Conceptualizing a Critical Race Educational History Methodology

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In their foundational piece on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and education, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate (1995) wrote, "Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression" (p. 57). As Critical Race theorists, we are especially invested in understanding how those actions relate to Students of Color and their educational histories. Powerful scholarship documents the persistence of unequal educational institutions, policies, and practices for Students of Color, along with the constant struggle by Communities of Color for more equitable learning opportunities (e.g. Anderson, 1988; García, Yosso, & Barajas, 2012; MacDonald, 2004; Pak, 2002; San Miguel, 1987/2001; Siddle Walker, 1994).[1] Such work underscores the importance of history in establishing generational links between People of Color who presently endeavor for justice and our predecessors with whom we share this journey. In this brief, we draw inspiration from the aforementioned scholarship and CRT in education literature (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1998) to offer guiding principles for students, community members, practitioners, and scholars interested in telling the stories of People of Color in their own neighborhood schools over time. Those principles build a methodology for documenting the educational experiences of Communities of Color that we call Critical Race Educational History (CREH).

THREE PRINCIPLES OF A CRITICAL RACE EDUCATIONAL HISTORY METHODOLOGY

A CREH methodology builds upon and supports the existing, innovative contributions of Critical Race theorists in education. Working from a CRT perspective in CREH means fully embracing all of the framework's tenets that value 1) the centrality of race and racism in education; 2) a challenge to the dominant ideology; 3) a commitment to social justice; 4) experiential knowledge; and 5) the tools available through interdisciplinary inquiry (Solórzano, 1998). Historical perspective has long been a component of CRT in education for the purpose of contextualization, yet comprehensive and concentrated historical inquiry in the field has been sparse. Throughout the last nine years, individually and collectively[2], we have sought those tools and principles that better facilitate an amalgamation of a CRT in education framework into historical research, writing, and teaching. Drawing from our dissertations (Alonso, 2015; Mares-Tamayo, 2014; Santos, 2016), we identified 3 guiding principles of a CREH approach. The following methodological commitments work together throughout the various stages of a CREH research project.

1) Intentionality

A hallmark of CREH is an intentional and explicit application of the tenets of CRT in education in every part of the research process – from the initial conceptualization of the project until the public dissemination of findings. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated that "By arguing that race remains untheorized, we are not suggesting that other scholars have not looked carefully at race as a powerful tool for explaining social inequity, but that the intellectual salience of this theorizing has not been *systematically employed* in the analysis of educational inequality" (emphasis added, p. 50). Similarly, historians of race (e.g., Menchaca, 1995; Takaki, 1993) and education (see footnote 1) have critically and significantly examined constructs of race, class, gender, and multiple identity markers. We argue that a CRT analysis should be systematically employed in educational history to explicitly and unapologetically interrogate the continuing salience of race, racism, and white supremacy. A CREH methodology honors the CRT tradition of naming structures, institutions and ideologies of oppression. Only after explicitly identifying these processes can we seek to challenge and end these systems of abuse. Intentionality matters, not merely for the sake of academic classification, but for the purpose of declaring one's theoretical and methodological obligations.

2) Embodying A Collaborative Process

This principle underscores the ways in which the educational histories of Communities of Color represent collective knowledge, or community memory (Delgado Bernal, 1998). We therefore see the research and writing of those stories as a collaborative endeavor that must include partnerships with multiple knowledge-holders and producers throughout the data collection process. These include (but are not limited to) former students, parents and community members who share their lived experiences through oral histories and *testimonios*; local historians, librarians, and independent researchers with specialized knowledge on the subject; and long-time community organizations and other social institutions that contextualize the larger experiences of People of Color in that community outside of school walls. Upon completion of a CREH study, this principle also emphasizes relationship-building with practitioners in multiple educational settings to disseminate the resultant narrative via curriculum development. In order to write the history of a community, we see it as an ethical duty of CREH work to reach out to said community. This further facilitates numerous ways for multiple people to contribute to the historical record.

3) Creating Space for Multiple Voices to Be Heard

We echo Ruiz' (1998) assertion that our methodology and methods are not about "'giving voice', but of providing the space for people to express their thoughts and feelings in their words and on their own terms" (p. xiv). There are multiple histories to be written even within a single community, district, school, or home. CREH encourages Critical Race theorists to mine personal and communal memories for historical threads that can be woven into a vivid tapestry of counterstorytelling. It identifies within the diverse actions of everyday people and formally recognized leaders alike, triumphs of social justice, courageous acts of resistance, and the dignity of struggle. These narratives can be chronicled through the use of oral histories, archival documents, photographs, newspaper articles, yearbooks, maps, census data, audio/video recordings, and artifacts gathered from personal, institutional, and community collections. Ultimately, CREH expands our notion of *how* history is written and *who* can write it. Simply put, there is not just one but numerous perspectives worth exploring in order to historicize the ways that schooling has been both oppressive and empowering for Communities of Color.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

CREH disrupts the historical erasure of Communities of Color

while providing an interdisciplinary methodology that explicitly centers the experiences of Students of Color, their families, and their communities over time. Below we describe three important areas in the further development and utility of this approach.

Research

CREH adopts an inclusive position on what disciplinary backgrounds and techniques are appropriate for historical study. There is a critical need to lift the veil on the historical research process itself, and show how we can all engage in the historical recovery of our communities for the sake of more rich and diverse accounts. CREH can guide others in this research process.

Writing

Questions of whose stories we tell and what voices we privilege are at the core of CREH. We must refocus our research lens to document not only those with institutional power, but also the students, parents, and people who can illustrate how they historically navigated and resisted unequal structures and institutions. By documenting and writing counternarratives into the historical record, the stories of resiliency and resistance of everyday community members both add to our collective memory and deepen our

understanding of the relationship between Communities of Color and schools.

Teaching

A CREH methodology not only values the research and the writing of subjugated histories; it directly advocates that these community histories be taught and studied in formal and informal settings. Along with developing curricular tools specific to CREH narratives, we look to introduce the CREH research and writing tools across educational spaces. This further recognizes local classrooms as sites of historical recovery and honors students as holders and creators of community history.

In summary, a CREH methodology systematically and explicitly uses CRT to guide a collaborative research process that centers the myriad voices of Students and Communities of Color throughout time and space. We invite the readers of this brief to tell the stories of their own local communities that provide such vital historical context for the resilience of Students of Color in the present day.

NOTES

[1] Due to the space constraints of a research brief, this is a very abbreviated list of literatures that influences our work. We highly recommend these texts as an introduction to a rich and growing field of educational histories of

People of Color.

[2] Our current work on CREH has evolved from fruitful conversations that took place between the authors, José Aguilar-Hernandez, and Daniel G. Solórzano from 2009 to 2011 that produced initial and divergent iterations of a "Critical Race History in Education" framework and related concepts (Aguilar-Hernández, 2013; Alonso, 2015, Mares-Tamayo, 2014; Santos, 2016).

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