

Editorial

Introduction Special Issue: Educational Equity: Cultural and Ethnic Diversity in Schools

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In the past decade, education research has taken a turn toward culturally responsive pedagogy and critical race theory (CRT). Culturally responsive pedagogy, also known as culturally relevant or culturally sustaining pedagogy (CRP/CSP), together with critical race theory (CRT), now occupies a prominent place in education research. CRP/CSP and CRT exist on a continuum, with potential overlap between the two poles.

CRP/CSP drives educators to challenge the institutional structures and cultural practices that underlie knowledge construction and opportunities to learn in schools and society [1]. In this pedagogical model, cultural strengths are built upon and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about students' cultural place in the world. Culturally sustaining pedagogy's "urgency comes not only from the clear social justice and democratic impetus to create classrooms where the curriculum includes practices and content that are inclusive of the students found in them, but as a means of addressing the widening chasm of cultural differences between teachers and their students" [2]. Although much of the culturally responsive literature focuses on teacher practice, according to Lynch ([3], culturally responsive pedagogy can occur at the institutional, personal, and instructional levels: "The institutional emphasizes the need for reform of the cultural factors affecting the organization of schools, school policies and procedures (including allocation of funds and resources), and community involvement. The personal centers on the processes by which teachers learn to become culturally responsive and the instructional focuses on the practices and challenges associated with implementing cultural responsiveness in the classroom" [3].

CRT is a framework that enables us to examine and transform the foundations of race, racism, and power [4] in and beyond educational institutions, enacted at both the institutional and interpersonal levels. CRT posits that "race" and racism permeate every one of society's institutions—an idea echoed in the words of Toni Morrison, who saw "race" as having become "metaphorical" [5]. She suggests race's metaphorical state allows it to stand in for and to disguise "forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological race ever was", making it "completely embedded in daily discourse" [5] (p. 63). As such, CRT provides a valuable way to explore issues of race in educational settings, where both forms of racism occur. Intersectionality [6], a key aspect of CRT, explores how different forms of inequality and identity—race, class, gender, language—are interconnected, and how institutional structures interact with these identities to produce differential outcomes. However, as Ladson-Billings and Tate [7] note, "Although both class and gender can and do intersect race, as stand-alone variables, they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between whites and students of color" (p. 51).

CRP/CSP and CRT overlap and add to the work of each other. For instance, CRP/CSP's co-construction of knowledge intersects with CRT's emphasis on "voices" of people of



Citation: Foster, M.; Mark, S.L.; Baize, J. Introduction Special Issue: Educational Equity: Cultural and Ethnic Diversity in Schools. *Educ. Sci.* **2024**, *14*, 38. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14010038>

Received: 12 December 2023

Revised: 19 December 2023

Accepted: 20 December 2023

Published: 29 December 2023



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color and personal stories as a means of the preservation and exploration of reality. “As we attempt to make linkages between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voices of People of Color are required for a complete analysis of the educational system” [7] (p. 58). Education research situated within CRP/CSP and CRT is necessary to transform the societal foundations that limit equitable education and excellence for all students.

Critical race theory (CRT) and culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy (CRP) are both frameworks that aim to address issues of race and social justice in education, but they approach these issues from different perspectives. Here are some key differences between the two:

Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that originated in legal studies and focuses on examining how race and racism are embedded in social structures, institutions, and laws. Its focus is on the macro level and aims to understand how power dynamics and systemic racism perpetuate racial inequalities and oppress marginalized groups. As a broad framework, CRT analyzes the intersections of race, law, power, and social structures across various domains. It aims to uncover and challenge how racial inequalities are perpetuated and reproduced in society. In contrast, CRP is a pedagogical approach focused on classroom practices and instructional strategies. It emphasizes making the curriculum and teaching methods more culturally inclusive and responsive to students’ backgrounds, experiences, and identities. As an educational approach, CRP focuses on the micro- and macro-levels and is rooted in schools and classrooms. Its focus is on incorporating students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences into the teaching and learning process. It emphasizes recognizing and valuing students’ cultural and linguistic identities and uses culturally affirming practices to enhance academic achievement.

