Review

Can critical race pedagogy break through the perpetuation of racial inequity?: Exploring what is behind the structural racism and potential intervention

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Regardless of Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954, K-12 schools in the US are still racially segregated and the segregation is likely to perpetuate educational inequity. This paper deconstructs the factors that perpetuate educational inequity based on race by exploring the concept of race, how structural inequity based on race is perpetuated through knowledge construction, and also how Critical Race Pedagogy could serve as a potential intervention to the perpetuation of inequity.

Key words: race, structural racism, knowledge construction, cultural reproduction, CRP, CRT.

INTRODUCTION

As Ladson-Billing and Tate (1996) mentions, schools are racially segregated more than ever before. Regardless of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954, which claims that schools should not be racially segregated anymore, there are still some obstructs that hinder racial desegregation. Given that the racial segregation leads students in ethnic minority communities to differences in available facilities and the number of AP courses (Pollock, 2004; Sleeter, 2008), this racial segregation of schools obviously contradicts the Brown decision and denies equal educational opportunities for ethnic minority youth.

In order to analyze this structural inequality in order to provide equal educational opportunities for all, this study specifically address three aspects: how structural inequality is legitimized through "educational" processes such as knowledge construction and cultural reproduction; how critical race theory/pedagogy are helpful to analyze

and intervene the perpetuated structural inequality; further avenues for investigation in order to create an educational environment where students construct knowledge based on their critical awareness.

CONCEPT OF RACE AND STRUCTURAL RACISM

"Racial" categories are fake units of human diversity (the world's "racial" groups are more genetically diverse *within* themselves than *between* themselves), yet we have, over centuries of social racializing practice, created a country of "racially" "different folks" (Pollock, 2004).

Race is such a complicated and paradoxical notion that never could be 'cut and dried' since it is a social construct and racial categories have shifted over time (Banks,

2005). Given the prevalence of White/Black racial binary in the US society (Omi and Winant, 1994), it seems solely disregarded that a degree of intragroup genetical heterogeneity is larger than that of intergroup biological differences as Pollock (2004) mentions. This intragroup heterogeneity seems purposefully neglected since the prevalence of White/Black racial binary signals that the concept of race, especially racial differentiation between White and Black, has strong political meanings attached to it. Hall (1996), explains a political function of race that the notion of race itself has been created in order to construct racial hierarchy by 'racializing' 'others' with different racial identifications from White based on differences of physical traits.

These racial identifications tend to be associated with certain preconceived notions of members in 'raced' groups. For instance, comments such as "Funny, you don't look black" (Omi and Winant, 1994, p.59) or descriptions of some ethnic groups as "Happy Slaves" (Banks, 1998) or "Happy Mexicanos" (Gutierrez, 2004) explain that there are prevalent stereotypical images of "how members of 'raced' groups are". These racial stereotypes largely reflect the societal expectations toward members of 'raced' groups within the social structure based on racial hierarchy. In other words, perspectives of those in power tend to be reflected in these racial stereotypes in order to maintain the status quo of racial hierarchy by degrading 'raced' groups.

This racial hierarchy has strongly affected lives of those in 'raced' groups through structural racism. With regard to the field of education, examples of structural inequality include academic tracking, achievement gaps, racial segregations, and different numbers of AP courses offered depends on districts and schools. It is obvious that these structural inequalities negatively affect lives of ethnic minority youth. Therefore, Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954 claims that racial segregation should be abolished (Bell, 2004). However, racial desegregation claimed in the decision was unconditional, racial segregation is still frequently observed in classrooms even after five decades from the decision.

In addition to the unconditional racial desegregation, racial re-segregation within school such as academic tracking is still ongoing (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006). This racial re-segregation within school obviously provides better educational opportunities for members of some groups, while sacrificing equal educational opportunities for those in other groups. Racial re-segregation, yet, is not the only problem. Color-blind policy such as Proposition 209 in California became in effect in the mid 1990s (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006; Lipsitz, 2005; Pollock, 2004). The policy is intended to eliminate structural racism from school and create equal educational opportunities for all by making us all 'color-blind'. However, it has created "colormute" (Pollock, 2004) moments and does not resolve problems of structural racism at all. In other words, a color-blind

policy makes teachers refrain from talking racially in public, however, teachers still talk racially among them especially when talking about students' academic achievements (Pollock, 2004).

