by Crawford & Bartolomé, 2010).

By the 1920s, special education settings had grown in use, and research was used to demonstrate that students in regular education settings had benefited from the removal of those who had scored at least two standard deviations from the mean on the Stanford-Binet. This demonstrates how the outcomes of research reified ableism and white supremacy; these forces worked together to create a context which ensured that power stayed in the hands of the powerful, and the voices and rights of those deemed as deviant were marginalized and minimized.

During the 1950s and 1960s, many white Americans felt their power threatened by integrated public spaces—especially schools—as mandated by court cases and legislation. We see here another link between power, ability, and race and the scientific justification for segregation. While many see this shift in schools as a positive, in most integrated schools the majority of the Black professional educators lost their jobs (Anderson, 2014). This took even more power away from the Black community with regards to education, thereby allowing for the in-school segregation of many students through the use of disability labeling; this exemplifies the first tenet of DisCrit as we see situations where the “forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently…to uphold notions of normalcy” (Annamma, et al., 2016, p. 19). Without the support of the law, many members of the research community increased their focus on research which justified the segregation of “other” students for the benefit of the normal (read: white, middle class, nondisabled) student majority. That is, since there was no longer legal recourse for segregating students based on race, other methods were found to remove those who did not fit normative definitions of membership and respectability. As Ferri and Connor explain, “[t]echnologies of exclusion, including ability testing, tracking, labeling, and special education have all played a major part in re-segregating schools after Brown” (2007, p. 176). Because special education entailed separate classrooms or school settings, labeling racially and linguistically minoritized students with disabilities became the new way to re-segregate schools, reifying the conflation of race and ability difference.

**In Search of the Gold Star**

In educational policy and scholarship, research is typified by traditional notions of scientific research and evidence, especially those exemplified in clinical models utilized
throughout the history of Western medicine (Christ, 2014; Riehl, 2006). Many research communities and consumers prioritize research designs utilized in the field of medicine, primarily quantitative designs (Riehl, 2006), which, under a DisCrit lens, is deeply connected to the traditions of eugenicist anti-immigration policy and science (Dolmage, 2018).

In the wake of neoliberal school reform, values enshrined in policy, practice, and regulatory guidance reify white supremacy and ableism by controlling access and opportunity for research funding. Giroux (2014) wrote about the impact of neoliberal values on systems in higher education. Using the president of the University of Texas at Austin as an example, he identifies the impact of neoliberal austerity policies on the kind of research that is conducted at the university. Giroux wrote:

> Under the dictates of neoliberal austerity policies, he is changing the nature of education at UT by arguing that research initiatives will be evaluated and deemed most profitable in terms of their benefits to various industries. Those academic courses and departments that are aligned with and provide potential profits for industry will receive the most funding. (p. 133)

Giroux continued to relate these phenomena to the bigger issues surrounding the resurgence of authoritarianism and the ways in which white supremacy is enacted to benefit the preservation of the white research institution.

In education discourse around the future directions of policy and practice, many educators and policymakers call for “scientific research” to establish evidence-based practices for effective instruction and other institutional mechanisms. In recent discussions focused on policy and interventions for specific populations of students, including English learners and students with disabilities, there is evidence of contention among scholars regarding what counts as evidence and what counts as scientific research, as well as the consequences of privileging some research over others (Kauffman & Sasso, 2006; Skiba et al., 2016). Historically, scientific research in education and related fields seems to have been characterized by clinical trial research designs yielding hard-numbers data and presumed sterile objectivity. Although there surely are several clinical trial design studies in medicine which have creatively or effectively addressed important questions, many scholars in the medical field are moving away from traditional notions of scientific research, opting instead for interpretive, analytical, or single-case study approaches (Riehl, 2006). Nonetheless, many education researchers and policymakers insist on the implementation of clinical methods to ensure scientific research and analyses are conducted and published. Additionally, scholars who challenge this implementation or who call for more diversity in research methodologies, specifically the use of mixed methods research, often find their perspectives in contention with others in the field (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012).

Clinical Research and Evidence-Based Practices

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, formerly the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) clearly promotes scientifically-based research (SBR), privileging certain methods and degrees of evidence (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) to promote school and educator accountability, as well as limited notions of student achievement and success (Christ, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). For example, ESSA defines evidence-based practices (EBPs) using a four-tier system of evidence, ranging from practices demonstrating a rationale (Tier IV), being the least reliable, to practices supported by strong evidence from one or more randomized control experimental design studies (Tier I), being the most reliable (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).
Despite numerous publications and guidance documents stipulating exactly what the federal government accepts as evidence and scientific research, the application of education research to schools—including district-, building-, and classroom-level interventions and policy implementation—ranges from muddled to chaotic, particularly in special education contexts (Cook et al., 2015). Although this is due in part to shortcomings in teacher and administrator education, training, and professional development, this can also be attributed to the difficulty of conducting relevant research in real-world education contexts—even when striving to meet the “gold star” standards of scientific research and evidence-based practices (Christ, 2014). The articulation of student identities is so highly contextualized that the quantitative methodologies touted as best practices do not adequately address the needs and experiences of many students, particularly those with marginalized identities.

Although frequently lauded as objective and precise, clinical methods used in the medical field—perceived by many to be more reliable than inductive, qualitative designs—are subject to human error and bias like any other type of research. Problems found with these studies in the medical field are also present in the field of education. At the design level, poor sampling and treatment methods can compromise the quality of a study. At the procedural level, treatment errors and inaccurate documentation of results and procedures—intentional or unintentional human blunders—affect reliability and validity of findings, despite claims of precision and objectivity. Additionally, clinical trial studies cannot be effectively used to examine social origins and implications of several issues in medicine, including physician behavior, large-group trends in disease prevention and treatment, social origins and implications of healthcare problems, and the arrangement of institutional mechanisms in healthcare (Riehl, 2006). Such scholarship has important implications on the development, provision, and future direction of interventions and services for marginalized populations, as well as training and professional development for professionals. Multidimensionality of identities, which is an important component of DisCrit, is lost in these clinical trials (Annamma et al., 2016). Purely clinical research, as it is defined and used today, cannot capture these cross-sections of healthcare issues, nor those of education issues.

Since education scholars and policymakers continue to refer to the historic use of clinical research in the field of medicine as justification for SBR and EBPs—such as they are—it is unlikely that critical issues in education, such as the social origins and implications of the overrepresentation of students of color in special education, will ever be addressed with the same level of importance as other issues as long as we are reliant on these types of clinical trials as evidence of what works. This preferential treatment of certain kinds of research seems to effectively privilege not only certain kinds of research and evidence, but also seems to limit the issues and experiences represented by education research (Erevelles & Minear, 2016). This has potential implications on students and families whose history of marginalization has often been justified by the findings of scientific research, or by the procedures and practices therein (Crawford & Bartolomé, 2010; Ferri & Connor, 2007; Gould, 1996).

**Essentializing Difference: Quantitative Research**

Many aspects of quantitative research present or promote problematic narratives of difference among students. Education researchers often investigate issues regarding specific groups of students, whose definitions are typically rigid and “partly embedded in assumptions about identity purportedly framed by biological differences” (Artiles 2011, p. 436). Although participants in quantitative studies might claim or demonstrate multiple and/or intersecting identity markers, the inflexible context of quantitative studies only presents singular or concentrated characteristics. The consequence of this approach to research can be essentializing of particular groups, as well as the erasure of historical
complexity. As an example, investigations of the fluidity of disability require varied situated perspectives in order to be fully understood. Traditional scientific research is ill-equipped to provide such contexts (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016; Trainor & Bal, 2014). Additionally, many education researchers use quantitative methods to analyze differences between groups, as opposed to conducting research which investigates diversity within cultural or linguistic groups and the ways such groups measure and mediate difference (Artiles, 2015).

Aside from the broader issues of clinical research, there are many statistical tests frequently utilized in education research which have the potential to essentialize characteristics of participants, including ethnicity, race, culture, and language. When situated in a DisCrit perspective, this becomes problematic; essentializing characteristics or group membership devalues multidimensional identities and has the potential to promote (or create new) singular notions of identity (Annamma et al., 2016; Erevelles & Minear, 2016).

T-tests, z-tests, and other basic statistical analyses utilized in education testing rely on the central limit theorem. Central limit theorem is based on the bell curve used by eugenicists and others to categorize some as falling within the boundaries of normal and others as outliers. Beyond these approaches, many statistical applications promote and preserve limited or problematic narratives of human experiences and identities. For example, there is a large body of education research which utilizes regression and logistic regression tests. These address research questions regarding drop-out rates, retention, and incarceration rates based on various “risk factors” and other characteristics. Although regression and, especially, logistic regression tests purportedly account for many different characteristics, researchers cannot possibly accommodate for every component of a person’s life or experience which could result in dropping out of school or being retained for one or more academic years. Similarly, statistical tests such as hierarchical (or sequential) regression and path analysis provide inflexible, linear models for understanding human differences as predictors of various outcomes. In the case of path analysis, direct and indirect effects might be identified and discussed, but the results still contribute to a narrow, static perspective of participants’ experiences. Similar to the clinical trials used in medicine, in using only these methods, researchers are losing essential parts of the human experience in their erasure of context.

Equation: $Y=a+b_1x_1+b_2x_2+b_3x_3\ldots$

$Y =$ Projected Outcome

$b_1$, $b_2$, $b_3=$ slope of line for each variable, respectively

$x_1 =$ variable 1; $x_2 =$ variable 2; $x_3 =$ variable 3

Figure 1. Logistic Regression

As seen in Figure 1, logistic regression allows researchers to analyze the relationship between a projected outcome (such as dropping out of high school) and a multitude of variables, which are usually identity markers such as binary disability status, disability label, English learner status, gender, or race. Because this statistical test seemingly examines the interaction of multiple variables in relation to a focus outcome, it is likely considered by proponents of quantitative methods as the gold standard in education research. That is, applying logistic regression tests to a random sample to predict an outcome of interest seemingly accounts for multiple identity markers, thereby promoting the multiplicity of human experiences. However, such tests provide a narrow view of
human difference. Even when researchers are using measurements which account for various identity markers and/or forms of difference which yield hard-numbers data, those individual measurements are flawed. This is because the data do not provide researchers and consumers with information about how these identity markers interact (or how they are assigned) across time and space. While these measurements and statistical methods are seen to be objective, we argue that no research is truly objective. The measurements and data points are selected by the investigators conducting the study. Such selection is informed by the cultural and scholarly context of the investigators, which diminishes the objectivity of any statistical analysis. The use of statistical tests to analyze difference and assign problematic, rigid identity markers to students works against the tenets of DisCrit, where multidimensional identities are valued and singular notions of identity are troublesome.

Randomized sampling methods are another aspect of quantitative research which work against the tenets of DisCrit, wherein the voices of marginalized groups are given privilege and acknowledgement over dominant narratives. Randomized sampling assumes a level playing field for identity markers. That is, it assumes that categories based on dis/ability, race, or language affect individuals in the same way, regardless of context or intersection. Additionally, randomly sampling from a target population allows researchers to select desired numbers of participants based on categories they select, which is in contention with claims of objectivity in randomized sampling.

In addition to the reduction of complexity of the human experience to numbers and categories through quantitative research, psychological evaluations—upon which much quantitative research of dis/ability relies—lead to mislabeling of many racial and linguistic minorities. According to Codrington and Fairchild (2012), this mislabeling is a “byproduct of culturally biased referral, testing, and placement processes, which perpetuate the ideology that Blacks are innately inferior and chip away at the self-concept of African American children” (p. 6). The effects of cultural bias in testing go beyond the overrepresentation of minority students in special education—for students of color, disproportionate outcomes, such as the School-to-Prison Pipeline, are a direct result of institutional mechanisms founded on white supremacist, ableist thinking which informs the research context—directly and indirectly—for many education scholars.

**Expanding the Definition of “Scientific Research”: Possibilities in Other Methods**

Presumably, many scholars and policy makers tend to associate quantitative research with scientific research because quantitative methods have the potential to yield results using supposed objective, generalizable designs. There is a history behind the use of these methods which Quigley and Beeman-Cadwallader argue is embedded with “deep colonial consciousness” to influence “whose knowledge is legitimatized in the scientific community (Harding, 1991)”, and “from where knowledge can be legitimised” (Quigley & Beeman-Cadwallader, 2014, p. 153). In this section, we offer perspectives and examples of other research methods which expand the narrow definition of scientific research used in educational policy. We begin with an argument made by Sonia Nieto (2012), who challenges the values undergirding scientific objectivity.

Nieto argues for advocacy and activism in research rather than objectivity when she states, “to be neutral is both foolhardy and disingenuous because it flies in the face of what our work is about, that is, using research for the improvement of the human condition through education” (2012). This follows tenet 7 of DisCrit which calls for “activism and supports all forms of resistance” (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 19). However, the potential in research methods outside of quantitative data analysis is often ignored by scholars in
education and related fields due to the push from policy makers for what they consider “The Gold Standard.”

Scholars in education have started reexamining qualitative research as an important tool for understanding existing trends in education, as well as a perspective for grounding scholarly practices and research consumption (Kozleski, 2017; Trainor & Bal, 2014). However, Quigley and Beeman-Cadwallader (2014) suggest that persisting norms in qualitative research do not sufficiently question, “the dominant view that science is objective, value neutral, and placeless,” suggesting a need for a shift in qualitative methods as well (p. 153). With thoughtful implementation, the use of qualitative research methods can support the collection of counter narratives so sought after in the work of CRT and DisCrit scholars, specifically tenet number 4 which includes a focus on privileging marginalized voices over the more common discourse. Milner and Howard (2013) write about the use of counter-narratives to capture “experiences which directly refuge hegemony” (p. 542). They state,

Such narratives need to be told but often have been dismissed, trivialized, or misrepresented in education research. A counter-narrative provides space for researchers to reinterpret, disrupt or to interrupt pervasive discourses that may paint communities and people, particularly communities and people of color, in grim, dismal ways. (p. 542)

In other words, broadening the definition of scientific research would hold space to acknowledge and legitimize a wider array of knowledges. In addition to the inclusion of counter-narratives in research, the work of scholars utilizing geographic information systems (GIS) and decolonizing methodologies has yielded numerous models for participatory and emancipatory research.

**Mixed and Multiple Methods**

Mixed methods and multiple methods provide options for bringing all of these ideas about broadening what counts as scientific research. Quigley and Beeman-Cadwallader (2014) suggest that we must, “value the scientific knowledge that emerges from interactions between the sociocultural, biophysical, political/economic, and psychological dimensions of specific places” (p. 153). Recently, researchers across various fields have demonstrated increased interest in mixed method designs, primarily because they widen the scope of deductive investigations by incorporating meaning and quantity in solving the same problem. A mixed method design consists of a core project using a complete method (quantitative or qualitative) along with a supplemental project using a different type of data or analysis which are incomplete without the core project. That is, the core project consists of a complete method and can stand alone as a research publication. The supplemental project answers one part of the research question being addressed and could not stand alone as its own publication (Morse, 2010). A multiple methods design consists of multiple studies which address the same research questions—or different components of the same research question. The studies in a multiple methods design project are conducted using different methods (quantitative and qualitative), and each study is complete and publishable on its own (Morse, 2010).

Using a different method to support a core project question or using multiple kinds of data and analyses to answer multiple questions or components of a larger project goal, allows researchers to bring human experiences to large data sets. Besides the tandem or supplemental use of different research methods, using mixed or multiple methods requires researchers to think more deliberately about their research questions, pacing (sequential or simultaneous), sampling and data collection mechanisms, and the way they present their results. Additionally, the use of mixed or multiple methods provides a platform for qualitative inquiry and perspectives in policy and practice in education, since many
policymakers tend to privilege the findings of purely quantitative research. This has important implications on the future directions of education research, especially for students labeled with significant cognitive disabilities and other medicalized ability differences (Christ, 2014; Cosier, 2012; Riehl, 2006; Smith, 2003).

**Participatory, Emancipatory, and Decolonizing Methodologies**

With the call from Nieto (2012) in mind, we look to emancipatory and participatory research as having potential to promote activism. Emancipatory research refers to the production of knowledge which could benefit disadvantaged people, whereas participatory research engages communities in collective inquiry and is grounded in the experiences and social histories of the community where data are being created and collected. We call on researchers to look at examples of research outside of the medical field and build a new standard for scientific educational research. Many qualitative scholars claim that qualitative research provides more opportunities for emancipatory and/or participatory research. According to Kozleski (2017), qualitative research facilitates the achievement of social validity and measurements of sustainability when investigating the impact of evidence-based practices in education. Kozleski points out the utility of qualitative research, especially in privileging the lived experiences of participants, which is essential when researchers aim to conduct emancipatory or participatory research. “Narrative analysis [one form of qualitative research] provides a means to analyze the cultural, social, and contextual features of shared activity while attempting to include the voices and insights of all participants (Collins, 2013, p. xvi). This type of analysis is important in disrupting systems of marginalization. However, since purely qualitative research is often dismissed by leaders and policymakers in education and other social institutions, some researchers are turning to mixed and multiple methods to facilitate empowerment and to enact change.

One strong example of community-based participatory research using a multiple methods design is demonstrated by Elder and Odoyo (2018), who conducted a study focused on a sustainable inclusive education system in Kenya. The authors used multiple types of analyses to examine three cycles of interview data in addition to student enrollment data, photos, notes, letters, memoranda, and dictated participant feedback. Due to the nature of the study, the authors provided an in-depth reflection focused on the limitations and challenges of conducting the study and communicating their results to the community engaged in the project. Further, although the results of this study might not be generalizable across contexts, the authors established a goal for identifying and understanding local meanings and discourses of inclusion and disability.