Although both CRT and CRP emerged in the 20th century, CRT was conceived by legal scholars of color. Legal scholars of color developed it as a framework to critique traditional legal analysis. Its architects designed it to reveal how law and society interact to maintain racial hierarchies. CRT was later extended to education. Although CRP was first introduced in the late 1960s and developed as a pedagogical framework to address the educational achievement gap and the cultural mismatch between students’ backgrounds and the dominant educational practices, by the 1990s it had become firmly established in the education field and had undergone several iterations.

Intersectionality, multiple social identities, and oppressive interconnections are key concepts in CRT. These concepts include white privilege, racial microaggressions, color blindness, and the critique of meritocracy. As a methodological approach to understanding racial inequalities, CRT emphasizes counternarratives and storytelling. CRP’s key concepts are narrower. They include cultural competence, cultural capital, funds of knowledge, valuing and incorporating students’ cultural knowledge, identity affirmation, a culturally relevant curriculum, and critical consciousness to enable students to challenge the status quo.

Both CRT and CRP have come under attack recently, with many US states enacting laws prohibiting curricula that are judged to focus on these issues. These statutory forces limit the implementation and enactment of key aspects of CRP and CSP.

While CRT and CRP have distinct focuses, they are not mutually exclusive and can complement each other in addressing racial inequities in education. CRP can incorporate CRT insights to deepen the understanding of systemic racism, while CRT can inform the analysis of educational policies and practices within a larger societal context.

In the following section, we summarize the articles featured in this Special Issue. This Special Issue contains eight articles, most of which were written by scholars of color.

In the article entitled, “The Inequities of Defining Engagement in Science Education for African American Learners from a Culturally Relevant Science Pedagogy Lens,” Tara Nkrumah critiques the absence of research into African American science educators’ positive influences on K-12 African American learners’ engagement in science education. From a critical race perspective, she problematizes the limited conceptualization of student engagement, which has been predominantly defined in terms of “cognitive, behavioral, and

social mores of white, male, heteronormative, middle-class learners’ reactions to teacher pedagogy” (Nkrumah, this issue). She links this dominant perception of “student engagement” to racist justifications of disproportionately low levels of such student engagement amongst African Americans, as compared to white learners, as resulting from low socioeconomic status, limited content knowledge, and limited interest or motivation in science. As such, in her study, Nkrumah sets out to examine three African American secondary science educators’ understandings and practices of “student engagement” in science.

Demonstrating the impact of critical race theory in education in advancing both theoretical and methodological approaches in research, Nkrumah (this issue) employs a critical arts-based research methodology, in which “participants’ autobiographical data and drawings were crafted into a literary *métissage* of participants’ experiences, memories, and culturally relevant pedagogical strategies”. In her article, Nkrumah mainly argues that culturally relevant science pedagogy (CRSP; [8]) “fosters science engagement, identity, and actions to ameliorate racial inequity for African American students.” Specifically, teachers who enact CRSP in the classroom challenge the normalization of white cultural norms and history in science education and create opportunities for African American and other racially minoritized students to center their cultural ways of being as they engage in science. In regard to identity and actions, Nkrumah argues that, in response to “sociocultural and political injustices”, African American students’ interests in science education may decline, but not necessarily their interests in science itself. Therefore, to support enduring science engagement and science identity development, teachers must support students in critiquing and overcoming these injustices as part of CRSP.

In the article, ““Girls Hold All the Power in the World”: Cultivating Sisterhood, Counter-Spaces, and Intergenerational STEM Learning”, Erica Edwards and Natalie King build upon previous work in which they problematize foundational roots of racism towards Black girls. As with Nkrumah’s critique of the white, heteronormative, middle-class centering in defining science engagement, Edwards and King initiate their efforts towards critical and culturally relevant science education with a more just conceptualization of their target students’ positionalities and experiences in science. They do so by utilizing the Multidimensionality of Black Girls’ STEM Learning [9] conceptual framework, a framework that allows for the examination of perceived identities intersecting with learning contexts. This framework builds upon two critical race theory foundations—counterspaces [10] and critical race feminism [11]. In their article, the learning context of focus was an after-school STEM program for middle school girls, which served as a counterspace in which deficit and pathologizing notions of Black girls and Black girls in science “can be challenged and where a positive racial climate can be established and maintained” (Edwards and King, this issue). Their research focused on both the middle school girls enrolled in the program and the Black female educators working with the girls and, as such, critical race feminism supports accounting for the intersections of race, gender, and class. Again, as with Nkrumah, Edwards and King’s research allows for Black educators to critique their past experiences as students and generate new critical and race-conscious conceptualizations of racially minoritized students and science learning and to do so while presently working towards culturally relevant science teaching.