This colormute phenomenon brought by color-blind policy informs us that even if we have the policy, race still matters (Pollock, 2004). And most importantly, those in power seem completely blind to the fact that race matters. If those in power had recognized that race matters, it is unintelligible that they have left the Brown decision unconditional, and implement color-blind policy that makes us all stop talking about race and look away from structural racism as if race does not matter at all. Given these aspects of color-blind/racial desegregation policies that neglect the importance of eliminating structural racism, it is possible to assume that these color-blind/racial desegregation policies include some hidden political agendas such as perpetuation of structural inequality (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Roythmayr, 1999).

These policies could be used as powerful tools to maintain the status of privileges for those in power, while disguising public with superficial attempts of eliminating structural racism. Parker and Stovall (2005) claims that color-blind policy "upholds White supremacy in terms of sweeping away racial classifications, but leaves political majorities intact, which in turn uses the power of racism to undermine minority interest" (p. 165). Thus, color-blind policy may make structural inequality invisible, and ultimately perpetuate structural racism by silencing all the voices of minorities. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that color-blind policy reflects the interests of those in power rather than eradicates structural racism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). The study further sheds light on how structural inequality including structural racism is perpetuated through schooling with focuses on cultural reproduction and knowledge construction.

SCHOOLING AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY: CULTURAL REPRODUCTION AND KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION

Schooling reproduces certain deep-seated ways of understanding and perceiving that allow subordinate groups to be reproduced and the dominant [group] to maintain its status without resorting to physical representation or coercion. They call the deep-seated ways of perceiving and understanding that develop in this process the "habitus" (Feinberg and Soltis, 2004).

Pierre Bourdieu argues against a claim that schooling is a political and neutral process (Feinberg and Soltis, 2004), since "habitus" (Apple, 2004; Feinberg and Soltis, 2004) that is reproduced through schooling in the US society is based on cultural capitals of dominant group in the social structure. With regard to the US society, cultural capitals that are reproduced through schooling
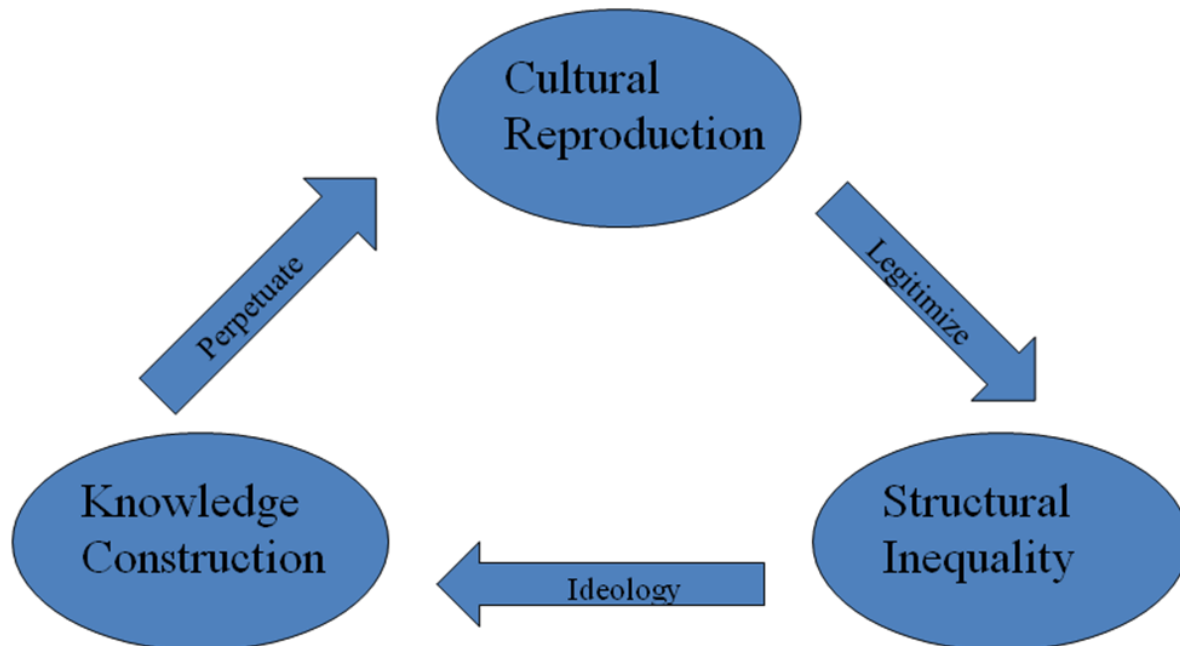
Figure 1. Diagram of systems of information flow for perpetuating cultural reproduction, knowledge construction and structural inequality.