A consortium of schools in and around New York City invited Michelle Fine and a team of researchers to investigate the so-called “Opportunity Gap” believed to exist between urban and suburban schools in that region. In their study, students from schools which fit in both categories and who ranged in academic achievement attended research training, collaborated with university faculty and teachers on research, design, questions, methodology, and analysis. They created a survey completed by over 9,000 students and then purposefully chose 32 interview participants and conducted 24 focus groups. It is important to note that these participants were purposively sampled to accurately represent the schools’ demographics.

Additional data collection methods used included participant observation, transcript analysis, and interviews with elders in the communities. The findings from this data collection led to more questions from these youth and more data collection. The research group paired quantitative data with qualitative data to see the pervasiveness of inequities both between schools and within school, as well the impact of that pervasiveness on individuals. The youths who participated in this were able to grow as researchers and also
begin to problem solve around struggles in their own community. As Fine and colleagues (2005) stated,

These young women and men have, indeed, learned to appreciate the complexity of race and class in America, to identify cracks in the opportunity structure where justice may breathe, and to develop their own intellectual and organizing capacities to repaint the canvas for the future. (p. 523)

These findings relate to the notion that the structures of ableism and white supremacy continue to oppress others in varied iterations. Rather than being passive, studies such as this encourage active disruption and questioning. Important findings, such as the change in the individual youth in Fine’s study, could be lost or dismissed without the multiple means of data collection and analytic approaches used in this example.

Another strong example of participatory and/or emancipatory research using mixed and multiple methods can be found in GIS research focused on community mapping. In community mapping studies, participants who are typically labeled non-experts in map making and GIS scholars engage in research as co-investigators to create maps and tools which preserve and promote local, often ancestral, knowledge of land formations, resources, and boundaries. These information systems are then used by the community to settle disputes within the community and provide a platform for agency when land rights are contended by outsiders. Using compilations of artifacts, oral tradition, focus groups, interviews, and other forms of information and knowledge from participants to inform the creation of geographic information systems, scholars and local groups effectively disrupt historically privileged notions of landmarks, boundaries, and ownership, thereby redefining spaces and empowering communities. In so doing, such scholarship holds space for the (re)production of marginalized and/or forcibly erased knowledges which resist the scientific hegemony of white supremacy and settler colonialism (Simpson, 2017). In other words, these approaches have the potential for decolonizing scientific knowledge and academic spaces. This approach to the construction and dissemination of information, knowledge, and experience of different communities has the potential to transform education and related social science research and policy development and implementation.

As an example, Annamma (2018) used a mediated learning experience that she called “cartographer’s clinic,” wherein both participants and researchers create and share education journey maps (EJM). “Cartographer’s clinic” could also be further adapted to include more cooperative mapping activities, wherein students from similar backgrounds or shared cultural, linguistic, or disabled identities could work together to co-construct EJMs to present collective cultural knowledge or experiences. This example of qualitative GIS affords flexibility and cultural responsiveness to researchers, but it also presents the opportunity for culturally sustaining research practices through the adaptation and authentic commitment to “cartographer’s clinics” and other considerations as described by Annamma (2018). This data collection and analytical research method presents important possibilities for understanding how educational systems and spaces shape and sustain the experiences of multiply marginalized students, including ELLs with disabilities. Although effective communication is critical to the successful and ethical implementation of this method, qualitative GIS does not necessarily rely on discourse to transmit information. As such, it could be an ideal method for researchers who are concerned with the ecological factors related to educational inequity for culturally and linguistically diverse students with and without disabilities, particularly when they do not share a common language with their participants or have access to a qualified interpreter.
Conclusion

Throughout history, scientific research has been defined in ways which further the agenda of ableist, white supremacist power systems. At the same time, traditional notions of what constitutes scientific research has been reified by policymakers and scholars in education, who equate “science” with clinical methods and hard-numbers data. Using the framework of DisCrit, we provided a brief critical analysis of the use of science by dominant groups to label minorities as “others” throughout U.S. history. This scientific research is strongly linked to education policy, which inexorably functions to separate white, non-dis/abled students from students who are constructed as deficient and/or dis/abled because of the articulation of their linguistic, cultural, and racial identities.

The pervasive acceptance of the dis/abling scientific studies was (and is) largely due to what counts as scientific research, and what does not. The authors identified some of the current notions of what is considered “evidence” in research and education policy; despite progressive trends in modern medical research, traditional clinical and/or quantitative studies continue to serve as the “gold star” in education research and testing. Although scholars claim quantitative research is more objective and reliable, there are many opportunities for human error and subjectivity at the design and procedural level of research, which trouble these assertions of a fixed truth. In quantifying and parsing elements of the human experience, this type of research results in a loss of multidimensionality. In reality, this kind of research only serves to uphold the values of white supremacy and ableism.

We propose an expanded definition of scientific research focused on educational change to include mixed and multiple methods guided by the values of participatory, emancipatory, and decolonizing methodologies. The answer to the widespread failure of schools and other institutions to provide equitable opportunities by supporting students’ differences, requires scholarly engagement with marginalized communities in research focused on school transformation. Although patterns throughout history have succeeded in dis/abling countless numbers of children and families through testing and scientific research, broadening the scope and application of insular research methodologies can privilege other notions of knowledge, competence, and normative views. Further, mixed and multiple methods research has the potential to serve as a conduit of resistance. In ensuring creativity, responsiveness, and community engagement, by adhering to the values of participatory, emancipatory, and decolonizing methodologies, in future research practices, there is the potential to yield dis/ruptive results.
References


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Utilizing a Critical Literacy Framework to Discuss Issues of Power and Privilege with Elementary Students

Barbara Pollard, University of Windsor

Abstract

This action research study utilizes a critical literacy framework to bring issues of privilege and power into critical dialogue with elementary students. The study is based on the idea that disadvantaged groups can eventually agitate for societal change if they are prompted to begin to critically question systemic inequalities from a young age. Thus, instead of allowing dominant culture to dictate unfair norms and practices by simply abiding to the status quo, this study suggests that elementary teachers should aim to be the vehicle for transformational change by implementing pedagogy that encourages students to think deeply and critically. Over time, the hope is that students will become active civic agents who question issues of power and privilege and become proponents of change. The results in this study support the premise that a critical literacy can prompt low-income and working-class students to become more aware of the implications of unequal access to power and privilege. In addition, critical literacy practice can enable students to be more aware of the power of their own voice, words, and actions.

Keywords: Critical literacy, power, privilege, elementary students

Introduction

Sociologists, economists, and historians have long been skeptical of the popular belief that schools have the power to counterbalance the structural inequities and the ability to break the cycle of inter-generational working class and lower-class status (Anyon, 2005; Katz, 1995; Rothstein, 2004). If there is to be any hope for change, the societal myth of social mobility for all, which ignores structural understandings of social class, must be brought to the teacher’s and the student’s critical awareness (Caro, 2009; Martin, 2008). Unfortunately, current educational contexts, as well as provincial and federal policies do not seem to acknowledge, nor attempt to address, how the broader socio-political contexts implicate student achievement (Levin, 2006; Rogers, Mosley, & Folkes, 2009).

Critical literacy, as a theoretical framework and pedagogical practice, explicitly recognizes the political nature of schools and the role of power and privilege in perpetuating inequitable structures and practices (Janks, 2009; Jewett, 2007; Shor, 1999). It teaches students to realize how their lives are shaped and affected by these larger social systems. By explicitly exposing students to the benefits of critical literacy, they can begin to understand how unquestioned and legitimizing power differentials shape the multitude of
information that they are exposed to daily (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Furthermore, critical literacy also introduces new ways of presenting the curriculum which connects school experiences with real life experiences that occur outside of the classroom (Shor, 1999). Ultimately, the development of critical literacy skills may enable the students to question the existence and effects of power and privilege both inside and outside of the school context.

Inherent in critical literacy is an explicit and implicit instructional style that prompts students to explore the disparities that are constructed and re-constructed through class, race, and gender relations (Shor, 1999). Becoming critically literate means that students have mastered the ability to read and critique messages in a wide variety of texts in order to better understand whose knowledge is being privileged (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006). For example, by reflecting on a series of questions—including, “How is the understanding of the text influenced by your background?”—financially disadvantaged students may explicitly come to recognize that dominant texts often fail to account for their personal background, histories, and experiences. Through this process, students will ideally understand that white, middle class, dominant values are overemphasized in literature and media texts without being systematically questioned or critically examined (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Developing a critical stance will help students to critique and form their own judgments about this reality and begin to see the benefits and necessity of acknowledging and legitimizing multiple cultural perspectives.

Essentially, teachers who endorse critical literacy demonstrate how to evaluate the function language plays in the social construction of the self (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006). In other words, the practice of critical literacy prompts students to consider how their self-image and identity is shaped by society’s mainstream ideological language. For example, some working-class students may feel ashamed when they self-identify as belonging to the working class. Students begin to see that working-class families and low-income groups have been ideologically positioned as being less than that of middle and upper class groups. At this point, children can critically question the validity of this problematic ideological positioning and reflect on how they may have internalized negative stereotypes associated with the word “poor.”

When students become critically literate, they come to understand the roles they were supposedly assigned to play in the world (e.g., a working-class person takes orders), critically evaluate and make sense of these narrow and constraining roles, and begin to discover personal ways of resistance and becoming agents of change (Shor, 1999).

**Study Objective**

This qualitative, participatory action research study was guided by the overarching research question, *How do fourth and fifth grade students respond to critical literacy pedagogy?* During this study, critical literacy instructional approaches were facilitated as a means to prompt a group of elementary students to actively examine dominant ideologies, especially those related to social class. This study also sought out to answer the following questions: a.) How will the process of a critical literacy program enable students to understand how language shapes identity? b.) How will the process of a critical literacy program enable students to understand how language constructs cultural discourse? c.) How will the process of a critical literacy program enable students to understand how language supports or disrupts the status quo? d.) How will the process of a critical literacy program engage students to reflect on multiple viewpoints and contradictory perspectives? e.) How
will the process of a critical literacy program encourage students to take social action in an attempt to resist or change existing discourses? These questions were taken from an existing critical literacy research framework developed by Lewison, Van Sluys, and Flint, (2006).

Methodology

Context and Participants

The study took place in an elementary school that was designated as a “high needs” school by the affiliated school board and situated within a low-income neighborhood. Although this community has a rather condensed population of low-income and working-class families, it reflects the many pockets of financially disadvantaged neighborhoods that are nestled throughout this urban Canadian city. With one of the highest unemployment rates across all of Canada, this city also has a high concentration of immigrants from a range of cultural backgrounds. Thus, this fourth/fifth grade classroom consisted of 27 children with rich and culturally diverse backgrounds (20 white students, 5 African-American students, and 2 newly immigrated Muslim students). Many of these students were living below the poverty line and two of the students were not currently living in their own home; rather, they lived with extended family members. One of the students shared a story about her brother being shot by a gang member, while another student confided that he often played a game called “survivor” with his extended live-in family members; this game entailed salvaging enough food from the community to last the weekend. It is paramount to note these children were very polite, intelligent, and inquisitive and seemed to possess a maturity beyond their biological age. These two students seemed to be especially warm and receptive to my involvement in this classroom, which was not always the case with some of the other students.

As mentioned by the teacher, and observed by me, there were many strong and spirited personalities in this group. The teacher had found that sometimes this created a great classroom dynamic, and at other times it had led to many conflicts throughout the school year within the classroom and the school yard. Getting along and treating each other properly has been an emphasized goal and focus for many of the students. In fact, the school board’s behavioral specialist had visited the class for 45 minutes each week to discuss the “character building traits” that revolved around establishing positive friendships. The classroom teacher, as well as the various teaching assistants that came in and out of the classroom on a regular basis, was a compassionate and high quality educator who strived to keep the students on task with their academic pursuits. The students were constantly reminded of the expectations and rules for listening and working, and had, for the most part, uniformly adapted to these expectations.

A very important part of the school community, was the Back-on-Track room. When students were uncooperative with the classroom and school rules, they were sent to Back-on-Track to deal with the issues at hand. When I arrived in the classroom each morning to work with the students, at least one student had usually been sent to the Back-on-Track room for something that occurred the day before. Physical fighting, verbal assaults, and uncooperative work habits were the main reasons why students were sent to Back-on-Track. There were only two instances in which a student was sent to Back-on-Track while I was working with the class. Therefore, even though I did not observe the many circumstances that justified a back-on-track visit, this program seemed like a highly-used space.
Researcher’s Positionality

Influencing my perspective, research, and writing is my own positionality as a white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual woman who has worked extensively in the area of equity-based teaching and learning, theory, and practice. I have experienced privileges afforded by factors such as class, race, sexuality, and physical ability; however, as an immigrant ELL (English Language Learning) female student from Poland, raised in an impoverished, working-class community, I have also experienced forms of discrimination based on my gender, ethnicity, and social class. The interconnected and overlapping ways in which these complex factors have both helped and hindered my life were largely obscured prior to entering graduate school almost a decade ago. It was only after entering graduate school that I began to develop a mature critical consciousness and acquire a language of critique, which together helped me better understand how oppressive social relations work. Thus, my professional interest in social justice research and teaching originates from a personal history with gender and class inequities, and eventually led me to critical literacy and critical pedagogy to promote social change.

Study Design

Using Stinger’s (1999a) Participatory Action Research Model (PAR) and Action Research Interacting Spiral Model (1999b) as a framework, my aim as researcher was to facilitate a critical literacy program that positioned the student-participants as critical inquirers of language; in so doing, I sought to guide students in the analysis of textual and social practices. Over a six-week period, I taught a critical literacy program every day of the school week; thus, I visited the classroom each day and worked directly with the students from 9:00am until 10:30am, which made up their daily 90-minute Language Arts block. I also conducted focus group interviews, which took place shortly after each Language Arts period.

The data analysis drew upon directed content analysis as described by Mayring (2000), as well as Lewison, Van Sluys, and Flint’s (2006) critical literacy framework (see Appendix A). In other words, this study used a prior existing theoretical framework that depicted which phenomena should be coded and categorized within the context of implementing a critical literacy practice. The goal of the data analysis was to identify and categorize all instances of a particular phenomenon by reading over the focus group transcripts and then highlighting and categorizing passages, using the predetermined codes of the existing critical literacy framework (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006). When analyzing the data, I used both critical and social constructionist lenses to draw conclusions. In using a social constructionist theoretical framework to understand the experiences of students immersed in a critical literacy program, the data analysis was situated on the assumption that meaning is socially constructed, historically contingent, and contextually dependent (Britzman, 2003). Meanwhile, the critical lens focused on the issues of power and privilege, and emphasized that traditional teaching practices should always be viewed as problematic and in constant need of deconstruction and reconstruction (Giroux, 1994).

Methods and Procedures

The fourth/fifth grade classroom consisted of 27 children with culturally rich and diverse backgrounds. The student body was composed of 20 boys and 7 girls, 15 fifth graders and
12 fourth graders. Throughout the study, I took the position of both critical literacy teacher and the researcher, engaging in the role of a participant observer. As Spradley (1980) suggests, becoming directly engaged in the activities at the research site offered an ideal opportunity to observe the actions and responses of the participants. In order to document the format of each daily lesson and the perceived key events that occurred during each daily lesson, I kept daily field notes, writing them immediately after each visit was completed. I revisited the field notes to aid in the data-analysis.

During the focus groups, I used both semi-structured and open-ended questions, while documenting students’ insights on the issues of gender, race, and class, as portrayed in the texts that we previously read and discussed, and gaging whether students were acquiring critical text analysis skills. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) assert, focus groups are unique and important modes of collective inquiry where theory, research, pedagogy, and politics converge. Thus, focus groups provided a democratic research and teaching method which aimed to increase the students’ voices by encouraging personal and political opinions on the issue of social inequity. The focus group interviews each included 3 to 5 students and were fifteen to twenty minutes in length; these conversations were later transcribed and coded.

Within the context of daily classroom instruction, students read a series of nonmainstream and mainstream texts. To elaborate, I define mainstream texts as those that problematically portray historically dominant/traditional ways of being and knowing. Thus, in Canada, children’s literature conveying stories featuring white, cisgender, monolingual, English-speaking characters, and plots that are founded on middle/upper class, Euro-Christian values and beliefs can be categorized as mainstream texts. Nonmainstream texts feature stories outside of this dominant ideological norm. For example, a children’s story centering the lives of homeless families would fall outside of dominant ideological norms. Children’s literature featuring stories about working-class and homeless families were very carefully chosen for this class; these stories effectively illustrated a challenging life experience and related to homelessness or being poor; however, all the characters conveyed qualities of dignity and integrity. (See Appendix D for the list of texts utilized in this study.) Using a critical lens, the students discussed the issues of class, gender, and race as portrayed in the texts, having been taught a series of critical literacy tools and prompted to apply and continuously rehearse their critical lens using these tools. (See Appendix C for a list of the questions used.)

The students also filled out a questionnaire that was administered at the beginning and at the end of the four-week critical literacy program. The pre- and post-test questionnaire served as a means to evaluate whether students’ awareness of the relevant issues discussed had evolved over the course of the study. The pre-teaching questionnaire was also used to assess where the students, as a group and individually, stood in terms of previous knowledge on the specified topics. (See Appendix B.)