This connection between CRT and CRP/CSP is also foregrounded in the article “Afrocentric Education for Liberation in the Classroom: It Takes a Village to Raise a Child” by Tytianna Ringstaff. Her research argument espouses similar ideas about the underpinning structures of American public, private, and cultural institutions: that they are racist and inequitable. Ringstaff explores how the color-blind curriculum of US K-12 schools makes the creation of Black schools, specifically home schools, a strategic response to non-inclusive public and private schools and a viable option to address the academic and cultural needs of Black students.

Her paper explores practices at a Black homeschool in the southeast of the United States using an Afrocentric theoretical framework, which places African Americans’ experiences and their spaces at the center of the analysis. Using this framework, Ringstaff analyzes

and interprets data collected at the Black Scholars Academy (BSA), a pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) through 12th-grade Black homeschool collective, through individual interviews and textual artifacts. She researches the practices in this homeschool, including familial relationships and culturally responsive instructional practices such as an African time orientation and personalized learning plans. This paper provides evidence that these Afrocentric practices, practices typically absent in the dominant White, middle-class culture of the United States' K-12 schools, benefit Black students' learning. This recentring of curriculum on Black people and their cultural experiences, is in opposition to the institutional structures which CRT interrogates, and Ringstaff argues that it is key to helping students to develop cultural pride, agency, self-determination, independence, and liberation through education. Ringstaff concludes that the employment of Afrocentricity is best practice in a homeschool collective, making the argument that Afrocentric features in curricula and instruction are beneficial to students in any educational setting, whether public, private, parochial, or charter.

In "Culturally Responsive Practices or Assimilation? Views and Practices on Linguistic Diversity of Community College Instructors Working with Multilingual Learners", Sivira Gonzalez analyzes the views of instructors who teach multilingual learners at a community college in one of the US border states (the border states are Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. Although these states enslaved Black people, they did not secede from the Union in 1860–1861). Her research is grounded in raciolinguistics, a theoretical framework that examines the relationship between language, race, and power dynamics and acknowledges that language is not a neutral system but is shaped by social, cultural, and political factors, including racial hierarchies and inequalities. Raciolinguistics challenges the notion of a standard or "correct" language and recognizes the existence and legitimacy of diverse linguistic practices. It acknowledges that language variation is often stigmatized and associated with racial or ethnic groups, leading to the disenfranchisement of these communities.

Raciolinguistics encompasses several principles and tenets that guide its analysis of language, race, and power dynamics. Sivira Gonzalez specifically addresses three of these in her article. These are the (1) racialization of language, which recognizes that language is racialized. This means that language practices and attitudes are influenced by racial hierarchies and inequalities. This acknowledges that certain language varieties and accents are associated with specific racial or ethnic groups and can be stigmatized or privileged based on these associations; (2) language ideologies, representing the ideas and beliefs about language that circulate in society, and exploring how language ideologies are shaped by and perpetuate racial inequalities and hierarchies, influencing attitudes towards different language varieties and speakers; and (3) language policy and education, representing the language policies and practices in educational institutions, and exploring how these can reproduce or challenge racial inequalities. This advocates for more inclusive and equitable language policies that respect and value all students' linguistic repertoires. These principles and tenets of the raciolinguistic approach help shed light on the complex interactions between language, race, and power. They aim to promote linguistic justice and challenge the marginalization of racialized communities. Sivira Gonzalez's article illustrates the ways in which some community college instructors empathize, form connections with, and utilize culturally responsive pedagogical approaches in their classrooms; however, the prevailing raciolinguistic attitudes hamper their efforts, rendering them ineffective in changing the status quo.

