

Shifting the Center in Teacher Education: An Introduction to the Special Issue on Critical Race Theory and Teacher Education

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What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2: 14–17 NKJV).

In 1978, Barbara Sizemore aptly noted in her reflection on school desegregation that “the child is no longer the center of the controversy, desegregation is. The means have become the end” (p. 62–63). Sadly, this sentiment rings true not only of the process of school desegregation in the United States but is also a hauntingly prescient assertion that speaks to the lingering challenges in teacher education. As a field, teacher education not only prepares preservice teachers; it examines the work and practices of teachers along “...a professional learning continuum from initial preparation through the early years of teaching” (Feiman-Nemser 2001, p. 1014). In the last two decades, there have been significant strides in research in the areas of pedagogy and practice (e.g. Grossman et al. 2009), multicultural education (e.g. Nieto 1992), anti-racist education (e.g. Pollock 2008), resource and culturally sustaining pedagogies (e.g. Paris 2012). However, teacher education programs as well as professional development for in-service teachers *still* struggle to prepare teachers, most of whom are white, to teach and support the high academic achievement of students of color while simultaneously speaking to the recruitment, preparation and retention of teachers of color.

Given the racialized opportunity structures created in schools and schooling, critical race theory (CRT) allows room for a more robust analysis of the social,

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cultural and historical practice of race and racism in schools and classrooms and more importantly, the students in those schools and classrooms. Therein lie the possibilities in using CRT in the field of teacher education. This special issue focuses on teacher education *and* critical race theory in large part because CRT has been under-utilized in the field of teacher education, arguably where it is most needed. According to Lynn and Dixson (2013), CRT “...emerged as a way to engage race as both the *cause* of and the *context* for disparate and inequitable social and educational outcomes” (p. 1). As a methodological and theoretical framework, critical race theory offers needed explanatory power as it relates to vital issues in teacher education such as equitable access to high quality teachers for students most underserved by public schools, the racial implications of licensure and evaluation policies aimed ostensibly to raise teacher quality, and the recruitment, preparation and retention of teachers of color.

My preservice teachers often share with me that they believe in equity and they *want* to teach rigorously to all their students; the struggle, as they see it, is with the *how* especially in the age of accountability, assessment and the obsession with standardized testing. From their perspective the intense focus on race and racism in much of their education coursework *especially* methods courses is at best misguided and at worst detrimental to their learning how to teach. Akin to my students, teacher education, broadly speaking, frequently talks about equity and diversity while explicitly ignoring how race and racism impacts how we teach. The field of teacher education (e.g. recent developments in high leverage teaching practices, attempts to parse out quality teaching and teacher quality) would greatly benefit from critical race theory’s centering of race as the *cause* and *context* for unequal and inequitable education outcomes. Confronting race and racism is the salient and persistent issue for 21st century teacher education. The recent teacher strikes in Chicago and court decisions in California regarding tenure have (re)focused the nation on racial dilemmas facing teachers and the field of teaching. In her article in the Nation about the Chicago strike, Christie Thompson (2012) points out that the “...teachers that are fired to make room for young, less-experienced teachers are disproportionately minorities [with] African-American teachers have declined by 10 % since 2000. Meanwhile, 62 % of new teachers in 2010 were white, compared with 48 % in 2000”. The controversy around tenure requirements centralizes race in ongoing negotiations.

An important point is that researching race and race research is not equivalent to being a critical race theorist and/or researcher (Ladson-Billings 2013; Cook 2013); nor does researching teachers make one a teacher educator. While not exhaustive, this issue represents a significant contribution to both the teacher education *and* critical race theory literature. Continuing and building upon the scholarship that utilizes critical race theory for examinations of teacher education (Ladson-Billings 1998, 2012; Solórzano and Yosso 2001; Milner 2008; Lynn 2002; Dixson 2006; Ryan and Dixson 2006; Chapman 2011; Fasching-Varner and Mitchell 2013), the authors in this volume write about race and racial issues in teacher education as scholars who subscribe to the tenets of critical race theory who are grounded in working with teachers along various points of the teaching continuum.

This special issue of *The Urban Review* pushes us to think about teacher education in more complex ways. The articles explore the range of critical issues in teacher education including the absence of critical dialogues that center race in early childhood (Cheruvu, Souto-Manning, Lencl and Chin-Calubauquib's *Race, Isolation and exclusion*), the problem of focusing on the needs of white teachers to the detriment of actually focusing on the needs of students who will be taught by these teachers in programs (Warren and Hotchkins' *Teacher Education and the Enduring Significance of "False Empathy"*), an analysis of the dispositions and practices of teachers in juvenile justice settings towards students of color (Annamma's *Whiteness as Property: Innocence and ability in teacher education*), the marginalization of teacher educators who center race and racism in their preparation of teachers (Juarez and Hayes' *On Being Named a Black Supremacist and a Race Traitor*), and the urgency in revising the curriculum of teacher education to center race (Milner and Laughter's *But Good Intentions are Not Enough*).

Theologian James Cone (1980), most notably known as the main architect of black liberation theology, stated, "I know what your faith is, not by what you confess but only by what you do" (p. 157). His extended discussion of faith brings to mind the well-known and oft-cited scripture in the book of James that heeds *faith without works is dead*. If teacher educators, and by extension teacher education, is guilty of operating without faith, Critical Race Theorists occupy the other end of this spectrum with insufficient works. The hope of this issue is to couple our faith in racial equity and justice to the work of teaching and preparing teachers. There is still work to do especially in our capacity as scholars and researchers to develop race equity tools that *explicitly* help teachers undo the pernicious legacy of race and racism in schools and classrooms.

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