Findings

From the onset of the research, the Critical Literacy (CL) framework (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006) for data analysis seemed rational, legitimate, and most importantly, essential. There was indeed evidence that the students in the classroom had become critical text analysts. And perhaps, as some students demonstrated the ability to apply some of the skills across contexts, one may assume that they had internalized the skill to critically examine how gender, race, and class were portrayed in texts. However, in using the CL
framework (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006), it became clear that, in the process of collecting data, the teacher/researcher should remain keenly aware of how the students are meeting the CL framework (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006) criteria. Is the teacher putting information in the students’ heads, and are the students simply regurgitating the information back to the teacher during discussions and on assignments and/or evaluations?

If we are to use a CL framework and truly endorse a CL pedagogy, we must encourage students to find their own way of meeting some of the CL framework criteria. Knowledge should be constructed by the students, not the teacher. When using this CL framework (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006) as a guide, it becomes essential to continuously reflect on how the students’ knowledge is being produced. By closely examining the process of how the CL program unfolds, one may be able to better ensure that both questions and answers are carefully crafted, allowing students to come up with their own conclusions and to choose the issues that concern them. The novice critical literacy teacher must be sensitive to the inclination to assume the role of authority and influence positive critical learning outcomes superficially. For example, I noticed in myself the tendency to tell students the answer, rather than lead them to discover their own answers, and this may have inflated at least some portion of the results. In other words, there were likely some students, who provided the critical answers that I unintentionally imposed and positioned as correct during whole class and focus group discussions. In the next section, I present the results of the data analysis and provide segments of the focus group transcriptions that support each thematic conclusion.

**Directed Content Analysis:**
**Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy Framework**

*Disrupting the Common Place:* Broadly, within this section, critical literacy is conceptualized as seeing the “everyday” through new lenses. Throughout the duration of the study, the students’ responses indicated that they had developed an implicit understanding of how language shapes identity. For example, the students’ responses indicated that they understood that stereotypes, based on gender, race, and class, are prevalent in texts and are often unquestioned and naturalized as “normative ways of being.” Therefore, a theme that emerged was the student’s ability to understand that texts influence our ways of “being.” The following statements, extracted from a focus group transcript illustrate one example of this new awareness.

- **Josh**  Most people stereotype, but they really don’t realize it.
- **Mrs. P.**  Okay, can you give me an example?
- **Josh**  Like uhm…. In like, you showed us clips of Disney. All girls have to have long hair. All princesses have long hair, long dresses, mostly blond hair and they have to look good. And then there always has to be a prince to fall into their hands and live happily ever after.
- **Josh**  I think that more little, little kids think, yeah, like in grade two believe that one day, too, they’ll become like Cinderedna, have a carriage, go to the ball.
- **Mrs. P.**  Cinderella, you mean, right?
- **Josh**  Yeah, Cinderella and go to the ball and all that.
Sue Uhm, because if you watch, like, too much like of how princesses are all styled, like all the hair. Uhm, you might get brainwashed when you watch it. When you watch it or if you actually pay attention to it when you watch it you should say, “that’s not real.” Then stuff.

Throughout the study, many of the students came to understand, on some level, how language constructs cultural discourse. For example, many students realized that the majority of texts showed dominant ways of “being” and “living” and that these messages “brainwash” small children on how to “be” and how “they should live their lives.” Therefore, another theme that emerged is the understanding that stereotypes “brainwash” everybody on “how to be.” The following examples convey this understanding.

Dan Uhm, people, they do…people do what their gender is supposed to do, so that they won’t get teased. So that they can fit in with their friends, instead of doing what they want to do.

Mrs. P. Good, I like that. So, when you learn about stereotyping what is that? How can that help?

Dan It doesn’t really matter if you fit in or not. Just that you’re being true to yourself.

Sandra It’s like Dan’s, but say you read, like, the book of Olivia, like, lots of times/ You’ll be brainwashed and instead you’ll think that’s how I should live my life. I should be like Olivia, but you should be just like the way you are. But just because the story in the book says that, you shouldn’t be like that. It’s just their life.

Mrs. P. It’s one story, right?

Sandra IT’S LIKE…IT’S LIKE UHM, IT’S LIKE A Disney theme. All you have to do is watch and watch and watch it. And you think you have to be like that. And all you are going to do is read and read about one book like that and then you hold a book and you read Tight Times and then you realize okay, my life doesn’t revolve around money. I’m more like…loves around my family than more than just money.

Upon understanding how language shapes identity and how it constructs cultural discourse, the students also became aware of how stereotypical characters often limit and restrict “other ways of being” for children who don’t fit in with dominant ways of being. For example, while comparing mainstream and nonmainstream texts, the students came to realize that some authors intentionally resist the traditional gendered, raced, and class stereotypes by using non-stereotypical characters, settings, and plots as a way to show the reader that there is more than one way of being. Overall, the students agreed that stereotyping gender was wrong, hurtful, and potentially very damaging to individuals and groups. They seemed to understand that these stereotypes were constructed, and therefore could be deconstructed and reconstructed as evidenced in the nonmainstream texts.

The CL program had “disrupted the status quo” of everyday classroom practice as students examined the portrayal of stereotypes based on gender, race, and class, from a new critical lens which involved questioning these stereotypes, reflecting on whether these stereotyped messages are true and fair, and if we should look to some of these stereotypical characters as role models. As a result, another common theme that emerged was the students’ ability to understand that stereotyping and dominant “ways of being” can be
misleading and that these “limit” other “ways of being.” The following student statement exemplifies this point.

Leo

If boys play with dolls, you shouldn’t tease them about it ‘cause then they won’t feel good about themselves, and they’ll think that the only thing is that they have to do all boy things and not what they really want to do.

**Considering Multiple Viewpoints:** This dimension of the framework emphasizes that critical literacy should include learning opportunities that enable students to understand experience and texts from their own perspective, as well as the viewpoints of others, and to consider these various perspectives concurrently. The students in this study were able to directly compare mainstream texts that portrayed stereotypical characters and/or stereotypical ways of “being” and “living” based on gender, race, and class, to that of nonmainstream texts which resisted the portrayal of these stereotypes and featured multiple ways of “being” and “living.” For example, *Fly Away Home* (2009) written by Eve Bunting, is a beautiful story about a young boy who is living in an airport with his homeless father; moving from terminal to terminal trying not to be noticed, the boy is given hope when a trapped bird finally finds its freedom. When reading and comparing nonmainstream texts, such as *Fly Away Home* (2009), and mainstream texts, the students were able to easily, though mechanically, answer the critical literacy question of “Whose voices do you think are heard, and whose voices do you think are missing?” Their responses to written assignments included a repetition of “white people, black people, Asian people, rich people, poor people, and the homeless.” However, there were very few students who were able to independently expand on some of the issues we discussed in class. Most of the students had answers that seemed memorized from the class discussions. A common theme that emerged was the students’ ability to identify whose voice was missing and present in texts; however, this was done in a rote and mechanical way. The following statement illustrates a typical student response within this theme.

Zachary

There’s…the voices that are present are, uh, a white family. Uhm, working poor…well, working…. Well, I don’t know how to explain it, but their dad is working, but they’re also…. They’re homeless, so it would be put together as working-poor homeless.

**Focusing on the Sociopolitical:** Broadly, this section of the framework emphasizes that traditional teaching practices do not bring awareness to the sociopolitical systems that we belong to and frequently do not address how these sociopolitical systems, power relationships, and language intersect and are inseparable from our teaching practices. In an attempt to assist the students in understanding the sociopolitical system to which we belong, I explained the concept of “social class” explicitly to students and thereafter, it seemed that the students were better able to see how class was implicated in the texts that we read. This enabled the class to move beyond the personal and to begin to understand the sociopolitical systems to which we belong. A theme that developed in this dimension was the students’ ability to use language that identified the different classes; as a result, the students acquired a “class consciousness” that they did not have before. To illustrate this point, we turn to the student responses on the pre- and post-test questionnaire.

The pre-test questionnaire indicated that students weren’t able to accurately define what the term ‘social class’ meant. When asked to explain what social class means, three students responded with “it is a class that talks a lot,” and the rest of the class responded with answers
like, “don’t know,” or “I have no idea.” In contrast, the responses on the post-test questionnaire indicated that almost all of the students understood that there was a working class, middle class, and upper class. Five of the students also identified the ruling class, working poor, those in poverty, and the homeless. Also, on the post-test questionnaire, most of the students indicated that social class was based on how much money someone has, while five students indicated that social class was based on income, education, and power (as emphasized in class). Also, on the post-test questionnaire, all of the students indicated that people do not choose the class that they were in. Answers in response to, “Do people choose the social class they belong to?” ranged from, “kids are born into the social class that their parents are in,” to “people don’t choose their social class because if they did, everyone would be rich,” to “not all people can get good jobs or have good educations to be like the upper class and rich people,” to “homeless people may have gambled all of their money away or did drugs and so they can’t have a home or money.” Although most responses varied, almost all of the students indicated that social class was not a “life choice.”

During the in-class lessons, the students were especially interested in the stories we read about the homeless and the working poor, and seemed to be very engaged in the conversations that followed the reading of each story. For example, the children were especially responsive to A Shelter in Our Car (2014) written by Monica Gunning, The Lady in the Box (2014) by Ann McGovern, and Lily and the Paper Man (2008) by Rebecca Upjohn. These stories featured diverse heartfelt experiences of homeless families and individuals. After reading and critically discussing these stories, the students were able to identify various scenarios as to who benefits from reading stories about the homeless and the working class, although the prominent answer seemed to be that homeless and poor people benefit because they can see themselves in the story and not feel so alone, and that rich people may benefit because they may come to understand how poor people live and they may want to help them in some way (e.g., give money to food banks, homeless shelters, and help in repairing the destruction of homes during natural disasters). As a result, one of the main themes that emerged was the students’ ability to point out the differences between social classes, in terms of which family had more money, more options, and more privileges. Within this theme, the differences between each social class was made explicitly visible by the students. The following student examples illustrate this point.

Ray: The upper classes have more privileges than the lower classes.
Mrs. P.: Can you give me an example, Ray?
Ray: Well, like, Joe said that you can just move it away. Ah...like, make money. The owners of the business, they can fire people and hire, but, uhm, the lower classes like, uhm, working-class...they can’t really do anything. They can try their best to get hired, but the middle class, they have like more choices or jobs to go to.

Mrs. P.: And would you be able to describe what that upper-class person is like?
Joe: Yep.
Mrs. P.: What would you say?
Joe: Well, I would say that they have a big house. They have, uhm, some power. Uhm, I would guess that they had a very good education.

Mrs. P.: Good. And what about a middle-class person? What would you say they were like?
Joe: Like me.
Mrs. P. | Okay. What about a working-class person?
Joe | Uhrm, I would say…. I just need a second to think about that…. I would think that they wouldn’t have the best education like others. Maybe they didn’t go to university or, ah, they would have a little, little amount of power.

Class conversations, such as the one above, occurred when we read stories contrasting mainstream and nonmainstream ways of “being” and “living,” and were asked to compare and contrast these stories. For example, *Tight Times* (2009) written by Barbara Shook Haze features a story about a working-class family experiencing financial difficulty. The young boy in the story does not understand when his parents tell him he cannot have a dog because of tight times. Eventually, however, the boy finds, to his surprise, a cat in a garbage can, and his wish of having a pet is met. After the parents reluctantly agree to allow their son to keep the cat, the climactic illustration shows this young boy and his parents embraced in a firm hug while his dad is crying. In my experience of reading this text, this scene incites tears among a few students, and the students remain in a state of deep connection and reflection for some time after the reading. In contrast, *Olivia and the Missing Toy* (2003) written by Ian Falconer is a mainstream story book with animal characters (pigs) that appear to represent a white, middle/upper class, stereotypical family life. The mother stays at home and provides a very comfortable and adventurous life for Oliva, while the father pursues a high-status profession outside the home. Similar to most mainstream children’s storybooks, this family does not experience financial struggle. Olivia has a dog and a cat, and she sometimes drags these pets around from one place to another; in other words, her pets are taken-for-granted. Olivia’s most pressing issue is that she has lost her toy.

From our class discussions, and in response to my leading critical literacy questions, a few students seemed to understand that mainstream books, like *Olivia*, represent the white, middle/upper class voice and ways of being, and that working class, working poor, and homeless voices and ways of being were rarely, if ever, represented in the texts they were exposed to at school.

**Taking Action:** This dimension of the critical literacy framework emphasizes that, in order to take informed action against oppression or to promote social justice, one must have understood and gained perspectives from the other three dimensions. The data provided several examples of how students used language to exercise power to enhance everyday life and to question the practices of privilege and social injustice. A common theme that evolved in this dimension was the students’ ability to deconstruct and reconstruct the stereotypes associated with gender, race, and social class. For example, students reflected on whether or not the homeless are at fault for their circumstance. The class posed various scenarios of why a homeless person may have become homeless, and the tendency was not to blame the homeless person for their circumstance. Furthermore, on the post-test questionnaire, about half of the students said that homeless people may not be responsible for their circumstance, as they may have lost their job, as well as their money, or may have become sick, addicted to drugs or gambling. Almost all of the students said that we should help those who are homeless by giving them money or donating to shelters or food banks. The following student examples further illustrates this point.

Mrs. P. | Uhumm…and what if I asked you about homeless people and asked you, Is it a homeless person’s fault for being homeless? What do you think about that? Whose fault is it?
Toni: Well, if you’re homeless I—You would have to listen to [their] story because then you’d understand whose fault it was.

Mrs. P.: That’s right, and what do a lot of people do in terms of homeless people [how do most people respond to homelessness]?

Toni: Instead of… uhm… listening to [their] story? [Most people respond with] Okay, it’s your fault, deal with it. Find a job.

Overall, the analysis showed that the students became more consciously aware of stereotypes based on gender, race, and class over the duration of the critical literacy lessons. However, I cannot attest to the depth of this awareness. Some of the students’ responses were mechanical in nature, and it was sometimes difficult for me to figure out if they were responding with what I wanted to hear. Ideally, I would like to believe that after concluding my work with the students, they will continue to question the normative discourses that oppress ‘other’ ways of being and living, especially as this pertains to issues of gender, race, and class. There were a few incidences that would support this long term critical literacy goal. For instance, on the post-test questionnaire, in response to the question, “Do you ever think about your own social class?” one student answered, “I never really [thought] about my social class very deeply until you came and [taught] us a lot more about it.” Comments such as this lead me to believe that the “critical questioning” will continue to blossom.

**Conclusion**

Critical literacy is one school-based instructional approach that has the potential to a.) increase awareness of the issues of gender, race, and social class inequity; b.) give students a voice to speak freely about the issues that deeply affect their daily lives; and c.) begin the process of changing the existing gendered, raced, and classed stereotypes that devalue ‘other’ ways of being while creating new societal norms that value difference. The critical literacy practice that I suggest in this study has the potential to address these issues.

The attempt to create equitable and inclusive classrooms by utilizing a critical literacy pedagogy will likely include some messiness in the process, as was experienced in this research study. However, one way to positively view this is to appreciate the cultural collisions within this pedagogy as a driving force that may remediate and more justly represent our diverse world (Janks, 2010). In order to begin this process of change, we must first bring a critical awareness to the issues of gender, race, and social class inequity. This study has attempted to achieve this goal and suggests that critical literacy pedagogy is complicated and needs to be continuously fine-tuned. Nonetheless, we must all start somewhere. The following section will address how the research findings can be utilized and explored in future studies, and makes recommendations as to how certain aspects of this research can be improved upon.

**Improving and Building on the CL Framework**

This existing CL framework (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006) provided a sufficient amount of predetermined codes in terms of categorizing most of the data set. From here, I was able to develop at least two or three themes within each of the four CL critical literacy domains. These themes are illustrated in Table 1.
Table 1. The Themes Found in Each of the Four Domains of the CL Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISRUPTING THE COMMON PLACE</th>
<th>CONSIDERING MULTIPLE VIEWPOINTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The students’ ability to understand that texts influence our ways of being.</td>
<td>• An explicit and implicit awareness of the fact that there are many viewpoints and perspectives that are silenced and not portrayed in most of the circulated texts shared and read within the school or home setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The students’ understanding that stereotypes brainwash us on “how to be.”</td>
<td>• The students’ ability to identify whose voice was missing and present in texts. (This was done in a rote and mechanical way.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The students’ ability to understand that stereotyping and dominant “ways of being” can be misleading and that these limit other “ways of being.”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUSING ON THE SOCIOPOLITICAL</th>
<th>TAKING ACTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The students’ ability to use language that identified the different classes; as a result, the students acquired a “class consciousness” that they did not have before.</td>
<td>• The students’ ability to deconstruct and reconstruct the stereotypes associated with gender, race, and social class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The students’ ability to point out in texts the differences between social classes in terms of which family had more money, more options, and more privileges.</td>
<td>• The students’ ability to cross cultural borders and gain a better understanding of ‘other’ ways of being and living.</td>
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There were some sections of the data that did not fit into the predetermined codes and thus did not enable me to develop additional themes. For instance, several students’ responses did not directly answer the critical literacy questions that I had asked, but rather veered off into a completely unrelated topic. Additionally, there were times during our focus group conversations that the dialogue seemed to get off topic. Therefore, perhaps a new predetermined code entitled, “Unrelated Responses” could be incorporated into this CL Framework. This would be a good way to keep track of how often the students digressed onto nonrelated topics; perhaps, those nonrelated responses could be further analyzed after more contextual student information is gathered.