are white, upper and middle classes. Thus, education contributes to maintaining the status quo of the social hierarchy based on differences in race and class. Roithmayr (1999) mentions that "the classroom---where knowledge is constructed, organized, produced, and distributed---is a central site for the construction of social and racial power". In other words, 'habitus' that may include perceptions that justify and normalize social hierarchy is being reproduced in classrooms. Since 'habitus' is so deeply embedded in the study perceptions, it is too subtle to be depicted. This invisibility of White upper/middle classes' 'habitus' is a key factor that makes 'habitus' function as a perpetuator of structural inequality. Lipsitz (2006) claims that White power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular". In other words, cultural values based on white upper/middle class culture that are regarded as 'standard' include hidden and deeply embedded biases that may justify, normalize and legitimize structural oppressions.

Then, the study's next question is "how are these values and norms that perpetuate structural inequality inculcated to students?" The answer is that there is a system of information flow in order to maintain structural inequality through cultural reproduction and knowledge construction (Figure 1). As Giroux (1988) mentions, culture is being reproduced through constructing knowledge based on dominant ideologies. This knowledge constructed upon dominant ideologies is called "mainstream school knowledge" (Banks, 2004), which functions to maintain structural inequality that preserves the status of privileges for those in power (Apple, 2004; Banks, 1993; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012;

Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2007; Solorzano and Yosso, 2005).

With regard to paradigms that mainstream academic knowledge is based upon, Banks (2004) refers to Nativist paradigm. This paradigm is based on an ideology that immigrants from other parts of the world are 'inferior' to those from North or Western Europe. These paradigms, which seem to maintain the status quo of racial hierarchy, tend to affect the construction of "mainstream academic knowledge" (Banks, 2004) through contents of curriculums or textbooks (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2007). If students 'learn' mainstream academic knowledge based on these paradigms, they could normalize structural inequality by thinking that those who are powerless deserve being sacrificed or mistreated since they are 'inferior' to Whites.

In summary, knowledge construction and cultural reproduction in classrooms contribute to legitimizing structural inequality by disseminating information including mainstream academic knowledge or ideologies that include racist biases, and normalize inequity. Schooling, consequently, is never apolitical or neutral. In order to eliminate structural inequality by intervening this cycle of reproducing cultural biases through schooling, development of critical awareness through alternative approach to education such as critical pedagogy is necessary.

Critical pedagogy should be helpful to cultivate critical awareness and deconstruct some "mainstream academic knowledge" (Banks, 2004, p. 230) that perpetuate structural oppressions. As an alternative methodology for knowledge construction for equality, some scholars

identify the importance of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2007).

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AS AN ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION

Schools are historical and structural embodiments of forms and culture that are ideological in the sense that they signify reality in ways that are often actively contested and experienced differently by various individuals and groups (Giroux, 2007)

Historically, schools have not taught diverse student body appropriately, and they seem still struggling to achieve educational equality for all (Banks, 2004; Freire, 2007). One of the reasons for this educational inequality could be the fact that many pedagogical practices tend to be conducted with "mainstream academic knowledge" (Banks, 2004) without clearly referring to whose interests are reflected in the knowledge. In other words, 'learning' this knowledge may empower some groups of students while oppressing or discouraging others by leading them to "false perception of reality" (Freire, 2007).

In order to empower all students in classrooms, cultivation of "conscintization" (Freire, 2007, p.104), which means critical awareness, by understanding how knowledge serves the interests of those in power is necessary. Critical pedagogy is designed to understand relationships between knowledge and power (Apple, 2004: Freire, 2007; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2007). Critical pedagogy is aimed at cultivating critical awareness by deconstructing "mainstream academic knowledge" (Banks, 2004) in order to understand how knowledge has a connection to maintain power relations, and re-constructing knowledge upon students' own critical awareness. By doing so, it is possible to conduct empowering educational practices for all since knowledge that students take away does not perpetuate structural inequality. Critical pedagogical practice, consequently, should ultimately eliminate structural inequality by intervening knowledge construction and cultural reproduction processes.