Rodriguez and Navarro-Camacho's article "Claiming Your Own Identity and Positionality: The First Steps Toward Establishing Equity and Social Justice in Science Education" examines two interconnected strands, helping students to identify their positionalities and understand how these impact how they approach curriculum, teaching, and relationships with students, as well as providing them with experiences that will enable them to develop culturally relevant teaching approaches and curriculum for the student populations they will likely teach. In this article, the authors argue implicitly that preservice teach-

ers who have not explored their own positionalities are not prepared to engage students in culturally relevant pedagogy. Rodriguez and Navarro-Camacho's paper is grounded in Bakhtinian and Vygotskyian theories. Created by Russian theorists in literary theory and developmental psychology, respectively, these theories have had a significant impact on various disciplines, including education. Though not directly related to critical race theory (CRT) or culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), drawing connections among them is possible. Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism and heteroglossia—the coexistence of multiple languages, dialects, and discourses—relate to CRT because it emphasizes the importance of recognizing multiple voices and perspectives, particularly those marginalized by dominant narratives. This aligns with CRP's goals, aiming to integrate students' cultural experiences and perspectives into the curriculum and pedagogy. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that acknowledges the significance of social and cultural contexts in shaping individuals' experiences and identities as well as the concept of the zone of proximal development can also be linked to CRT's focus on the importance of supportive and culturally responsive educational environments that provide scaffolding for students from diverse backgrounds. Like CRP, Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's ideas seek to create inclusive classrooms that honor and value students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, schools and school systems create barriers to academic achievement and enjoyment for students of color. Unfair resource allocation, low expectations, stereotypes, discipline and punishment disparities, limited access to support services, segregation and school composition, standardized test bias, cultural insensitivity, and the absence of diverse curricula are some of the problems. In his article, "When School Wasn't 'School': Developing Culturally Responsive Practice during COVID-19 Lockdowns", Jonathan Baize explores this issue. He points out that the pandemic forced teachers to teach online, which adversely affected student achievement because of the lacuna created. The pandemic did, however, result in weakened school districts and schools' surveillance systems, along with the conformity enforced by professional learning communities. This made it easier for teachers to adopt culturally relevant teaching methods [12,13]. His article examines how the pandemic allowed teachers to incorporate culturally relevant materials, examples, and teaching strategies—culturally responsive practices—that recognized and valued students' diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Social emotional development is an important part of CSP. This approach emphasizes building relationships between teachers, students, and families to create a sense of connectedness and belonging. Providing students with a safe and supportive learning environment, educators can help students to develop self-confidence and emotional resilience, which is essential to their academic success. In their article "'The Work I Do Matters': Cultivating a Counterspace for Black Girls through Social-Emotional Development and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies" (King, Peña-Telfer, Earls, this issue), the authors describe and analyze the interactions that take place in a non-residential STEM summer camp. The articles describe a setting wherein girls from several schools in an urban metropolitan area were enrolled in a camp created to encourage their interest in STEM in a supportive environment.

A critical discourse analysis methodology is used to examine the *jamboard* postings and exchanges between students responding to a prompt that illustrates student achievement in science disaggregated by racial and ethnic groups. In many instances, CRT and CRP/CSP are inextricably linked, and it is impossible to draw sharp distinctions between them. This connection is particularly evident in this article, where CRT frames both the structuring of STEM camp activities and the analytical approach. Creating settings such as the STEM camp are critical to success particularly to combat school settings where African American students are made to "feel unwelcomed or experience racism and sexism in the classroom" (King, Peña-Telfer, Earls, this issue).

In the same vein as Baize and King et al., Leah Halliday's "Y'all Don't Hear Me Though: Insight on Culturally Responsive Teaching from Scholarship on AAL" likewise explores the disparity between the significant body of scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy and the comparative dearth of culturally responsive teaching in K-12 schools

in the United States. She acknowledges how the persistence of labels, (e.g., “at risk” and others mentioned above) cause the discourse practices of students bearing these labels to be deemed unworthy for academic discussion and analysis. This paper refutes this opinion by reviewing examples from the rich body of scholarship on African American language (AAL) to illustrate how AAL texts can support active learning and critical thinking. Halliday examines AAL texts from three spheres: home or community discourse practices, traditional literary and informational texts, and texts more commonly associated with popular culture. These explorations provide insight and inspiration for educators working to enact culturally responsive teaching by recognizing and leveraging the assets of their students’ voices, perspectives, and passions.

We hope you enjoy these articles as much as we enjoyed assembling them.

Author Contributions: Writing—Original draft preparation: M.F., S.L.M. and J.B.; Writing—Review and editing: M.F., S.L.M. and J.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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