Also, some of the other uncategorized data could have been categorized or coded under titles such as, “Did Not Voice Opinion,” “Had Trouble Putting Thoughts Into Words,” “Contradictions,” and “Not Sure.” There was a significant amount of responses, within my data set, that would have fit into these categories. For example, “Did Not Voice Opinion,” seems to be an especially important category as the researcher may want to keep track of which students are not contributing to the dialogue and then potentially figure out ways to encourage these students to have a voice. This would be especially important in the context of a critical literacy pedagogy, as students’ voices have the potential to lead to transformational action.

The predetermined code of “Contradictions” may also reveal how students struggle with resisting certain stereotypes. For example, in responding to the story, *William’s Doll* (1972) by Charlotte Zolotow, one of the students said that William should be allowed to play with
dolls so that when he grows up, he will be a good dad and will be able to take care of his baby when the mom is not around. In discussing gender stereotypes, one student responded, “There are no such things as girl things; it is just that more girls choose to do girl things.” Furthermore, the newly developed themes (Table 2) created as a result of the utilizing the predetermined codes in the existing CL framework (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006) may be used as a new CL framework when working with students in the junior grades. The language used to describe these new themes/predetermined codes are more practical and concrete for this age group and seem to lessen the abstraction that was present in the CL framework developed by Lewison, Van Sluys, and Flint (2006). A teacher may find this framework more straight forward and adaptable to his/her group of junior grade students. Personally, I found that using the term “stereotype” was productive with this age group as they have been exposed to this term and have applied it to other contexts. In addition to utilizing the CL framework provided by Lewison, Van Sluys, and Flint (2006), I would suggest that future researchers add the other predetermined codes suggested earlier, such as “No Opinion Voiced,” and “Contradictions.”

While utilizing the pre-existing CL framework (Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006), there were times where the focus for me became, what the students will learn at the expense of how they will learn it. Even though, I had planned on using Freire’s (2000) problem posing method of teaching and learning, some of the questions I had posed were leading questions, and if the students did not come forth with answers that fit my notion of the correct answer, I sometimes imposed the answer I wanted to hear. When the students did say what I wanted to hear, they were positively reinforced. In fact, the EA’s and the teachers in the classroom wanted, so kindly, to assist me in my agenda, that they imposed my message on the children when they were not able to produce answers themselves, when they struggled, or if their answers seemed off topic. I frowned upon these interactions while I had observed them occurring. In retrospect, I had no right to pass judgement on these frequent occurrences, especially when my own actions sometimes paralleled this type of controlling and domineering teaching environment. My description of the personal struggle to teach in alignment with critical literacy pedagogy, while at the same time using a CL framework for teaching and researching critical literacy, has been complicated and messy, yet also productive and worthwhile.

In light, future researchers may benefit from conducting a self-check and student-check to examine how the students are learning throughout the CL program. Are the students empowered to self-generate the knowledge by being prompted and explicitly taught only when necessary, or is the teacher imposing his/her agenda on the students in order to create the data results that are needed to fit the framework. This is significant, as within the context of critical literacy pedagogy, we must try to avoid a scenario of the “oppressed” teacher further “oppressing” the students by engaging in an authoritarian pedagogy and imposing his/her agenda onto the students.
References


Author

Barbara A. Pollard, Ph.D. conducts research and teaches a range of preservice and graduate courses in the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor, Canada. Her research focuses on the process and outcome of critical literacy, critical pedagogy, and gender equity teaching initiatives across elementary and post-secondary contexts. Dr. Pollard draws on feminist and other critical theoretical frameworks in order to explore how culture, ideology, knowledge, and identity implicate the social and academic outcomes of students and teachers. Her research examines factors such as gender, race, and social class under circumstances of oppression and resistance in the lives of students and teachers.
APPENDIX A:
Critical Literacy Framework

Four Dimension of Critical Literacy
(Based on the work of Lewison, Van Sluys, & Flint, 2006)

DISRUPTING THE COMMON PLACE
This section describes critical literacy as seeing the “everyday” through new lenses and offers the following criteria to achieve this goal.
1.) Studying language to analyze how it shapes identity.
2.) Realizing how language shapes cultural discourse.
3.) Disrupting the status quo.

CONSIDERING MULTIPLE VIEWPOINTS
This section emphasizes the ability to understand experience and texts from our own perspective and the viewpoints of others, and to consider these various perspectives concurrently. The following criteria are offered to meet this goal.
1.) Reflecting on multiple and contradictory perspectives.
2.) Using multiple voices to interrogate texts by asking questions such as, “Whose voices are heard and whose are missing?”
3.) Paying attention to and seeking out other voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized.
4.) Making difference visible.

FOCUSING ON THE SOCIOPOLITICAL
This section examines how socio-political, power relationships, and language are intertwined and inseparable from our teaching. The following three criteria help in achieving this aim.
1.) Challenging the unquestioned legitimacy of unequal power relationship by studying the relationship between power and language.
2.) Going beyond the personal and attempting to understand the socio-political systems to which we belong.
3.) Using literacy to engage in the politics of daily life.

TAKING ACTION
The last section emphasizes that in order to take informed action against oppression or to promote social justice, one must have understood and gained perspectives from the other three dimensions. Thus, the ability to enact the following criteria may show how students may be taking action or moving toward action.
1.) Using language to exercise power to enhance everyday life and to question the practices of privilege and social injustice.
2.) Using diverse forms of language as cultural resources and realizing how social action can change existing discourses.
3.) Encouraging students to be border crossers in order to understand others.
APPENDIX B:
Student Pre-Test and Post-Test Questionnaire

Name: ___________________________________________
Date: ___________________________________________

Please read the following questions carefully and respond to the best of your ability.

Please feel free to ask any questions at any time during this assessment.

1. What is social class?
2. Do people choose the social class they belong to? Please explain your answer.
3. How does a poor person become poor?
4. Should people help the poor?
5. What can people do to help the poor?
6. Can you name a person from the upper class? If so, describe this upper-class person. Explain what they look like, act like, and talk like:
7. Can you name a person from the middle class? If so, describe this middle-class person. Explain what they look like, act like, and talk like:
8. Can you name a person from the working class? If so, describe this working-class person. Explain what they look like, act like, and talk like:
9. Why are some people homeless?
10. Does a person’s social class really matter to you?
11. Do you ever think about your own social class?
12. Do you compare your social class to that of others?
13. What does the word “stereotype” mean to you?
14. Do you believe that girls should wear pink and boys should wear blue? Explain why or why not.
15. Do you think that all girls should play with girl toys like dolls and that all boys should play boy toys, like trucks? Explain why or why not.
16. Do you believe that girls listen to instructions more than boys? Explain why or why not.
17. How do you think girls should act in school? Explain why you think so.
19. Based on your experience, please explain how girls play together at recess.
20. Based on your experience, please explain how boys play together at recess.
21. What does the term “racial discrimination” mean to you?
22. Are some cultures sometimes treated differently? Please explain.
23. Do you believe that all people, regardless of their race, culture, gender, and social class are treated the same?
24. Do you ever stop to think about an author’s story and question why the author wrote the story in a certain way?
25. What is meant by the term “point of view” and why is it important to think about the “point of view” when reading a book or watching T.V.?
26. Do you believe that some “points of view” are more used in texts and media, more than others? Please explain your answer.
27. Have you ever read a story and rewritten it, so that it makes more sense to you? If so, explain why you did that and how it made you feel.
28. Do you ever want to be like any of the characters that you read about or see on T.V. Please explain which character and why you want to be like them?
30. Do you ever read a story and think, that is not the way my family is? Please explain.
31. Do you ever see messages in texts or the media and know right away that the message does not include your “point of view,” or that it does not apply to you? Please explain your answer.
32. When your classmates and you read a story, with the teacher in small reading groups, do you think that everyone in the group hears the same message or thinks about the same things that you do? Please explain.
APPENDIX C:
Critical Literacy Questions

QUESTION SERIES #1:
Who authored this text?
Why did the author write this text?
Who benefits from this text?
What voices are being heard?
Whose voices are left out?
Is there another point of view?
How is gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, etc. portrayed in this text?
What if this story were told from the perspective of a different character?
How is the reader positioned in the text?
What are the design features of this text? Why were they included?
How does the message in the story relate to your own life?

QUESTION SERIES #2:
How is your understanding of the text influenced by your background?
How is the text influencing you, e.g., does the form of the text influence how you construct meaning?
How does the language in a text position you as reader, e.g., does the use of passive or active voice position you in a particular way?
What view of the world and what values does the text present?
What assumptions about your values and beliefs does the text make?
What perspectives are omitted?
Whose interests are served by the text?
APPENDIX D:
Sample List of Nonmainstream Children’s Texts:

Gender Equity Resources:
Oliver Button is a Sissy by Tomie dePaola
The Princess Knight by Cornelia Funke
Cinder Edna by Ellen Jackson
The Paper Bag Princess by Robert N. Munsch
William’s Doll by Charlotte Zolotow

Social Class Equity Resources:
Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting
A Day’s Work by Eve Bunting
A Shelter in Our Car by Monica Gunning
Tight Times by Barbara Shook Hazen
A Kids’ Guide to Hunger and Homelessness: How to Take Action! by Cathryn Berger Kaye
The Lady in the Box by Ann McGovern
Lily and the Paper Man by Rebecca Upjohn

Racial Diversity Resources:
Willie’s Not the Hugging Kind by Joyce Durham Barrett
Amazing Grace by Caroline Binch
Back of the Bus by Aaron Reynolds
The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson

† See References for complete bibliographic information.
“Where Are You From?”:
Using Critical Race Theory to Analyze Graphic Novel
Counter-Stories of the Racial Microaggressions Experienced
by Two Angry Asian Girls

Talitha Angelica (Angel) Acaylar Trazo, University of California, Los Angeles
Woohee Kim, University of Oxford

Abstract
This article uses critical race theory (CRT) to analyze two stories about racial microaggressions from *Where are you from?: Short stories about being Asian in America*, the graphic novel written and illustrated by Talitha Angelica (Angel) Acaylar Trazo in fulfillment of her undergraduate honors thesis. *Where are you from?* visually historicizes the counter-stories of 48 Asian and Asian American students at a predominantly white undergraduate institution. In this article, we examine two stories of microaggressions in relation to institutional and structural racism and the intersections of race, gender, and power dynamics between white faculty and Asian female students. Furthermore, we propose that the graphic novel functions as a counter-space where counter-stories, otherwise overlooked or silenced by the institution, can exist, as well as a means by which two angry Asian girls voice resistance to racism on a predominantly-white campus.

Keywords: Critical race theory, AsianCrit, graphic novels, higher education, microaggressions

Introduction
Seated on the library floor, I was surrounded by a hundred sheets of paper. Comic-style stories in search of a binding: when OT (a Chinese friend from Hong Kong) and I received accolades on our English, our native tongue; when Chester (a Korean friend whose parents are Christian missionaries) revealed the silhouette of Africa inked on her back; when Woohee (a Korean friend from Seoul) felt her identity erased because her professor refused to pronounce her name. I was attempting to create a work that would add to the ever-growing history of Asian America.

— Angel (she/her)
Graduate School Application Personal Statement, 2017

Three years ago, I held up a poster that read “#ItooAmSnowy-Hill” in front of Snowy Hill’s admissions building. Coming to the United States for college after spending almost all of my life in South Korea, I did not

1 “Snowy Hill” is a pseudonym for the institution in which these events took place. In regard to the comic book illustrations used for this article, any resemblance to professors living or dead is purely coincidental.
completely understand the microaggressions and stereotypes I was experiencing. I did not have the language to articulate what felt like an erasure of my existence. However, standing by hundreds of other students, I felt for the first time that I was not alone in my marginalization.

—Woohee (she/her)
Graduate School Application Personal Statement

These personal statement excerpts exemplify the critical consciousness we possessed after four years of attending our undergraduate institution. However, we both admittedly began our college journeys without much understanding of our positionalities as Asian women, as well as the oppression that people of color face in higher education.

In 2014, students at Snowy Hill led a sit-in protesting the lack of inclusivity on campus, using slogans such as #ITooAmSnowyHill and #CommunityNotConformity. While Woohee, then a first-year student, immediately joined the protest, Angel, a second-year student, shied away due to a fear of appearing “too political.” Woohee read critical texts such as Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire (2005) and learned critical race theory through courses in the Department of Educational Studies. However, Angel, a biology and studio art double major, spent her time at Snowy Hill without having been exposed to critically-based curricula. Moreover, she did not know that fields such as Asian American Studies even existed. It was not until her junior year that she felt the courage to speak out about her experience as an Asian American at Snowy Hill and engage with other Asians and Asian Americans in critical conversations. These conversations inspired the creation of Where Are You From?

In 2017, Angel wrote and illustrated Where Are You From? for her senior studio art thesis in partial fulfillment of her B.A requirements in Art & Art History. Angel interviewed 48 students at Snowy Hill and compiled their stories into a graphic novel. Where Are You From? encompasses a range of identities, from monoracial to mixed-race, and domestic to diasporic, as well as representing students of various socio-economic classes, academic disciplines, and worldviews. What unites their voices is their collective racialization in the context of the nation-state and their desire to critically reflect on what being Asian feels like, particularly in an upper-class, predominantly-white microcosm such as Snowy Hill. Notably, throughout the process of creating Where Are You From?, neither Angel nor Woohee had taken an Asian American Studies course, since none were available on campus. It is important to note how this lack of formal instruction heavily influenced the creation of Where Are You From? such that neither author had adequate words nor extensive understandings of theoretical frameworks to describe the discontentment regarding our racialization on campus. Instead, our defense was to document racial microaggressions as memories preserved through graphic novel stories. Angel chose the graphic novel medium as it works to both visually and textually deconstruct the stereotypes imposed on Asian students.

Now further along in our journeys to dismantle structural oppression and advocate for justice through our scholar-activism, we return to our undergraduate experiences to analyze these graphic novel excerpts as evidence of fighting back against erasure of our existences by utilizing critical race theory’s tools of racial microaggressions and counter-storytelling. In addition, we highlight the complexity of self-imposed silence experienced by minority students when those in positions of power, such as white professors, inflict racial microaggressions. Lastly, our article provides a macro-level perspective of how microaggressions persist due to white supremacy embedded in systems of higher education, particularly within the confines of a predominantly-white institution.
In this study, we ask the following questions: How do our counter-stories of racial microaggressions illustrate institutional and structural racism embedded in higher education? How do race, gender, and power intersect in our experiences of racial microaggressions? How did the creation of the graphic novel Where Are You From? allow us to speak from the margins and present counter-stories? Using counter-storytelling as our method (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), we present two counter-stories of racial microaggressions perpetuated by white professors and illustrated in Where Are You From?. These two counter-stories from our own personal experiences were chosen as they both demonstrate the entanglements of race, gender, and power dynamics that manifest in microaggressions against Asian and Asian American female students. Woohee was interviewed for the creation of Where Are You From? and her story was illustrated by Angel, whereas Angel’s story was self-illustrated.

In presenting and analyzing these counter-stories, we aim to fill the gap of literature on Asian female students that has been relatively understudied in higher education research (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Using critical race theory (CRT) as our analytical lens, we present our counter-stories, both written in this text and visualized in graphic novel form, in response to call for studies that demonstrate diverse experiences of Asian and Asian American students (Poon et al., 2016).

The Racialization of Asians in American Graphic Novels

The visual reading of Americans as race-d is catalyzed by physical appearance and associated preconceptions. In seeing Asian characters drawn in comics, readers are confronted with what Monica Chiu (2015) terms the “look” of race (p. 2). As Will Eisner explains, comics are a “heavily coded medium that rely on stereotyping as a way to concentrate narrative effectiveness” and because of this, there is always “danger of negative stereotype and caricature, which strips others of any unique identity and dehumanizes by means of reductive iconography” (quoted from Royal, 2007, pp. 7-8). Thus, due to the often visually-reductive limitations of the comics form, illustrators turn to racialized codes and iconography when depicting race. Often indicated by facial phenotypes, race-d appearance translates to readers of graphic novels (i.e., almond-shaped eyes and small noses are seen as Asian), an understanding shared by illustrators and American readers alike (whether consciously or subconsciously) because, as Ralph Rodriguez (2015) explains, both have been “schooled well these last few decades about the biological fiction and social construction of race” (p. 89). While far from rendering perverse, caricatured images of Asian Americans, Angel employs iterations of race-d visual markers to facilitate a race-d understanding of characters in Where Are You From? by illustrating Asian and Asian American characters with black hair, in contrast to white characters with uncolored or blonde hair.

