

What the research says about

Understanding Critical Race Theory in Relation to our P-12 Education Systems in Minnesota

WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY?

Critical Race Theory was founded in the writings of Harvard Law Professor Derrick Bell in the 1970s and early 1980s with contributions from Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, and several others.¹ Critical Race Theory provides a framework to challenge legal scholarship and policy analysis for understanding root causes for structural inequality and the role of race in the creation and maintaining of inequality. It allows those structural and systemic inequities to be understood and discussed as experienced by communities of color.² At its core Critical Race Theory is a lens that equips people to understand and to act in favor of racial and social justice and transform society.

W.F. Tate, a well-known critical race education scholar, offers that, “The elements that characterize Critical Race Theory are difficult to reduce to discrete descriptions, largely because critical race theorists are attempting to integrate their experiential knowledge into moral and situational analysis of the law.”³ However, below is an attempt to summarize what is offered at length in the literature.

BASIC TENETS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

- Critical Race Theory identifies racism as “normal, not an aberrant, in American society.”⁴ Racism is difficult to erase as racism is an everyday occurrence woven into the very fabric of America. Generally, racism is not acknowledged, and is veiled under the guise of colorblindness—equal treatment for everyone across all racial groups. A colorblind approach only allows for the addressing and remediation of blatant forms of discrimination, but not for the “everyday,” “business-as-usual” systemic racism and oppression including but not limited to microaggressions. Critical Race Theory seeks to “unmask and exposed racism” in its various forms.⁵
- Race as a social construct is a tenet of Critical Race Theory.⁶ Omi and Winant suggest race has been positioned through several lenses focusing predominantly on class, ethnicity, and nationality. Each lens is discredited as a legitimate definition or categorization of race as each lacks, masks, or overlooks key aspects. Race is a concept used to categorize people that has no biological basis but has been constructed: physically on the basis of skin-color, socially through information and messages produced by society, legally bylaws that have defined race, and historically through how people have been treated and have fared over time⁷. Race is something that is more than simply observed. Rather, it is woven into the fabric of understanding life outcomes, spatial boundaries, and the deeply seeded stereotypes and understandings of persons.
- Departing from mainstream legal practices and scholarship, Critical Race Theory can challenge oppression through storytelling or unique voice-of-color⁸ to “analyze the myths, presuppositions, and receive wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities as one-down.”⁹ Further, Barnes (1990) states, “Critical race theorists integrate their experiential knowledge, drawn from a shared history as ‘other’ with their ongoing struggles to transform a world deteriorating under the albatross of racial hegemony.”

1 (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015, p. 206)

2 (Delgado & Stefancic, 2018)

3 (Tate, 1997, p. 210)

4 (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv)

5 (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11)

6 (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013)

7 (Milner, 2015)

8 (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 11)

9 (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv)



- Critical Race Theory critiques liberalism by arguing that civil rights under liberal tenets as a “long, slow, but always upward pull” is flawed because it does not recognize the inability of the existing legal system to create the type of necessary “sweeping” change and at the speed it needs to occur.¹⁰ Instead Critical Race Theory posits that liberalism engages a lethargic process of “arguing legal precedence to gain citizen rights for people of color.”¹¹
- Critical Race Theory additionally argues the notion of interest convergence.¹² Delgado and Stefencic (2013) describe interest convergence as white elites tolerating or encouraging racial advances for Blacks only when they also promote white self-interest. For example, CRT identifies whites as the primary beneficiary of civil rights legislation. This is supported by real numbers that indicate the largest benefiting groups of affirmative action as white women. As a result, white households and whites, in general, are the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. Additionally, because racism advances the interests of whites there is little societal incentive to eradicate it.¹³

CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN EDUCATION

As states legislate and enact laws and regulations around education, Critical Race Theory examines the way curriculum is written to silence the voices and perspectives of minoritized voices to legitimize white dominant narratives. It also suggests that instructional strategies aimed at teaching Black and other students presume deficiency instead of moving towards different teaching practices such as Culturally Responsive Teaching. Possibly highlighted most frequently by Critical Race Theory and education is the inequitable funding as a function of institutional and structural racism.¹⁴

Lynn & Parker (2006) support this by stating “Critical Race studies in education could be defined as a critique of racism as a system of oppression and exploitation that explores the historic and contemporary constructions and manifestations of race in our society with particular attention to how these issues are manifested in schools...”¹⁵

ARE MINNESOTA SCHOOLS TEACHING CRITICAL RACE THEORY?

Critical Race Theory is not currently included in the [Minnesota Department of Education’s K-12 Social Studies Standards](#), nor is it proposed in the current draft, released on December 1, 2020. This draft provided a revision of the standards, and did not provide a comprehensive view of the final product.

IS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING (CRT) THE SAME AS CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)? IF NOT, HOW IS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING DIFFERENT?

Culturally responsive teaching connects students’ cultures, languages, and life experiences with what they learn in school. These connections help students access rigorous curriculum and develop higher-level academic skills. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Critical Race Theory are not the same. Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for reaching students more effectively.¹⁶ A culturally responsive teaching model requires five motivational conditions:

1. Developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity,
2. Including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum,
3. Demonstrating caring and building learning communities,
4. Communicating with ethnically diverse students, and
5. Responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.¹⁶

¹⁰ [Crenshaw, 1988]

¹¹ [Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12]

¹² [Bell, 1980, p. 94]

¹³ [Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.9]

¹⁴ [Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 20]

¹⁵ [Ledesma & Calderon, 2015, p. 206]

¹⁶ [Gay, 2002, p. 106]



ARTICLES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Education Week - [Critical Race Theory isn't a curriculum. It's a practice](#)
- Education Week - [What is Critical Race Theory and why is it under attack](#)

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FAQ: POTENTIAL QUESTIONS LEADERS MAY WANT TO CONSIDER WHEN COMMUNICATING ON CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Do you implement Critical Race Theory in your school?

If the question(s) asked are broad or unclear, such as this one, you could respond with something like: In conversations with others, I have found that there are multiple understandings of Critical Race Theory. I want to make sure I understand your question. Will you share with me a bit about what you know about Critical Race Theory or provide some specifics as to what information you're seeking?

Do you teach Critical Race Theory to your students?

We do not teach Critical Race Theory to our students. It's a theory that was developed over 40 years ago by lawyers, activists and legal scholars and may be taught in some colleges' Master's or Doctoral programs.

Do you teach/train your staff in Critical Race Theory?

We do not teach Critical Race Theory to our staff. However, one may find some of the tenets of CRT in the professional development we do with our staff. Examining practices that create or contribute to inequities is a tenet of CRT. You may want to insert your own Equity policy here. Therefore, we do examine our practices and policies to determine what/if changes are necessary so that we produce more equitable outcomes.

How do you define equity?

Example: We use the Minnesota Department of Education's definition of equity: "Educational equity is the condition of justice, fairness and inclusion in our systems of education so that all students have access to the opportunities to learn and develop to their fullest potential."

What work do you do around diversity, equity and inclusion?

Example: We examine our curriculum and materials via our curriculum review cycle to insure that students are exposed to people and their ideas and lived experiences from all backgrounds. We also insure our staff have training in Cultural Competency as part of the mandatory requirements for relicensure in the state of Minnesota. MN Rule 8710.7200

These questions were provided by Maria Roberts, Senior Facilitator, Culturally Responsive School Leadership Academy and Equity Coordinator in District 197. They were created based on Shakopee Public Schools FAQ