Allen (2005), however, mentions that the concept of critical pedagogy is developed upon Eurocentric concept of social dominance, therefore, may not be helpful to eliminate structural racism. According to Allen (2005), "for critical pedagogy to become anti-racist, it will need to be much more serious about the race-radical philosophies of people of color around the world and move away from the comforts and constrictions of a Marxist Eurocentricity". In other words, critical pedagogy needs to be modified with theoretical frameworks that more deeply engage in racial dynamics such as Critical Race Theory in order to intervene the cycle of perpetuation of structural racism.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT): AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STRUCTURAL RACISM

Poverty, however, has a black or brown face: black families have, on the average, about one-tenth of the assets of their White counterparts. They pay more for many products and services, including cars. People of color lead shorter lives, receive worse medical care, complete fewer years of school, and occupy more menial jobs than Whites (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012)

Structural racism is endemic to the US society, and it largely impacts lives of people of color (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006; Omi and Winant, 1994; Tate, 1997). In order to crystallize the concept of structural racism, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) refers to capitalist social structure of the US society that it is "based on property rights rather than on human rights". This social structure based on property rights indicates that property owners, those who have rights for possession and have been predominantly Whites, have an access to better property and treatments in the current social structure. Given that we live in a society structured upon racial hierarchy, it is no doubt that being White is a huge determinant of an access to property rights. As it is explained in a former chapter, this societal inclination to provide an access to property rights exclusively to Whites could be reproduced through knowledge construction and cultural reproduction as a part of our dominant culture.

Given that cultural reproduction perpetuates our deeply embedded perceptions and understandings that are based on White middle class culture, legal systems that are constructed upon these Eurocentric perceptions and understandings may function as perpetuators of structural oppressions against ethnic minority groups. In order to reinterpret legal systems and shed light on their roles as perpetuators of structural racism, Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement has arisen (Sleeter and Delgado, 2004). CLS challenges the definition of 'objectivity' in legal scholarships that is based on Eurocentric "universal system of right and wrong" (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006). CLS further claims that this Universalist definition of 'objectivity' solely disregards "nontranscendent (historical), contextual (socially constructed), or nonuniversal (specific)" aspects of legal systems (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006). Given that the 'truth' is defined in close relation to these three particularities (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012), the neglect of these particularities in legal systems may justify and perpetuate structural oppressions against those other than White male.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has emerged as a response to CLS in order to challenge its Marxist analysis of the US legal system that is based on the definition of Marxism and social dominance from Eurocentric perspectives (Roythmayr, 1999; Sleeter and Delgado, 2004). CRT claims that CLS still may neglect voices from people of color through structural oppressions based on Eurocentrism that may conceal and ignore racial hierarchy embedded in our social structure (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006; Sleeter and Delgado Bernal, 2004; Tate, 1997). In order to thoroughly include voices

from people of color to the societal infrastructures, CRT refers to the importance of counter-storytelling (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006; Sleeter and Delgado Bernal, 2004; Tate, 1997).

Counter-storytelling is defined as "nonmajoritarian narratives" (Sleeter and Delgado Bernal, 2004), which contain information about how structural oppressions impact lives of normal people in ethnic minority groups. Counter-storytelling, if used in the field of education, challenges discourses that perpetuate structural inequality such as "the stock story on merit or academic tracking or standardized testing by redescribing an experience or a social phenomenon from an outsdier's perspective" (Roythmayr, 1999). Since oppressions do not look oppressions to oppressors, counter-storytelling may destroy or transform mind-sets of oppressors by challenging "majoritarian narratives" (Sleeter and Delgado, 2004), a series of discourses that may perpetuate and legitimize structural inequality with exercising power. In other words, CRT scholars assume that counter-storytelling may deconstruct perceptions or knowledge that perpetuate oppressions by making oppressions and their impacts upon lives of ethnic minority groups more visible and recognizable (Delagado and Francic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Sleeter and Delgado Bernal, 2004; Solorzano and Yosso, 2005).

CRT is aimed at offering an analytical "framework that would attack seemingly neutral forms of racial subordination, while counteracting the devaluation of minority cultural and racial institutions in a color-blind society" (Parker and Stovall, 2005). In order to do so, asides from counter-storytelling, CRT has five tenets: American legal systems are unfair, and legitimize structural oppressions; centrality of race in the US society with an assumption that structural racism is endemic to the US society; suspicions/challenges against Eurocentric claims of neutrality, objectivity, rationality and universality; reliance upon experiential knowledge of people of color; interdisciplinary nature based on postmodern, Marxist, nationalist and feminist discourses (Lynn, 2005).