While employing stereotypical forms to illustrate race, the graphic narrative form simultaneously allows readers to gain a more complex understanding of Asian characters by way of sequential comics and textual devices. Gardner (2010) poses the question: Can one “deploy a racial stereotype without empowering it, reinforcing it?” (p. 133). The power of the visual vocabulary of race relies on stereotypes, and therefore, cannot be disconnected of its racist origins. However, Gardner (2010) argues that artists’ “nuanced” and “complex” portrayals of ethnic characters through the form of sequential comics allows for a “shift away from cartoon racism” to what he terms “graphic alterity” (p. 135). Thus, sequential comics, a term describing stories that develop over multiple panels, provides graphic novels with “the ability to destabilize racial stereotype” and “enhance understanding of how ethnic identity can be conveyed” (Gardner, 2010, p. 135). The stereotypes that are implicitly connected to images of Asian characters are deconstructed through dialogue, interactions,
and narrative progression of graphic narrative form, a graphic alterity which works to humanize Asian characters over time. In addition to the sequential comics form, textual devices, such as speech bubbles and thought boxes, facilitate a deepened understanding of characters. In doing so, graphic novels provide Asian characters with the agency to (re)define their identities. Overall, graphic novels challenge racial stereotypes perpetuated by hegemonic culture by showing the range of experiences of people racialized as Asian in America. As Chin, Feng, and Lee (2000) explain:

Asian American culture became a challenge to the prevalent images produced and consumed by hegemonic culture, images ranging from the “yellow peril” to the “model minority.” At the forefront of re-visioning of radical representation was the world of Asian American artists, who debunked the rigidity not only of stereotype but also of “ethnic” packaging that confined such work to the earnestly realistic and “authentically” autobiographical. (p. 271)

Contemporary graphic novels authored by and for Asians in America, such as Where Are You From?, perform this work of “re-visioning” the diverse identities included under the umbrella term “Asian Americans.” By creating visual and textual representations of Asians beyond the stagnant stereotypes and caricatures imposed by white hegemonic discourse, Where Are You From? illustrates the visual dimensions of racial microaggressions; centers the perspectives of Asian female women in higher education; and showcases the graphic novel as a platform by which Asians can author American counter-stories.

Critical Race Theory, Microaggressions, and Asian Americans in Higher Education

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) originated as a legal framework committed to the struggle against racism and has since been used widely by educational researchers to illuminate racial inequity in education (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1998). In bringing CRT into the field of education, Daniel Solórzano (1998) proposed five major tenets: (1) intersectionality of race and racism; (2) challenge to the dominant ideology; (3) interdisciplinary perspective; (4) commitment to social justice; and (5) centrality of experiential knowledge.

CRT has developed branches, such as Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), a form of CRT tailored to the experience of Asians in America (Chang, 1993; Museus, 2014). AsianCrit derives from the work of legal scholar Robert Chang (1993) who argued that while CRT “claims that race matters, CRT has not yet shown how different races matter differently” (p. 1248). To best address the issues in higher education specific to the stories of Asian women analyzed in this paper, we employ the tenets of AsianCrit as outlined by Museus (2014, pp. 22-28):

1. **Asianization**: Racism is normal aspect of U.S. society and Asian Americans are often monolithically racialized (e.g. model minority, perpetual foreigner, yellow peril).
2. **Transnational contexts**: Historical and contemporary contexts shape how racism impacts Asian Americans in society.
3. **(Re)constructive history**: Drawing from CRT’s revisionist history, AsianCrit is a call for “transcending invisibility and silence” to construct an Asian American narrative.
4. **Strategic (anti) essentialism**: Race is a constantly changing social construction, and we cannot view Asian Americans as a monolithic group.

5. **Intersectionality**: AsianCrit acknowledges the multiple social categories one experiences (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status).

6. **Story, theory, and praxis**: AsianCrit applies theory to the real world through storytelling.

7. **Commitment to social justice**: This framework ultimately aims to eliminate all forms of subordination.

Another pivotal aspect of CRT and AsianCrit is the centering of people of color through the telling of personal narratives. Referencing the work of scholar Barbara Johnson, Robert Chang (1993) writes, “Narrative will allow us to speak our oppression into existence, for it must first be represented before it can be erased” (p. 1267). Through the use of personal narratives, CRT creates space for people of color to speak about their realities of oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). We argue that, from an AsianCrit lens, graphic novel-style short stories serve to (re)construct history by visualizing narratives of oppression, combating erasure and misrepresentation, and illuminating structural oppression faced by Asian students in higher education.

**Counter-storytelling**

We use counter-stories, a tool of CRT, to explore the experiences of Asian women in higher education. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that counter-storytelling serves as a form of resistance and “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majority stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). As such, counter-storytelling can be used as a methodology that draws from CRT to conduct research rooted in the experiences and knowledge of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In addition, counter-stories allow people of color to: (a) build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice; (b) challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems; (c) open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position; and (d) teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36).

The graphic novel, *Where Are You From?*, contains counter-stories told by Asian and Asian American students which defy majoritarian perceptions of Asian students in higher education. While not explicitly referencing CRT, other artists have used counter-storytelling in the form of comics to validate the lived experiences of Asian women. For example, Sabrina Alcantara-Tan (2000), a mixed-race Filipino American, created her zine *Bamboo Girl* because “I couldn’t find publications that spoke to me (…) I was looking for a fierce Asian woman to look up to so I could read and feel validated” (p. 159). *Where Are You From?*, like *Bamboo Girl*, fills the dearth of Asian female voices in spaces of higher education.

*Where Are You From?* also functions as a counter-space where students build pan-ethnic Asian community in resistance against a predominantly white campus culture that marginalizes them (Yosso et al., 2009). Albeit a book rather than a gathering place, the pages of *Where Are You From?* exist “without the additional pressure of being ‘on display’ (e.g. feeling the need to prove oneself, speak on behalf of an entire race) for white peers,” and thus serve as a mobile counter-space where Asian students feel valid (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 677).
The two counter-stories analyzed in this paper challenge majoritarian narratives imposed on Asian women in higher education which demand subordination and silence. For example, Byung-In Seo, a Korean-American woman in higher education, explained in her personal narrative that “Asian Americans are seen as people who follow the status quo. As a woman, I am expected to be quiet, compliant, and non-threatening” (Seo & Hinton, 2009, p. 211). Asian women remain typecast under Orientalist stereotypes such as the “lotus blossom,” “Suzie Wong,” and “China doll,” embodiments of docility, silence, and subservience (Cheng, 2019, p. 3; Hune, 2011, p. 309; Nam, 2001, p. Xxi; Chung, 1999, p. 64). As a Korean American professor, Ruth Chung (1999) explains, “My assertiveness and articulateness seem to surprise and threaten some because I don’t fit their stereotype of an Asian woman” (p. 67). In addition, Sue et al. (2007) note the “exotification of Asian women” as a category of microaggressions Asian femmes experience (p. 474). Notably, while silence is expected of Asian women in majoritarian narratives, anger is not. This imposition of silence shapes the lives of those read in society as Asian femmes by reinforcing objectification whilst stifling anger. In Ornamentalism (2019), Anne Anlin Cheng writes that anger is not commonly associated with Asian women, not because ‘angry yellow women’ do not exist, but “because jagged rage has not been in keeping with the style of her aesthetic congealment” (p. xi).

This conflicting yet simultaneous hypervisibility of Asian female bodies and invisibility of Asian female voices in majoritarian narratives shapes how Asian women were read in our undergraduate institution. Such invisibility and hypervisibility constructed us as a racial and cultural ‘other’ (Ríos-Rojas, 2018). Notably, despite Angel’s identification as Asian American and Woohee’s identification as Asian,2 we were both read as exoticized Asian women. As Asian-presenting, cisgendered females in higher education, our common racialization reflects studies that demonstrate how Asian American students in higher education are often misread as Asian international students (and vice versa), irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, or non-essential identity (Yeo, Mendenhall, Harwood & Huntt, 2019). The AsianCrit term “Asianization” explains that this blanket racialization as “Asian” is based on a stereotypical visual appearance and reduces Asians to a monolithic group (Museus, 2014).

For Woohee, another majoritarian narrative she faced as an Asian international student is that of assimilation into white America as a definition of ‘success’ for international students. This majoritarian narrative demands that international students adapt to the existing social order of the country where they study, deflecting attention from shortcomings of the host society (Lee & Rice, 2007). The focus on assimilation erases the neo-racism that international students encounter, which justifies discrimination against people of color for their cultural differences (Lee, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007). In presenting counter-stories of the racism she experiences, Woohee speaks against majoritarian narratives that position international students as in need of accepting the dominant ideology of white supremacy. Her counter-storytelling illuminates her resistance against Euro-centric cultural hegemony, white supremacy, and gender hegemony in academia, where whiteness and masculinity are highly valued (Chung, 1991). Woohee’s counter-story adds to educational research that disrupts monolithic perceptions about international students and Asian women through personal narratives (Rhee, 2006; Soong et al., 2015).

2 We borrow Yeo et al.’s (2019) definition of international students as “students from countries outside the United States, especially those from diverse racial/ethnic, historical, social, cultural, political, linguistic, and religious backgrounds” (p. 41). We refer to Angel as a domestic student or Asian American and Woohee as an international student or Asian.
Racial Microaggressions

Microaggressions explain the more “subtle” forms of racism faced by minority students, with literature demonstrating the persistence of microaggressions in the experiences of Latinx, Black, Asian, and other minorities in institutions of higher education (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009; Sue et al., 2007). Huber and Solórzano (2015) define microaggressions as:

A form of systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place. They are (1) verbal and non-verbal assaults directed towards People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms; (2) layered assaults, based on race and its intersections with gender, class, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent or surname; and (3) cumulative assaults that take a psychological, physiological, and academic toll on people of color. (p. 298)

Pierce (1974) clarifies that microaggressions are only “micro” in name, as the frequency with which microaggressions occur can accumulate over time to inflict immense, chronic harm on victims. Thus, the term “micro” does not minimize the impact of microaggressions, but alludes to their everyday and often “private” nature (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274; Huber & Solórzano, 2015, p. 304).

A majority of Asian American students in college institutions encounter racism in the form of microaggressions, directed either toward themselves or their Asian American peers (Alvarez et al., 2006; Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010; Yeo et al., 2019). Themes that arise in studies on microaggressions faced by Asian Americans include: (1) alien in one’s own land; (2) ascription of intelligence; (3) denial of racial reality; (4) exotification of Asian American women; (5) invalidation of inter-ethnic differences; (6) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles; and (7) second-class citizenship (Sue et al., 2007). Several assumptions link to the “model minority” myth, a stereotype which positions Asian Americans as a successful minority in achieving academic and occupational success (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Sue, 2010; Teranishi, 2002). In doing so, the model minority myth obscures systemic racism against people of color, thus functioning as a tool to perpetuate white dominance and racial oppression (Poon et al., 2016). While this myth is upheld by aggregate statistics boasting higher-than-average levels of educational and socioeconomic attainment by Asian Americans compared to other minorities and even whites, such data obfuscates disparities amongst Asian ethnic groups (Teranishi, 2002, 2010; Yeo et al., 2019). Nevertheless, largely a result of the model minority myth, Asian Americans appear “de-minoritized” (Lee, 2008, p. 129). After all, can Asian students continue to exist as a minority in higher education if they are overrepresented?

In addition, neoliberal logics of colorblindness and meritocracy propagated in educational settings divert attention from the white hegemonic discourse underpinning curriculum, as well as the erasure of racism imposed on Asian students which Sue et al. (2007) term the “denial of racial reality” (p. 76). This logic also contributes to what Soo Ah Kwon (2013) describes as “colorblind comfort,” such as Asian-identifying students, avoiding critical discussions on race or ethnicity, despite taking Asian American Studies courses, in order to match the institution’s depoliticized narratives of diversity and multiculturalism (p. 48).

In contrast to the model minority myth and neoliberal rhetoric of institutions, Asian Americans do experience racism. For Asian Americans, negative impacts such as depression and exclusion result from campus microaggressions and the systemic oppression that makes racism in higher education permissible (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Kim, 2013; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Teranishi, 2002; Teranishi, 2010).

Notably, qualitative research on microaggressions acknowledges the overwhelming sense of doubt Asian American students feel after experiencing microaggressions (Sue et
Such doubt manifests in personal reflections such as, “Were we being oversensitive?” and often causes “inner turmoil and agitation caused by the event” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 78). Some students reported that microaggressions caused confusion, as “it was often easier to deal with a clearly overt act of bias than microaggressions that often created a ‘guessing game’” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 78). This occurs because people of color may normalize racial microaggressions as insignificant due to internalized racism. Kohli and Solórzano (2012) explain that internalized racism occurs when people of color “accept subtle daily, racialized insults as reality” (p. 448). Thus, the institution’s denial of racism may compel minority students to internally reinforce ideals of whiteness as neutral and racism as personal, rather than see both as systematic (Kwon, 2013).

After all, when constantly told, albeit ‘subtly,’ that Asian experiences, perspectives, and histories do not matter, it is no wonder that Asian students default to self-doubt and internalized racism when confronted with microaggressions. In 2018, Woohee interviewed Angel for her honors senior thesis on pedagogies of resistance of youth activists in Korea and the United States. Angel expressed feelings of silence, internalized racism, and anger:

> When I first came to college my friends were very keen on being assimilated. I was so whitewashed. In [activist group], [an individual whose name was retracted for privacy] taught me that it was okay to be angry. I wrote in my personal statement about self-silence and internalizing anger as something that was inherent to me and me alone. There was a lot of internal hate. But it was that a lot of things around me were causing me to be angry. It wasn’t about what’s wrong with me; it’s about what’s wrong with a school that is so homogenous. (Kim, 2018a, p. 72)

Angel uses the term “self-silence” to describe how institutional racism caused her to internalize white hegemonic narratives propagated by the institution and silence her experiences of racism on campus. The concept of silence is particularly salient in how it has functioned to marginalize Asian American women (Kim, 2009; Hune, 2011). While we do not dismiss the power of silence, as scholars such as King-Kok Cheung (1993) have reclaimed what was once deemed a deficit of Asian culture, we present self-silence to address the internalized stereotypes, self-doubt, disbelief, shock, or anger that prevent Asian students from speaking against injustice.

Although racial microaggressions are often dismissed as individual and separate incidents inflicted without malice, making it difficult for students to speak about them, they are connected to larger structural and ideological forces of racism. Huber and Solórzano (2015) demonstrate that through a CRT framework, racial microaggressions can function as “tools” that help educators “identify the often subtle acts of racism that can emerge in schools, college campuses, and in everyday conversations and interactions” and the “ideologies of white supremacy that maintain racial subordination” (p. 298). By connecting the often subtle manifestations of microaggressions to larger structural forces, their analytic
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framework (Figure 1, adapted from Huber & Solórzano, 2015) contextualizes racial microaggressions by identifying institutional racism and macroaggression that shape them. We also use this analytic framework to examine our counter-stories from Where Are You From? in relation to institutional, structural and ideological dimensions of racial oppression.

Background Context

The experiences analyzed in this paper took place during our undergraduate experiences at Snowy Hill, a private liberal arts college located in rural, upstate New York. In 2017, The New York Times listed Snowy Hill as one of 38 U.S. colleges with more students from the top 1% ($630K+ household income) than the bottom 60% (<$65K), and calculated the median family income at $270,200 (Aisch, Buchanan, Cox & Quealy, 2017). Upon their arrival, Angel’s incoming class of 2017 gained “the distinction of being Snowy Hill’s most diverse,” a phrase which meant 65.8% white, 9.2% Hispanic or Latino, 4.5% Black or African American, 3.7% two or more races, 3.67% Asian, 0.104% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (DeVries, 2013; DataUsa, 2016). Despite this “diversity,” Snowy Hill remains a predominantly white institution (PWI).

Counter-Storying through Art as Resistance

Woohee’s Name

Kohli and Solórzano (2012) use student of color counter-stories to argue that instances in which teachers fail to learn students’ names—in the form of mispronunciation, erasure, renaming (e.g. replacing with a white name or nickname), or mocking—are racial microaggressions (p. 444). While their study focused on the K-12 setting, Woohee’s counter-story demonstrates how name-based microaggressions occur in higher education. In “My Name Is...,” (Figures 2a and 2b), Woohee, a Korean international student, experiences multiple microaggressions inflicted by her white, male professor. First, she experiences his mispronunciation of her name in the first panel when he mumbles “Weehoo” instead of “Woohee.” In the third panel, Woohee notes that she did not notice this mispronunciation, indicative of the subtlety by which this slight occurred. The next time she meets her professor, she notices him write down her name as “Weehoo,” a misspelling. Despite her shock, she corrects him by spelling her name letter by letter “W-O-O-H-E-E.” Relieved, she accepts his word when he tells her, “I’m very sorry. It won’t happen again.” However, on the next page, her professor re-names her “Weehoo” for a third time in a row. “I lose the right time to point him out but I am shaken with anger,” Woohee explained in her personal essay (Kim, 2018b, p. 6). Her essay quote reflects the moment of self-silence and anger that Woohee felt following this microaggression. After this moment, Woohee expresses her pain by explaining to her professor that his actions are “so offensive.” Again, her professor apologizes and says, “Call me out on it next time.” This phrase evokes his refusal to hold himself accountable for his errors, instead placing the burden of remembering and respecting Korean culture on Woohee.

Kohli and Solórzano (2012) underscore that “for many students of color, a mispronunciation of their name is one of the many ways in which their cultural heritage is devalued” and that “who they are and where they come from is not important” (pp. 443, 445). Her professor’s failure to remember her name and pronounce it correctly made Woohee feel devalued. In addition, the everyday nature of this incident demonstrates the subtle yet accumulating distress Woohee experienced in class. In the end, her professor stopped calling Woohee by any name, resorting to pointing his finger at her when she raised her hand to contribute in class. The silencing was made visible because he called out every
student by their first names in class, except Woohee. By erasing her name altogether, the professor did not even give Woohee a chance to “call him out” as he had suggested when he was confronted. The explicit erasure of Woohee’s identity, demonstrated by her professor’s refusal to acknowledge her name, led Woohee to experience racial battle fatigue.

Figure 2a. “My Name Is…”
Figure 2b. “My Name Is...”

(Smith, 2004). Woohee felt that her voice, even when spoken, went unheard. She struggled with telling stories of the microaggressions she experienced:

Telling them means that I have to challenge structures of oppression, but at a very personal level. Telling them evokes the pain I felt in each incident. These stories are hard to tell. I want to run away from them. Perhaps that is why some of my stories of
marginalization lay buried in my chest. I have grown tired of people invalidating my experiences and erasing my emotions. (Kim, 2018b, p. 2)

In this excerpt from her personal essay, Woohee describes the pain she experiences when retelling experiences of marginalization. Woohee frequently experienced invalidation as people dismissed her experiences of racial microaggressions as “a simple mistake” or “not coming from bad intent.” She was tired of pointing out to people how such reactions justify the perpetrators’ behaviors and obscure the racism she experienced. As a result, some stories of marginalization were self-silenced.

Such self-silencing can also be understood in the context of interpersonal, institutional, and structural dimensions of racism. Although Woohee made efforts to correct her professor, the unequal power dynamics between the tenured white male professor and Woohee, then a first-year student, allowed the professor to erase Woohee’s name from the classroom without facing any consequences. While Woohee tried to continue participating in class even with the professor’s blatant finger-pointing, her initial intellectual enthusiasm for the course suffered since the daily experience of being the only student the professor refused to name in class made her feel ostracized. Her otherness was simultaneously made hypervisible with the professor’s decision to single her out as the only student he would not address by first name in class, yet also rendered her invisible by the erasure of her name and cultural identity. By refusing to speak Woohee’s name, the professor eliminated further possibilities of Woohee confronting the professor about mispronunciation of her name and deprived Woohee of the chance to remain assertive. Silence is thus imposed onto Woohee, relegating her to the majoritarian narratives of Asian women as quiet and non-threatening (Seo & Hinton, 2009).

In search of stories for her senior honors thesis, Angel was in her junior year of college when she asked Woohee about her experiences as an Asian on campus. Woohee was able to share her story without feeling the need to prove the validity of her experiences to others. The graphic novel was a counter-space where Woohee’s perspectives, narrative, and emotions were reflected and honored in the visual story. In Where Are You From?, Woohee was not an exotified Asian female depicted through an othering lens, but rather an angry Asian student telling her story in her own voice, in the way she wanted. Angel invited Woohee to add her own Korean writings in addition to the English sentences of her first-person narratives, hoping to capture Woohee’s full self in both languages. The graphic novel centered the experiences of Woohee and other Asian and Asian Americans, enabling them to articulate counter-stories that had been silenced and to take ownership of how their stories were told. Inspired by the counter-storytelling by Angel’s Where Are You From? that allowed Woohee to resist the erasure of her stories and name her oppression while feeling validated, Woohee shared the ‘Weehoo’ story in a public Spoken Word performance on campus. She recited her story to an audience of over 200 during a performance titled “Collective Breathing: Stories by Women of Color” on April 28, 2017.

When disregarded or erased, cultural names often bear burdens instead of the cultural wealth imbued within them. Yet, Woohee fought erasure of her cultural identity. When Angel interviewed Woohee for her graphic novel Where Are You From?, Woohee explained the story behind how she was named. We quote from a personal essay Woohee wrote about the erasure of her name and performed at the abovementioned public performance, where she detailed her name story:

When my mom was pregnant with me, one of my mom’s relatives had a dream. A tree was shining brightly on top of 북한산, a mountain that my family lived near to back then at 은평구, Seoul. This tree, 오동나무, was thought to signify a baby girl in Korean traditions. They knew it was a dream signaling my birth. The relative suggested naming me 동희, a combination of 동 taken from the name of the tree and 희, which means
bright. However, my grandmother disapproved because one of my aunts has the same exact name. So instead my parents decided to take 우 from my brother’s name, 우성, and name me 우희. 우 is the 돌림자 of me and my brother. The characters my parents used for 우 means to be helped by supernatural powers – 천지신명의 도움을 받을 우. 천지신명의 도움을 받을 우, 빛날 화. This is the story of how I was named 김우희. (Kim, 2018b, p. 9)

Despite its immense cultural wealth and family history, Woohee’s name is “rendered meaningless within a colonizing European culture” (hooks, 1994, p. 168). The Eurocentric hegemony embedded in higher education denigrates cultural identities and perpetuates racial microaggressions, including, in Woohee’s case, multiple cases of name-related microaggressions by several faculty and staff members during her time at Snowy Hill (Patton, 2016).

Utilizing Huber and Solórzano’s (2015) analytical framework, we name the microaggressions, institutional racism, and macroaggressions that shaped this narrative. The racial microaggressions Woohee faced were the mispronunciation and erasure of her name. These acts reinforce the institutional racism demonstrated by Eurocentric bias and the devaluation of non-white culture in institutions of higher education. Lastly, the macroaggression at play is the ideology of white supremacy. Woohee’s counter-story illuminates how language-based racism, in the form of microaggressions, manifests and maintains white supremacy in institutions. Woohee could have internalized these constant acts of racism. Kohli and Solórzano (2012) explain that students may internalize that a “common” or “more American” name is better than a non-white, cultural name (p. 456). However, despite the cultural hegemony reinforced by the microaggressions she experienced, Woohee continued fighting erasure by sharing her story through the graphic novel form, as well as additional mediums of counter-storytelling, such as essays and public performance. Notably, the “Weehoo” story stuck with Woohee for days, months, and years after the class had ended because of its erasure of the cultural and family roots that were deeply important to her. Her subsequent forms of resistance demonstrate multiple ways to speak out against erasure, as well as the profound, lasting impact this experience of racism has had on Woohee.

Angel’s Language

Born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, an area lauded as a hub of diversity, Angel had never experienced racial microaggressions so profoundly until she came to college. Angel did not expect white professors to constantly ask her “Where are you from?” and expect (and demand) an answer other than “California.” They did not care where Angel grew up, but wondered where they could place her foreign face on a map. In Asian American Dreams (2000), Zia writes:

There is a drill that nearly all Asians in America have experienced more times than they can count. Total strangers will interrupt with the absurdly existential question, “What are you?” Or the equally common inquiry “Where are you from?”… But when I turn the tables and ask, “And what country are your people from?” the reply is invariably an indignant, “I’m from America, of course.” (Zia, 2000, p. 9)

Zia’s quote explains the “alien in our own land” microaggression theme (Sue et al., 2007). Because Asian bodies are not racialized as white, Asian and Asian Americans continue to be read as perpetual foreigners who cannot belong to the U.S. (Museus, 2014; Sue et al., 2010). This microaggression is often articulated via phrases such as “Where were you born?” or “You speak good English” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 472). Such microaggressions
forced Angel to justify her migration, monolingualism, and her particular lived experience as an American from California (Figures 3a and 3b).

In her visual counter-story, “Office Hour,” (Figures 3a and 3b), Angel experiences racial microaggressions by a white professor who makes several assumptions about her language ability based on her phenotype. Angel is discussing a paper she wrote at the professor’s office hours when the professor starts making comments about her diction and use of certain phrases. In the last box of the first page of the visual story, the professor asks, “Is English your first language?” Her question exemplifies racial microaggressions directed at Asian Americans who are perceived to be perpetual foreigners and thus assumed to have limited English abilities (Museus, 2014; Sue et al., 2007; Tran & Lee, 2014). Angel indicates that English is indeed her first language, to which the professor responds with an awkward pause. Angel further clarifies that she is “from California.” However, in the fourth box the professor continues to ask, “Do you speak any other languages at home?” In doing so, the professor hints her disbelief at Angel’s American-ness, rejecting Angel’s answer that English is her first language and deeming Angel a perpetual foreigner who must be from outside America and speak a language other than English. The professor then proceeds to say that she “doesn’t mean to assume” but nevertheless justifies her assumption with the phrase, “It’s just that I had a lot of Asian students.” She tries to deny the fact that she has made the racialized assumptions about Angel’s ability to write in English based on Angel’s racial phenotype. Angel challenges the professor’s actions by questioning, “Then, why are you assuming? Would you have assumed this if I were white?” In this important counter-storytelling narrative, Angel points out the racialized nature of the professor’s microaggression as one she would not have had to endure if she were read as white. Asian Americans, who are not white, are constantly reminded that they are not ‘American’ (Zia, 2000). Angel finally says, “I’m sorry, but English is the only language I speak,” countering the racialized assumptions the professor made about her language ability.

In using comics to recount the story visually, Angel centered her perspective and challenged her professor’s racist assumptions and justifications by inserting her critical (yet unspoken) thoughts in thought rectangles. While Angel corrected the professor’s racialized assumptions, it is important to note how certain thoughts remained unspoken, such as Angel’s inability to talk with her professor explicitly about white privilege nor the hurt that stems from her racialization as a perpetual foreigner. In experiences of microaggressions, particularly when the event occurs between a white person and an Asian student, the minority must take on the burden of correcting the racialization they face as well as challenging the cultural hegemony subscribed to by the perpetrator. The microaggressions Angel felt derive from ideas of foreignness and white nativism upheld by the “Eurocentric bias” masked as neutral and objective by educational institutions (Kohlhi & Solórzano, 2012). Eurocentric bias, though often unspoken about at institutions such as Snowy Hill, remains evident in Snowy Hill’s lack of Asian American Studies curriculum. This erasure of the history of Asians in America inevitably perpetuates the stereotype that Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners and aliens in America.

Additionally, the occupational power dynamic compounds the racial dynamic. Hune (2011) describes that the classroom, and by extension the institution in which it exists, is a “contested space,” while Kohli & Solórzano (2012) attest to the immense power whiteness maintains in such spaces. Angel had to repeatedly point out that she is from California and only speaks English, while the professor did not face any immediate consequences of her actions as the professor occupied a position of power in this interaction. Angel’s story resonates with that of South Asian students at a predominantly white Canadian university, whose professors spoke very slowly to the students based on the racialized assumption that the South Asians had poor English skills; however, the South Asian students spoke English monolingually (Samuel & Burney, 2003). In analyzing these experiences, Samuel and
Burney (2003) argue that “the power-dynamic between dominant faculty and minority student is often exacerbated by overt or covert racism” (p. 95). The positionalities of Angel, then a first-year student, and the white female professor who had graded Angel’s essay, as well as the private setting of this incident in the professor’s office, contribute to the unequal power dynamics that make it difficult to disrupt the situation.

![Figure 3a. “Office Hour”](image-url)
Figure 3b. “Office Hour”
Conclusion: Where Are We Going?

The experience of microaggressions does not end after the microaggression takes place (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). For Asians and Asian Americans in higher education, such experiences contribute to feelings of depression and the perception of negative campus climates (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Lee et al., 2009). In her dissertation, Haeyoung Kim (2013) found that Asian American participants reported significant negative impacts from having experienced microaggressions from someone of authority, and that the negative effects were exacerbated if the person of authority was familiar (p. 76). In the cases of Angel and Woohee, experiencing microaggressions perpetrated by white professors in positions of authority led to intense feelings of anger and pain that comes from reliving and revalidating our perceptions of these events in the face of constant invalidation from the institution. These white perpetrators, whose power derives from the institution, continue to oppress students of color through subtle racism that gets easily dismissed as a well-intentioned mistake. This is one way that “racism can be perpetuated while rendered invisible” (Huber & Solórzano, 2015, p. 309). It felt strange to be at once hypervisible in how white professors read us as Asian, but also invisible when microaggressions erased our cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. As Asian women in higher education, we experienced simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility (Cheng, 2019; Sue et al., 2007). These stereotypes remain systematically upheld, for as Vietnamese American Kieu-Linh Caroline Valverde expresses, “Academia for women of color is toxic, laden with such a myriad of discriminatory practices and barriers for advancement that is nothing short of a miracle if one overcomes it with one’s sanity, health, and general sense of being still intact” (Valverde, 2013, p. 369; Valverde et al., 2019). It felt difficult to focus on our scholarly subjects when we ourselves felt like objects. It is no wonder so much of our work now focuses on our lived experiences. We are grateful to the legacy of ethnic studies and critical race theory in education which supported our ability to create work from our personal narratives. Today, Woohee studies youth activism as a Master’s student in Comparative and International Education, while Angel studies identity and belonging as a Master’s student in Asian American Studies. It took us years to find the words within ourselves, as well as within the works of those who came before us, to explain these experiences. We hope our counter-stories will help others fight self-silence, too.

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**Authors**

*Talitha Angelica (Angel) Acaylar Trazo* is a master’s student in Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Angel is a visual artist and scholar who aims to make the field of American Studies more accessible through the creation of educational graphic novels and children’s books. Her current research interests include Asian American youth culture, specifically how suburban spaces such as boba shops, shape identity and cultural formation, and the visual arts, namely graphic novels, comics, and zines. She self-published her debut children’s book, *We Are Inspiring: The Stories of 32 Asian American Women in 2019.*

*Woohee Kim 김우희* studied for her master's degree in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oxford. She is a scholar-activist dedicated to creating spaces for alternative knowledge and pedagogies of resistance through her scholarship and
activism. Shaped by her own activism across Korea and the U.S., Woohee conducted multiple research projects on Korean youth activism through Projects for Peace Fellowship and Lampert Fellowship, and wrote her undergraduate honors thesis on trans-border pedagogies of resistance between Korean and U.S. youth activists. Her master’s thesis examined how Korean youth activists’ educational experiences shaped their activist journeys. Woohee hopes to continue exploring the intersections of education, knowledge, power, and resistance.

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We thank the anonymous reviewers at Intersections for their critical feedback on this article.
Wake up Wide

Momina A. Khan
University of Saskatchewan

we are all sleepwalkers within us
human (beings) a (kind) of (species)
temporal // corporeal // bounded // blind
eyes asleep, veiled vision
do not naturally see
must be taught how to see
witness thyself
in the throes of all truths
how does the shadow dissipate?
from our pursuit of light
from the socket of muted darkness
what lies in wandering to wonder?
because sometimes
the road leads through dark places
because sometimes
the darkness is our true comrade
when // why // where did we stop?
stargazing in exalted spaces
sculpted by opposing climes
paradox // puzzle // contradiction
where inquiry // encounters // discovery dwells
why can’t we see what’s round the bend?
yes, we have a hunger for certitude
we want // we do // what we can

This *found poem* emerged from rigorous readings of texts on spirituality, education, and art. My practice of found poetry is an attempt to revise and repair the euthanized aspects of the past to make the present more meaningful. The freedom to remix, rearrange, and mesh the words and phrases read, heard, and overheard instills in me a sense of self-suspension from the black-and-white text to many shades of grey. This translucent mirroring of the renewed expansion of self with vocabularies I do not own comforts me, and I find myself in the found poems that I recreate.
to immediately transpose
fidelity into certitude
because fidelity is relational // variable
& certitude is a flat // settled
a mechanical // orderly category
we must acknowledge
our thirst for prediction
immersed in self-fulfilling prophecies
control, authority, license, expertise
if we had all the certitudes in the world
would it make the quality of our lives any better?
would it make all our problems go away?
this quest for mental certitude
itself a problem spawning
more peril than promise

what we must have is fidelity
loyalty, dependability, reliability
step on the familiar step into the threatening
verisimilitude in all things
to heal, reconcile, & restore
recognize // ponder // aspire//
kindred spirit that i am still sorting out
emotive, being present, staying alive
a divine coping ritual
to save life
we must lose it
to thrive in the new world
we must dissolve our old bodies
letting go is the only path
this urge to escape
the confines of certainty
cemented walls // skyscrapers
tiny // trapped existences // essences
the densities of dominance, power, control
fractured // manufactured minds
competing // conflicting impulses
collision of life
moving in(to) light
i, a manuscript of a divine letter
desired // required connectedness
to earth // water // wind // fire// trees
sound of sky // sunshine // stars //moonlight
nature whispers to me
the immortal secrets
of how to live long // deep // hard
gather in together
an expanded version of myself
leaning into my absent eyes
to connect the dots
of our destiny // humanity // being
healing // redeeming // gathering
my creaturely existence
from the sleaze of being
i hear myself
wake up wide
solemn night
ah,
a shooting star
i see the light
wide-awake
References


Author

Momina A. Khan received her Ph.D. in Education from the University of Saskatchewan in 2018. In life and scholarship, as a mother and woman of color, she engages in constructing counter-stories through interweaving narrative and poetry. Her work invites schools and educators to become leaders in eradicating barriers to racialized students’ sense of self, sense of hybridity, sense of belonging, and sense of citizenhood. She strives to re-conceptualize the dominant aspects of mandated curriculum by decentering the Eurocentric perspective, knowledge and content. She challenges curriculum makers, educators and teachers that there are alternative perspectives of knowing worthy of inclusion. Her poetry acknowledges the exalted space sculpted by the opposing poles of paradox, puzzle, and contradiction where encounters, and newness dwells.
Critical Intersections through Poetry in a TESOL & World Language Graduate Education Program

Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, University of Georgia
Sharon M. Nuruddin, University of Georgia
Kuo Zhang, University of Georgia
Yixuan Wang, University of Georgia
Amanda Brady Deaton, University of Georgia
Xinyi Meng, University of Georgia
Ashley Brown-Lemley, University of Georgia
Ming Sun, University of Georgia

It’s difficult to get the news from poems, yet men [sic] die miserably every day from lack of what is found there.