CRT is applicable to educational researches both in policy and practices in order to examine perpetuated and legitimized structural racism. When CRT is applied to educational researches, it functions as "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of Students of Color" (Lynn, 2005). In other words, if applied to the field of education, CRT should be a helpful tool to examine how cultural reproduction and knowledge construction through schooling may perpetuate structural racism. In order to use CRT as a theoretical infrastructure of critical pedagogy, it needs to be intertwined with critical pedagogy. This critical pedagogy combined with CRT is called Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP).

CRITICAL RACE PEDAGOGY: A POTENTIAL PEDAGOGY TO BREAK THROUGH STRUCTURAL RACISM

CRP is a combination of CRT and critical pedagogy. Therefore, CRP is aimed at cultivating critical awareness about structural oppressions with specific focus on race by providing a framework to identify, analyze and transform structural racial oppressions. As major tenets of the pedagogy, Solorzano and Yosso (2005) refers to the following five points: the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; the challenge to dominant ideology; the commitment to social justice; the importance of experiential knowledge; the use of interdisciplinary perspectives". Deconstructing "mainstream academic knowledge" (Banks, 2004) about race based on racial oppressions, and constructing knowledge upon critical awareness developed along these tenets should empower all students regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. When students successfully construct knowledge upon their own critical awareness, the systems of perpetuation of structural inequality through knowledge construction and cultural reproduction will be abolished by intervening information flow of ideology and perpetuation of cultural reproduction that legitimized structural inequality (Figure 2).

With regard to CRP's reliance on experiential knowledge, counter-storytelling from students of color should provide information about various cases of structural racism and their impacts on everyday life. In order to help generate knowledge out of their conter-storytelling, one of the most difficult task for critical educators is "to develop tools" that are "designed to describe, analyze and empower people of color and to help change negative social forces into positive social forces" (Parker and Stovall, 2005). In order to facilitate counter-story telling, teachers need to develop tools that help students to do so and transform their perceptions after they hear these stories. This development of learning tools for counter-storytelling seems an utmost difficult challenge for critical educators since effective tools for counter-storytelling may vary depends on demographics of students and contexts in which stories are told.

In order to use counter-storytelling as a learning tool, there are some other challenges for critical educators as well. First, teachers need to know how to create a safe space in which all students feel comfortable to talk about their stories. Since CRP relies on experiential knowledge of learners, counter-stories could be very personal experiences of structural oppressions. Therefore, it is necessary to create safe space where students respectfully communicate with each other without any fear of being attacked. Second, critical educators need to understand to how much extent they can function as an agency for social justice. Educators need to balance CRP and districts' prescribed curriculum. They also need
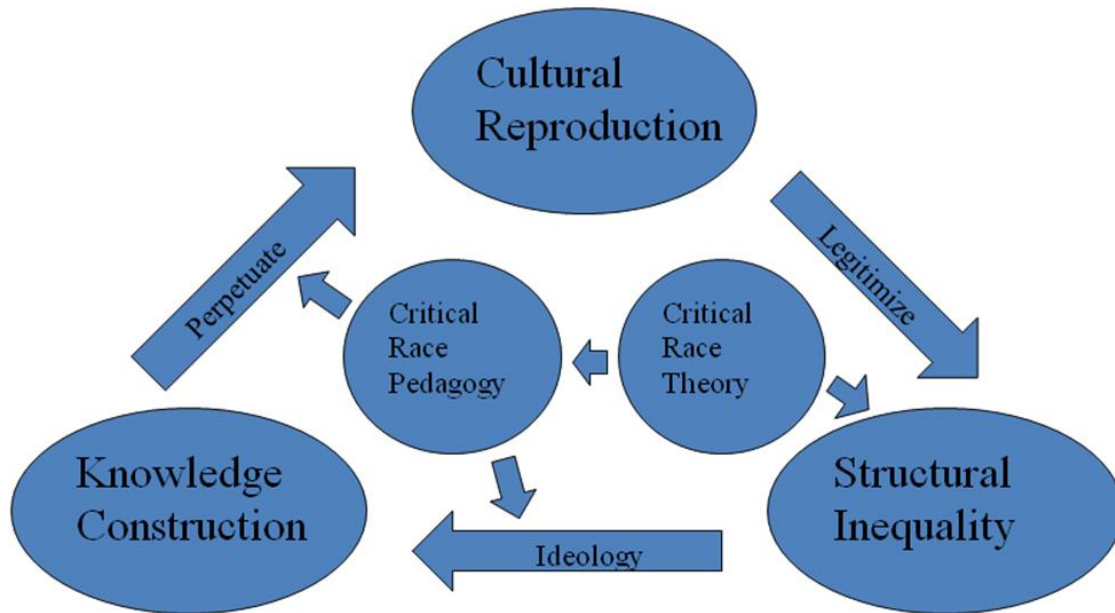
Figure 2. Diagram of relationships between systems of perpetuating structural inequality and its relation to critical race theory/pedagogy.

to assure that students learn subject matters by developing critical awareness, and achieve well in standardized tests such as WASL. Finally, critical educators also need to think about how it is possible to retain critical awareness developed in class.   This retention of critical awareness may require critical educators to develop another tool that helps students to do so. Confronting these three major challenges would allow CRP to further help students to develop knowledge that empowers all.

CRITICISM ON CRT/CRP

Through reviewing the literature, it became clear that traditionally CRT/CRP have tended to receive the following major three criticisms: CRT as racial essentialism (Rosen, 1996); CRT's critique on merit is anti-Semantic and anti-Asian (Farber and Sherry, 1997); CRT's take that "objective truth" does not exist (Farber and Sherry, 1997). First, Rosen (1996) indicates his concerns that given that CRT refers to the structural inequity based on the assumption that those in the same racial groups tend to experience the similar structural discriminations in similar manners. Therefore, it does not refer to individual differences and has a risk to promote the racial essentialization.

Second, Farber and Sherry (1997) point out the risk of the theoretical assumption behind CRT that it basically criticizes the sociocultural practices in which the merit tends to be distributed to the members of the particular racial group. However, there are some racial groups that historically have been categorized as non-white, such as

Jews and Asians, and they still succeed in the current social structure with conventional standards. If the merit is solely based on racial categorization, it is difficult to explain the success of these two groups. It could even imply as if these two groups were taking unfair advantages. Accordingly, Farber and Sherry (1997) indicate that the CRT could be anti-semantic or anti-Asian in some way.

Third, Farber and Sherry (1997) also indicate that the analytical rigor of CRT is not solid enough. CRT takes a stance that "objective truth" is a social construct, therefore, it is a product of interpretation with a particular standpoint. Therefore, storytelling that shows the alternative knowledge or interpretations from a different viewpoint is helpful to understand how the merit is distributed within the current social structure. However, Farber and Sherry (1997) indicate concerns about the ambiguity of storytelling as a founding to promote justice. According to Farber and Sherry (1997), "if we wish a society to have a conversation about issues of race and gender, unadorned stories may be too ambiguous in their implications to provide a basis for further dialogue". Accordingly, storytelling needs to be backed up with some data that solidifies its analytical rigor to function as a founding to promote justice.

CONCLUSION

This study examines ambiguity of the concept of race, how it structurally impacts ethnic minority groups, how the structural racism is perpetuated through knowledge construction and cultural reproduction in classrooms.

Critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and critical pedagogy are mentioned as alternative knowledge constructions that enable the study to identify, analyze and transform structural racism. These alternative knowledge constructions may intervene the cycle of perpetuation of structural inequality by blocking the ideology flow into knowledge construction. Although some concepts including CRP require further investigations to develop tools that make it more effectively functional in classrooms, it seems a huge progress that an analytical framework for structural racism has been developed, given that structural racism has not been theorized for long unlike gender or class oppressions.

Another concern regarding CRP is that if all students are successfully empowered by critical race pedagogy, it might provoke economic crisis because no one takes certain jobs with low-wage. Applying another critical pedagogy to deconstruct conceptualizations of these jobs based on capitalist societal values may be a solution to the problem. Another alternative is that it may require a huge amount of tax, however, choosing politicians who may decrease living standards so that those low-wage people can make living. As far as it is possible to make living with low-wage jobs, it is not regarded as oppressive as it is.

In order to promote educational equality, how to promote liberation of those who suffer from structural oppressions under capitalist social structures without causing troubles in our economic system seems an impending problem for critical educators to research about. Otherwise, structural oppressions keep prevailing on us as a necessary evil part of our society. Conducting this research about educational equality without causing economic dysfunctions requires educational researchers to research the problem in collaboration with scholars from legal studies, economics, and sociology to identify and analyze systemic functions and interrelations of education, economics, law, and society. In order to make this interdisciplinary research possible, segregation of academia based on scientific disciplines should be addressed. Even in a university, it is not rare to observe certain disconnections between schools or departments. Segregations in research institutions may not only deprive institutional unity as a community, but may hinder systemic analysis of interrelations of multiple academic fields that needs to research together.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflicts of interests.

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