~William Carlos Williams

The famous American poet, William Carlos Williams, was also a medical doctor. Working with patients, Williams turned to poetry as a way to navigate and bear witness to human suffering and possibility. Neither medical doctors nor educators will get the “news” from poetry nor exact methods for applied practice, but the sentiment here bears repeating: Poetry provides an important resource for an examined, aesthetic life, one that is particularly important to those working in educative and/or caretaking professions. As a professor of TESOL and World Language Education, I have made it a part of my practice to offer two poetry courses for educators: “Poetry for Creative Language Educators” (15-week semester) and “Poetry for Interdisciplinary Understanding” (Summer, 3.5-week course). The goal for graduate students pursuing degrees in education is to nourish poetry writing skills as tools for reflection, connection, surprise, and joy in teaching practices. Both courses merge approaches in teacher preparation with “workshop” approaches in poetry training, where new writing drafts are shared among peers for attention to what is being said, as well as how it is rendered to take advantage of the beauty and power of carefully crafted language. We apply this understanding to curriculum, examining what material is being taught, how, and to what end. As someone with both a Ph.D. in educational linguistics, as well as an M.F.A. in poetry, with publications in and across both fields, my aim is to encourage pre- and in-service teachers’ skills as poet-educators, those able to engage in creative and playful approaches to curriculum and instruction in languages, literatures, and creative writing that take into account the challenges and opportunities presented by inequality and a social justice curriculum (Cahnmann-Taylor 2019; Cahnmann-Taylor & Sanders-Bustle, 2019).

Teachers and teacher educators are endlessly confronting the fallout from inequalities in our systems and often the first to be blamed, unfairly, for how inequitable social systems impact teaching and learning outcomes. An examined educator’s life, one which helps them thrive rather than “die miserably,” as Williams poetically described above, can include a practice that involves very personal reflections that access universal, systemic concerns. This studio submission represents a collaboration with graduate student poets in
these courses, each of whom shares one poem drafted in the course alongside a prose reflection that responds to this question:

How did the process of writing this poem and discussing drafts with peers and professor in “poetry workshop” impact your understandings of how “race, class, gender, sexuality, exceptionailities, power, well-being, and other subjectivities play out in educational settings as a means of advancing social justice for all people?”

In what follows, alumni from one or both of these courses, all of whom are pursuing graduate degrees Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages [TESOL] & World Language Education, share their poem and critical reflection, noting the impact of the political climate in which the creative work was produced, as well as how it contributes to reflexive, critical teacher education scholarship. Co-poets are identified by name, program degree, years of teaching, country of origin, age, and how they currently describe their racial or ethnic identity. In closing, the course instructor shares a poem and implications for creative and critical teacher education. –Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor

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Sharon M. Nuruddin

Degree Program: Ph.D. in TESOL & World Language Education
Teaching Experience: Over 20 years teaching Spanish and English at all levels (pre-K to adult)
Country of Origin: United States of America
Race/Ethnicity: African American

Pelo malo

Back turned, I heard my student call me *pelo malo*.
Whisper-quiet, almost silent, but I did not hear it wrong.
She thinks I’m monolingual, perhaps I didn’t follow.

I carry on for the others, in anger I won’t wallow.
Not deadlocked, but dreaded locks to keep my spirit strong.
Back turned, I heard my student call me *pelo malo*.

Dry-mouthed I turn to her and force myself to swallow.
Our brown eyes meet, her lips upturn. I smile, but not for long.
She thinks I’m monolingual, perhaps I didn’t follow.

Though our ancestors rest together in watery hollows,
and to the same sea we just might belong.
Back turned, I heard my student call me *pelo malo*. 
Our people in cages, our people for ages neck-noosed in the gallows
But straight-haired sister could not speak our black-girl bond.
She thinks I’m monolingual, perhaps I didn’t follow

English as her second language, español primero
Thinks that in my nappy blackness I barely know one.
Back turned, I heard my student call me pelo malo.
She thinks I’m monolingual, perhaps I didn’t follow.

Reflection:

Our poetry cohort became a family of sorts, sharing intimately personal connections with nature as we navigated the slippery slope of writing our world through the conventions of craft. In the beginning of the course, we were introduced to formal, inherited and international poetry structures such as the sonnet, pantoum, ghazal, and villanelle. This poem is written in the French form called a villanelle, a poem in three-line stanzas where the first and third lines repeat throughout the poem and are both repeated in the final, 6th stanza.

The poem is a meditation on a brief encounter with a Latinx student that had stayed with me for almost twenty years. It represents the racism that exists within and between minoritized communities. Recently, social media has exposed oppressive violence at the hands of white supremacists for all to see, but rarely do we see its trickle-down effects in our communities. This poem exemplifies how racism sticks, how it becomes an inherited evil manifested in microaggressions such as coded comments that favor and promote white norms of physical appearance. It speaks to a larger issue of the ways in which power structures are often maintained through self-sabotage, in this case within African diaspora communities.

Poetic discourse reaches us in ways different from traditional academic writing and, as an educator who focuses on awareness and respect of culture in the world language classroom, this poem broaches a subject worthy of discussion in courses that prepare world language teachers, as well as all teachers. Boisseau et al. (2012) state that “[w]riting—trying to dig up one’s deepest feelings, perceptions, and ideas—will always be an intimate, vulnerable activity” (p. 2). It is within this vulnerability that poetry advances social justice. Through poetry workshop, we found voice as educators and teacher educators to speak through our languages and cultures while opening our minds and ears to one another's lived experiences of struggle, pain, persistence, and truth telling. Our collective works remind us how we are historically interconnected, and the responsibility we all have to support each other as an act of resistance.

***
Shumei Told Me What Happened
during Her Son’s 15-Month Checkup,
But My American Friends Didn’t Believe it

When the nurse pushed the dose
into my son’s thigh and said
“You are all set for today,”
I realized something must be wrong.

“But we’re here for the 15-month checkup!
What’s the shot? Is it called this?”

I shivered to show her
“Pneumococcal”
in my cellphone, a name
too complicated to pronounce.

“Oh yes!”
“But he already got it last Tuesday!”

The nurse was shocked.
She checked her computer,
rushed to report.

The doctor came in.
“We’re so sorry!
The blonde girl who did records
made a mistake. We won’t let her
work here anymore!
And your boy will be fine.
He may get a bigger bump.
Don’t worry.”

I still felt angry,
wanted to say
something more.

But I nodded,
thanked him,
and just let it go.
Reflection:

This poetry course and other courses in arts-based research encourage us to engage in qualitative inquiry through an artist’s lens. My dissertation about international student-mothers in U.S. institutions uses poetry as a method for analysis and representation of my interviews and ethnographic fieldwork. When one study participant, Shumei, told me her story during our interview about how she interacted with people in medical settings as a non-native English speaker and an international student first-time mother, I felt very shocked, sympathetic, and angry. I immediately wrote this poem, originally titled “Shumei’s Story during Her Son’s 15-Month Checkup,” and shared it in our poetry workshop. In addition to helping me improve the diction and structure of the poem, surprisingly, my American professor and classmates, due to questions of liability, did not believe that an American doctor would admit to the faulty actions of a staff person, questioning Shumei’s memory or the presentation of these lines:

The blonde girl who did records
made a mistake. We won’t let her
work here anymore!

Workshop comments made me reflect deeper on the intercultural and interlinguistic aspects of this issue. If Shumei told the “truth” in her interview, I wondered if the doctor had spoken differently to her than he would have to an American mom. Does the doctor have more authoritative discursive power because he doesn’t share the same cultural backgrounds and beliefs with his patient? On the other hand, in the age of “fake news,” it seems meaningless to argue about what actually happened that day. Shumei’s narrative should not be taken as a “truthful” account of her actual communicative practices, but as a restructuring process of reflections and interpretations on her own stories, through which we can see how she negotiated her new social identity of a mother in a foreign language and culture. My writing a poem about Shumei’s retelling and framing it as retold to a U.S. audience furthers reflection on how language is always simultaneously about what is being said, to whom, by whom, for what purpose and to what ends. After the poetry workshop, I changed the title of this poem in order to show the relationship between truth, fiction, and context.

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Amanda Brady Deaton

Degree Program: Ph.D. in Language and Literacy Education and Secondary English
Teaching Experience: Twelve years teaching middle and high school English
Country of Origin: United States of America
Race/Ethnicity: Caucasian

Argle Bargle

I have known the complete uselessness
of nude leggings, hiding
thighs,
argle-bargle
of creases
and dimples,

All the worthlessness of
24-carat gold pills,
and anal bleach,
Furry toilet seats,
a million dollar bridge
to nowhere,
Pet clothes
pet rocks
pet insurance.
My Bosu ball
and collagen supplement
keep me youthful and
broken.

And I have seen
all these things
with an empty
bank account,
Touchscreens on refrigerators
containing diet water,
With a $200 per month
card payment
while I
Forget to fill my cabinets
with food.
Reflection:

I took Dr. Cahnmann-Taylor’s poetry for educators course in the Spring of 2019, after a particularly stressful year in which I went through a (needed) divorce, survived a hospital stay after experiencing suicidal thoughts, started pursuing a Ph.D., went from “co-parent” to “single parent,” and spent countless hours in therapy. Writing poetry in this course became more therapeutic than anything else I had experienced, helping me to unpack long-lasting trauma from both my childhood and early adulthood. I feel as healthy now as I ever have, and this is partly because my identity shifted, through the efforts of this course, solidly to a writer.

As a white female hailing from a small southern town, I have often felt my ideas were at odds with those around me, and helpless to make a change, even as a classroom teacher. In sharing poetry with my students, as in the poetry workshops modeled in Dr. Cahnmann-Taylor’s course, I have been able to share poetry writing with my language arts students in a way that honors feelings of frustration and honesty to afford community-building. I have written and shared poetry on many topics, from being told as a child that I was not allowed to love a Black person or a woman, to violence I experienced in early childhood, to my estranged relationship with my father, to being a woman in a culture that too often privileges male status over female. After several workshop sessions, secondary students began sharing their own deep, insightful, and moving work, and my high school students begged to continue workshops. We became a family through the sessions, and my classroom became a safe place.

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Yixuan Wang

**Degree Program:** Ph.D. in TESOL & World Language Education  
**Teaching Experience:** One year teaching ESOL in China and two years’ teaching Chinese in the U.S.  
**Country of Origin:** China  
**Race/Ethnicity:** Asian

Translation’s Loss

Translation is opening  
a carbon-leaked soda.

A hyper husky choked  
by her leash, fetching phantom balls  
and gibberish.

Translators know how  
a returning General gropes  
amputated limbs;

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how a three-star
Michelin chef cooks
with no salt.

The loss is flesh and blood
gone too, after poachers
cut ivory off;

saggy skin
after the stomach’s
recent miscarriage.

Reflection:

The prompt for this poem was using metaphor to express difficulties or scenarios when translating from one language to another. During the prewriting stage, I realized that writing difficulties I experienced in translating Chinese to English, or vice versa, was a big challenge. However, choosing the best metaphors to convey the struggles that I had was the most difficult part. I wanted to have metaphors that people from all paths of life and language could understand, especially pre-service and in-service teachers who will encounter students with translingual or transnational experiences in our future classrooms (Canagarajah, 2013; García, 2009). As an English learner, I experience frustration when I fail to translate successfully between English and Chinese. Whenever the translation fails, the cross-cultural conversation fails as well. As a result, interlocutors from both sides struggle to understand one another and break down walls constructed by our racial, gender, and class backgrounds.

In our workshop, peers gave me mostly positive feedback, although some peers disagreed with some of the metaphors I chose, for example, “flesh and blood gone too.” I think it is understandable because I brought in a Chinese concept of a good translation which would be described as full of flesh and blood just like an alive creature in both languages. For monolingual or multilingual peers who liked this metaphor, it is also apparent that this metaphor is somewhat accurate in both Chinese and English, because they understood the image and idea quickly without knowing this cultural origin. Finally, I still chose to keep this metaphor in my final draft to keep this vivid metaphor, which is well-known in Chinese-speaking world. Thus, this line is not only a metaphor but also a translated metaphor from Chinese as well. Peers who can speak or tried to learn another language identified with frustration when we failed to translate between two languages. This shared experience among multilingual peers helped me realize that as language teachers, we need to understand students’ stress and frustration in class. Another important lesson is that some students who struggle with English in the class might be masters in their native languages. As teachers who have authority and power in the classrooms, we must recognize and appreciate students’ academic ability and skills they already developed in their native languages, and help them achieve in an English-dominant U.S. educational system. For teachers who have bilingual or translingual backgrounds like me, it is also our responsibility to help monolingual educators understand the difficulties and challenges that ESL students face on a daily basis.

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Ashley Brown-Lemley

Degree Program: M.Ed. in TESOL & World Language Education
Teaching Experience: Fourteen years teaching middle and high school Spanish in public school and private tutoring; one year teaching community-based ESOL; one year teaching ESOL in China, and two years teaching Chinese in the U.S.
Country of Origin: United States of America
Race/Ethnicity: Caucasian

November 9, 2016

A student says: They say I’ll get sent back to Africa. Wanting to ask which racist half-wit said that shit?, I rein it in: Sweetheart, you can’t be sent back where you’ve never been.

Another student says: Mis tíos are packing for México; it’s better to leave than be taken. De verdad no lo conocen. It’s only a place they were born in.

In the wake of the 58th quadrennial, the homework noted, the buses loaded; I sit at my desk and weep.

As I witness the panic in their eyes the color of you stinks on my skin. How will they know I didn’t want this either?

Reflection:

I’ve enrolled twice in Dr. Cahnmann-Taylor’s summer poetry class, which is available for repeat credit. During the summer of 2018, I found that writing poetry allowed me to revisit some stifled emotions that resulted from my mother’s death from cancer years earlier. My summer of 2019 experience writing “November 9, 2016” was not much different. Having had the emotional release poetry offered the previous summer, I was ready to unleash my frustrations surrounding the legitimate harm our current political and social climate does to our nation’s young people, especially as it relates to the legacy we are creating for interactions between people of color and whites. After all, we should move forward in acceptance and unity, not back towards racial division and conflict.

I am a Spanish teacher in an underperforming, majority African-American, low socioeconomic status school. With the election of Donald Trump to the presidency came an uptick in the racially charged language and behaviors I witnessed not only in the news media, but also from white friends, acquaintances, and relatives. It is as though white relations in my hometown felt emboldened to say inaccurate, racially motivated slurs. In
this context, the poem materialized as an emotional rant. Writing it gave me the chance to say all the things I want to say, but had felt unable to say for fear of social and even professional reprisal for myself and my husband.

An earlier draft of this poem included experiences of racial inequality and profiling from my teenage years; the workshop guided me to focus on the impact of racial unrest on my middle school students. Two of my classmates were also Spanish-speaking teachers who helped me with the Spanish language in the second stanza of the poem. I felt that it was important to get this part right, because I wanted the language to represent my students' perspectives and voices as accurately as possible. Monolingual readers will be unable to read parts of this stanza, which should heighten their discomfort and, with luck, focus attention on the final line, reminding the reader that for the potential deportees in this poem, America is the only home they know.

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Xinyi Meng

Degree Program: M.Ed. in TESOL & World Language Education
Teaching Experience: Six months teaching English to high school students in China as a substitute teacher
Country of Origin: China
Race/Ethnicity: Asian

Just call me Melanie

Xinyi runs into a crowd. Introduces herself.
They expect something exotic
and simple. It’s Xinyi. (Don’t deny me.)
Cinyi? See? (Who’s denying?)

You’re right that X looks too stiff.
Should be soft as sheen, except
Xin (馨) smells differently.
It’s a fragrance that wakes you in the morning.

She? You’re right it’s a feminine name.
Should be easily tamed, except
her heart is a wild yolk that refuses
the yoke of constant battering.

Last name? Not Ming, but Meng like monk.
A family tree stems from Mencius, except
her grandpa is a broken branch and she’s
now overseas with an English name.

Reflection:

Within the prompt of composing a poem about our names, scenarios of how my name is pronounced began flooding my mind. The different ways people pronounce my name have conveyed attitudes, judgments based on my appearance, and the stereotypes inevitably formed under the world’s limelight. How to make the conversation new? How to convey a part of me that’s more than the people I belong to racially, a class I’m subjected to socially, a gender I’m born into genetically? How should I present myself in a way that represents my personal beliefs, and how should my performance of self (Goffman, 1956) be received? Why had I previously been accustomed to accept any way in which people pronounced my name? Are corrections necessary, or futile?

As I started to consider the implications of how my name was perceived and pronounced, my identities in the eye of the public gradually took shape. The more I think about names, the stronger the interplay I find between self and others. The process of writing this poem is a reconsideration of my cultural heritage, my voice as a female student, and the image I portray beyond my "Asian" appearance. It also sheds light for me on the implications of increasing intercultural communication happening in an ever more global community. During the poetry workshop, the feedback I received on an earlier draft was mostly positive, confirming that to write about personal moments opens up a possibility for growth in understanding identity and progress in more universal cross-cultural communications. Building up a conversation essentially requires a two-way street where preconceptions are either confirmed or challenged. In order to achieve justice for ourselves and the community of people with whom we are associated, more conversations are needed regarding the heritages we carry through history and the vitality we contribute individually.

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Ming Sun

Degree Program: M.Ed. in TESOL & World Language Education
Teaching Experience: Six months teaching Chinese
Country of Origin: China
Race/Ethnicity: Asian

For International Students

from *Jubilate Agno by Christopher Smart*

For you crossed the sea with 2 overweight luggage;
For realizing even YouTube ads know your race;
For feeling you shouldn’t speak your mother tongue;
For getting angry but failing to argue in English;
For hearing “we only hire Americans”;
For depositing triple security when not having the SSN;
For changing the tire, then worrying about the next-month-rent;
For longing to hear your native songs in restaurants;
For furnishing your apartment from dumpsters;
For wanting organic food, but your wallet? Empty;
For saving $50 in 3 months for a new dress;
For not relating to family newborns;
For hating yourself when parents sell their house for tuition;
For struggling to find the best time to skype;
For lying “I am doing great”;
For receiving lots of A but can’t find a job.

Reflection:

Dr. Cahnmann-Taylor shared Christopher Smart's poem “from Jubilate Agno” (n.d.) with us after class to introduce the poetic device of anaphora in which beginning lines repeat, causing an incantatory effect. When I read this poem, I suddenly wanted to write a poem in this form for myself and for all the moments I have been through. I first shared my first draft with another international student, who said she felt sad about our common experience: holding many expectations to come to the U.S. to study and experiencing these vulnerable and hopeless moments. The next day, I shared this poem in the class workshop. Despite the fact that there were numerous international students enrolled in the 15-week poetry course I'd taken before, in my second course during the summer term I was the only Asian and international student enrolled. A classmate started to correct my grammar, telling me in English that the word “luggage” is uncountable, so I cannot put the number “2” before the word “luggage.” I was very angry because I knew luggage is uncountable; I had chosen this diction intentionally. I was asking myself, would this classmate say the same thing, if a native-English speaker had written this line? Dr. Cahnmann-Taylor confirmed my word choice when she said she liked the way I used “2 luggage” to convey the non-native speaker’s voice; this feedback made me feel more confident about my writing. In some cases, the instructor and/or one's native-English speaking peers might be considered to be “judges” in the classroom. A good language instructor listens to the voices from both sides without holding biases, requiring language that is appropriate to the context.

***
Melisa “Misha” Cahnmann-Taylor

*Program:* Faculty in TESOL & World Language Education  
*Teaching Experience:* Over 20 years teaching in higher education, as well as primary and secondary education  
*Country of Origin:* United States of America  
*Race/Ethnicity:* Jewish-American

Museum Says 75% of All American Comedians Were Jews in 1975

*Oy-va-voy,* the way Yiddish expressed unsayables edged with joy:  
think lace just past the nipple.

*Oy-va-voy.*

Such luck, after *Kristallnacht.* Some untranslatable sounds found equivalence in Shanghai,  
the only place in 1939 that didn't require a visa.

They were "*hulihuta,*" Mandarin for "confused," but found the same syllable sass.

When allowed to enter the U.S., they found punchlines:  
did you know *vista* in Latvian means "chicken?"

*What a beautiful chicken!* One exclaimed to Lake Michigan;  
another pointed to a father's German-town, P.A. bicycle  
called it: *Pop-cycle.*  
Almost maniacal

their card tricks with syntax,  
alphabet jugglers. Did you know

in Icelandic, speaking "rock language" is to echo?  
So a Jew said it again:  

*Oy va voy,* gargling stones,

while an audience tinkled at a *Yid* sprinkling wrinkles  
with powdered sugar to look old.  
*A kluger farshtet fun eyn vort tsvey*  
(A wise man hears one word and understands two)
Intersections: Critical Issues in Education  
Vol. 3, No. 2 (2019)

How native-like their children sounded,  
becoming, like so many unwanteds do,  
whizzes  
of double speak, microphone spit,  

bringing whole theatres  
to tears.

Reflection:

Most students in our graduate TESOL & World Language program will become teachers of language and/or language teacher educators. My courses ask them to consider adopting a poet’s identity to language and language instruction, discerning inherited forms and formal language, as well as learning to creatively play in the spaces of translingualism and translanguage (Canagarajah, 2013; García, 2009). In many assignments I encourage students to draw upon their many linguistic and cultural resources, inviting readers who may or may not be “fluent” in those resources. During the summer of 2019, I realized I had often kept my own languages and cultures of inheritance silent and decided to integrate new knowledge I’d recently learned at a museum in Tel Aviv about the roles Jewish people had played in the development of American comedy. In sharing this first draft with my students, it became clear that these international and Southeastern U.S. students had rarely, if ever, had encounters with someone of Jewish identity, and one student shared a negative stereotype her mother had communicated about Jewish people and their aggressive forms of communication. While hurtful, it was also an honest communication about the inheritances of bias, one that I think many minorities redress through humor and art. In discussing this poem in workshop, I realized none of these students were familiar with language considered to be slurs toward Jewish people or of formative, anti-Semitic events in the past that I felt were interconnected to issues of language bias, as well as gender and racial discrimination and citizenship status, that their poems were addressing. After all, in the words of the great poet Audre Lorde, “there is no hierarchy of oppression” (1983). I felt renewed in my passion to seek the right language to articulate the intersections of language play with resistance and response to oppressive circumstance. I do not see this poem as finished, as it is still too new a piece of work—serving as process, reflection, and a catalyst to action in teacher education. I am committed to the forms of intersection that poetry can provide to vulnerably share layers of ourselves and to invite others to participate and share in new layering. My students gift me with understandings of what it means to be an international student, a white or Black woman in the South, a person with a difficult name, a person working in high-stakes environments in newly acquired proficiencies during important, life-changing events such as motherhood, divorce, and other life transitions that accompany educators’ professional lives. The bravery and vulnerability shared in the space of the poetry workshop gives us courage to take the full possibility of ourselves into classrooms to ignite new levels of growth and reflection.
References


Authors

Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, Ph.D. Educational Linguistics & M.F.A. in poetry, is Professor of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia. Author of *Imperfect Tense* (poems), and three scholarly books in education, she's directed three NEA “Big Read” Grants, and been honored with the Beckman award for "Professors Who Inspire," and a 9-month Fulbright in Oaxaca, Mexico. As a poetry editor for *Anthropology & Humanism*, she has judged the ethnographic poetry competition since 2005. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Georgia Review, American Poetry Review, Women's Quarterly Review, Cream City Review, Barrow Street*, and many other literary and scholarly homes, including her blog http://teachersactup.com.

Sharon M. Nuruddin, is a Ph.D. Candidate in TESOL and World Language Education at the University of Georgia. Her arts-based dissertation focuses on African American parent perspectives of a southeastern, suburban, elementary Spanish-English dual language immersion program (DLI). She employs auto/ethnographical methods to recount her second language journey and her family’s experiences with DLI as she analyzes interviews of fellow DLI parents. Sharon is a motherscholar (Matias, 2010), as she is
informed by the educational experiences of her four children, three of whom are enrolled in the program under study. She was the poetry, fiction, and visual arts editor for the *Journal of Language & Literacy Education* from Fall 2017-Spring 2018. This year she was awarded the prestigious Phelps-Stokes dissertation fellowship.

**Kuo Zhang**, M.Ed. TESOL & World Language Education, is pursuing a Ph.D. in TESOL & World Language Education at the University of Georgia. She has a book of poetry in both Chinese and English, *Broadleaves* (Shenyang Press). Her poem “One Child Policy” was awarded second place in the 2012 Society for Humanistic Anthropology [SHA] Poetry Competition held by the American Anthropology Association. She served as poetry & arts editor for the *Journal of Language & Literacy Education* in 2016-2017 and as also one of the judges for the 2015 & 2016 SHA Poetry Competition. In 2018, she was the presentation winner of the 4'33” Arts Research Competition at the University of Georgia. Her dissertation will be a poetic ethnographic study examining the lived experiences of 11 international graduate student first-time mothers in the U.S.

**Amanda Brady Deaton**, M.Ed. English Education, is pursuing a Ph.D. in Language and Literacy Education with a focus on secondary English at the University of Georgia. She has been a middle and high school classroom teacher for 12 years, ten of which have been spent in high school; currently, she teaches at Stephens County High School in Toccoa, Georgia. She is interested in researching best practices for writing workshops in high school English classrooms, as well as discussing controversial yet relevant topics in rural, conservative communities. She is a lifetime resident of Northeast Georgia, and her two children also live in the same type of community in which she hopes to serve.

**Yixuan Wang**, M.Ed. TESOL and World Language Education, is pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Georgia in the Department of Language and Literacy with a focus in TESOL and World Language Education. She is currently the academic book review editor for the *Journal of Language & Literacy Education (JoLLE)*. Her native language is Chinese, and now she mainly writes poems in English as her second language. She has a poem entitled “Harassment” published in *Write Bitch Write*. Her research interests include art-based approaches in language education, poetic inquiry, Chinese-English bilingual education, translanguaging, teaching Chinese to young heritage learners, and multilingual pre-service teachers in graduate-level TESOL programs.

**Ashley Brown-Lemley**, B.A., is working towards her Master’s degree in Language and Literacy Education, TESOL, and World Languages. She is in her 14th year of teaching Spanish as a foreign language. She took her first poetry writing course in the summer of 2018 and has since continued writing in response to her life experiences and the edu-political context of the southeastern United States of America. Born in South Carolina and raised on the rugged rural terrain of the Appalachian mountains, she finds the intersections of her Appalachian and Atlantan identities, often at odds with one another, drive her writing. Brown-Lemley appeared in the *Seat in the Shade* summer poetry series in July 2018 and July 2019.
Xinyi Meng, B.A. in English Education, is currently pursuing a Master’s in Education degree in TESOL and World Language Education at the University of Georgia. With a native language in Mandarin, she is in the early stages of approaching poetry writing in English as a language of witness to reflect and reexamine cultural exchange and cultural heritage. Her poems appear in Yes Poetry, Write, Bitch, Write and A Velvet Giant. She’s also teaching Chinese at a heritage language school. Her teaching theory is informed by interdisciplinary and multimodal teaching with a focus on arts-based pedagogy. The examples of art mediums she loves to employ in her language teaching include poetry, music, and visual arts.

Ming Sun, B.A. is now pursuing the M.Ed. degree in TESOL and World Language Education at the University of Georgia. She was born in China and her native language is Chinese (Mandarin), but now she is writing poems in English. Her published poems include “The Color of Dreams” (Write, Bitch, Write), “My Father was an Epicure” (Gravitas, Volume 18, Issue 3), “The Best Way to Enjoy Fish” and “The Trash” (Journal of Language and Literacy Education). She loves traveling and enjoying food. She wants to introduce her Chinese world to all readers. Because she enjoys teaching Mandarin, she is now a full-time Chinese teacher at New Life Academy of Excellence, Duluth, GA.
BOOK REVIEW

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Working towards Decolonization, Indigeneity and Interculturalism
Palgrave Macmillan: Switzerland.
261 pp. ISBN- 978-3319463278

Theresa A. Papp
University of Saskatchewan

In Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Working towards Decolonization, Indigeneity and Interculturalism (2017), the contributing authors present a collective voice that affirms the need to decolonize the education system while presenting culturally responsive pedagogy that challenges the status quo. The essays in this collected work, edited by Fatima Pirbhai-Illlich, Shauneen Pete, and Fran Martin, illustrate ways to embrace a more socially just education system by repositioning power, challenging authority, and improving praxis to ultimately improve educational outcomes for students that are marginalized. The contributing authors range from representatives of diaspora, Indigenous, and white allies of education in their common goal to decolonize education, transform teacher practices, indigenize curriculum, improve methods of instruction, advance classroom relationships, and critique assessments. This book is relevant to in-service educators, as well as administrators, policy-makers, teacher educators, researchers, and all levels of politics that call for improved educational outcomes.

The book contains eleven (11) chapters and is organized into five parts. The first section is written by the editors and provides an introduction to set the context for the portions that follow. This provides the reader with an understanding of the origins of culturally-responsive pedagogy (CRP) and its origins from Critical Race Theory (CRT). Ladson-Billings (1995) is acknowledged as the developer of CRP, and it is explained to have three criteria: “(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).

Part II has four chapters of which the first three present decolonization in higher education and the preparation of young teachers to enter the profession of education. I found chapter 3, prepared by one of the editors, Shauneen Pete, of particular interest. In part, the interest stemmed from the Idle No More movement that had entered the world stage in the winter of 2012-2013 as “a peaceful revolution to honour Indigenous sovereignty and protect the land and water” (Idle No More, 2019) in resistance to the federal Omnibus Bills. It represented a time in Canadian history where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people stood in solidarity and Dr. Pete, a self-identified Cree woman, used this occasion to challenge her students to reflect on their whiteness, the education system, racism, and their perceptions of self, and other. Her pre-service teachers self-described themselves as white and middle-class. In her effort to indigenize her class, she presents the tensions created within the class that emerged, as well as her own self-reflective journey. The last two chapters of this section provide a rich account of teaching English as a second language—the first to refugee mothers in the United States, and the second to teaching young students in Brazil.
Part III is represented by three chapters. The first is written by an Anishnaabekwe woman who shares her experiences in an inner-city school where part of her teaching portfolio was to co-choreograph the school’s Indigenous dance troupe. She shares the many questions and comments that came from her colleagues that confronted the style of music, song, and dance that allowed her and her students to tour areas of Canada and the United States as an extra-curricular activity. She goes beyond answering her research question (“What is the significance of song and drum in school?”) to giving the reader a glimpse of Anishnaabe traditional practice, and the seventh fire prophecy. She concludes her chapter by an understanding that her non-Indigenous colleagues’ questions came from ignorance. King states, “The ignorance is indicative of a common pattern among white, European settlers who see the world in ways that make it possible to separate the past from the present and so deny their own complicity in the violences that continue to be perpetrated against First Nations peoples” (citing Cote-Meek, 2014, p. 136). The last two chapters of this section are within a New Zealand context and composed by Māori women; the culturally responsive pedagogy presented here stems from the Te Kotahitanga project and the Effective Teacher Profile (ETP). Māori metaphors were used within the classroom as a means to bridge Māori culture with their Māori students. The final chapter presents four case studies that attempted to improve literacy outcomes through support from either the community or higher-grade students. In both chapters the term “feed forward” was utilized; however, it was not explained, leaving the reader to investigate its meaning. Having previously conducted research in New Zealand at a school that utilized the ETP, I conducted an interview in which I asked what feedforward meant in this context. In this research manuscript, I stated, “the mantra of this school was ‘don’t tell what you can ask.’” This statement defines the strategy of feedforward where intentional questions are posed to the student to generate reflection and critical thinking to solve problems or improve classwork” (Papp, 2016, p. 9). Feedforward is often associated with inquiry-based learning and exemplifies a technique “that rejects a hegemonic and paternalistic approach to teaching and values the student and his or her voice” (p. 12).

Part IV consists of two chapters that focus on standardized assessments and the effects they have on the outcomes for students whose first language is not English. As Austin states, “the institutionalized practices of standardized testing...not only neglect culturally and linguistically diverse learning but also jeopardize their access to higher education and becoming productive contributors in their communities” (p. 201). Daly presents the context of assessment in Australia wherein literacy assessments in three studies present concern for Indigenous students: the assessments not only lack culturally responsiveness, but are culturally inappropriate.

Part V is the concluding chapter of the book and a space for the editors to connect the previous chapters while providing a reflection on their own experiences. The editors explain the themes that mitigate against culturally responsive pedagogy as found in the various chapters of this book, as well as the prejudices that make culturally responsive pedagogy incomprehensible at times to educators. This chapter concludes with the editors’ thoughts on decolonizing teacher education and affirm that “this book is a project in criticality” (Martin, Pirbhai-Illlich, & Pete, 2017, p. 247). Primarily, one of the two concerns presented regarding culturally responsive pedagogy are that white educators tend to focus superficially and have a narrow understanding of culture that includes deficit dispositions, differences, and “changing the Other” (Martin et al., 2017, p. 235). The second concern is that culturally responsive pedagogy is met with resistance fundamentally because of white privilege, which is deeply steeped in the education system, curricula, and the teaching profession. Mainstream educators are predominantly white females which adds to the dilemma of culturally responsive pedagogy not being intelligible. Throughout the chapters, there are four macro-themes the authors identify: (1) colonial thinking; (2) westernized hegemony of what counts as education; (3) marginalization and othering; and, (4) hegemony of the English language.
All authors in this book affirm that radical change is required in the current education system as hegemony exists in all corners of the world. Indigenous peoples of the world represent 370 million people. If all were within the same space, Indigenous peoples would be the third largest country in the world after China and India. It has been acknowledged throughout this book that Indigenous people have lower educational outcomes compared to non-Indigenous people. As an educator at the post-secondary level and a researcher focused on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students, I found this book to be of great interest in terms of integrating theory into praxis and would highly recommend it to seasoned as well as pre-service educators. Decolonization can only happen when hard questions are asked about whiteness.

References


Author

Theresa (Therri) A. Papp is a Ph.D. Candidate and researcher at the University of Saskatchewan and an instructor at the post-secondary level for Saskatchewan Polytechnic. She is the recipient of numerous scholarships including the Doctoral Scholarship in Community Engagement (2013), Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship (2014), and the recipient of a three-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship. In 2016, she earned the prestigious President’s Innovation Award for implementing innovative techniques in her classrooms. Her research has extended from Canada to New Zealand with her primary focus on improving educational attainment levels for Indigenous students.
Call for Submissions

INTERSECTIONS
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