Establishing Rigor/Validity in Critical Disciplinary Research

Cultural Studies, International Education, and Multicultural Education (CSIEME), as well as related fields (e.g., Social Justice Education, Ethnic Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, etc.) typically have different ways of establishing rigor and/or validity in research than do disciplines more traditionally steeped in the Eurocentric academic canon.

CSIEME and related "resistance" and/or "counterhegemonic" fields generally discourage researchers from engaging in research of "other" or "against type," meaning that researchers are encouraged to conduct research on topic areas around which they have organic knowledge and/or with/in groups of which they are organic members (insiders) and/or to which they have organic connections. This knowledge and these connections need not be uni-dimensional (e.g., only Black people can research Black people, only lesbians can study lesbian identity, etc.), on the contrary, they should be more complex and critically so (e.g., a white, middle class woman who has experienced various forms of gendered violence might study the impact of violence on identity development, including on students of color in urban schools). In traditional disciplines, this dimension of inquiry would be viewed as a threat to the integrity of the research in the form of "bias," the argument being that as an insider (proximal) to the research topic/community, the researcher cannot be "objective" or "neutral." In contrast, CSIEME and like fields view this dimension of inquiry as part and parcel of how rigor and validity are established.

Traditional fields believe that bias can be controlled for (quantitative) or admitted and mitigated (qualitative) by establishing and maintaining various forms of "distance" between the researcher and the research topic and/or research subjects/participants. Non-traditional disciplines argue that bias is inevitable, unavoidable, and, thus, present in all aspects of research. Therefore, these disciplines name bias as such and then organize and orient research (quantitative, qualitative, and indigenous) to solve problems (direct bias to these specific ends) by leveraging insider knowledge about, and connectedness to, those problems (including from other research community members (co-researchers)), in essence by engaging bias in service to the research endeavor conceptualized to: co-produce knowledge leading to social action to end suffering; co-realize self-determination for all people through the lived experience of radical research undertaking; co-enhance participatory democratic engagement (walking the talk of this in the conduct of research); co-support existing and co-develop anew the tools (research-originated and research-derived) to change reality for the better in all people; co-utilize research and its findings as vehicles for solving problems in everyday life—be they big or small.

Forms of knowledge leveraged in research in CSIEME and related fields may include *technical or "how to" knowledge* (e.g., how to build a pipeline; cultivate a disease cure; network a computer; bring water to a community; organize a filing system; build consensus; write a policy statement), *instrumental/strategic or "how can" knowledge* (e.g., how can a pipeline be built without an ACE hardware store down the block; resources be secured in a war zone, materials be delivered without access to trucks), *interactive or "who" knowledge* (e.g., who needs to be on board with the research for it to move forward, who needs to be involved to secure political buy-in), *critical (sociopolitical/meta-analytical) or "why" knowledge* (e.g., why/toward what end, for whom, in service to what/who is the research being undertaken (what's going on beneath the surface and why, what behind-the-scenes dynamics are operating and why, whose voice is missing and why, what is the impact of the research on…and why)), among *other types of knowledge* needed to solve the problem at focus.

Connectedness to problems (issues, concerns, etc.) leveraged in research in resistance and counterhegemonic disciplines argues for researchers to be organic members and/or to have organic access to sites of research in order for the research focus (problem, issue, concern, etc.) to emerge from the people in those sites, thus for the research results/outcomes to be of mutual benefit to those people (as well as the researcher as one of or akin to those people), and to be co-owned/the collaborative product of those people (co-researchers) and the researcher so that data derived can be use directly and immediately by those people to positively impact their own communities, rather than, through "data mining," used directly and immediately only by the researcher, acting as an agent for any number of data plantations (universities, academic journals, pharmaceutical companies, etc.), competing in various for-profit knowledge economies (tenure and promotion, rankings, patents, market shares, etc.).

In traditional research, especially quantitative researchers typically choose their own research site, develop their own study foci to support their own research agenda. In these instances, researchers often impose themselves on research subjects (including through on-going, large-scale government, non-governmental, and/or corporate projects). On occasion, traditional researchers, more likely qualitative ones, will seek permission to use a site for their research endeavors and share their results with the site community. Non-traditional research argues, however, that, despite these humanizing research efforts, inquiry outcomes still overwhelmingly have the effect of taking agency from members of research site communities, instead of engendering/facilitating their agency through genuine co-engagement of them as co-researchers, thus the effect of these efforts is, at best, in the vein of savior/do-gooder undertakings, in which there is more one-sided telling than turn-taking listening, and more individual showing than collaboratively doing.

In additional to using quantitative and qualitative methodologies and research methods in emancipatory manners, CSIEME and related fields also use indigenous methodologies and inquiry methods (e.g., advocacy, testimonio, participatory action, youth participatory action, collective narrative, decolonizing, recursion, social, historical representation, rhizomatic, bricolage, emergent design, hybrid design, and many more). Accordingly, research in these fields often establishes rigor and validity in manners that are aligned with indigenous ways of knowing, forgoing established conventions for achieving these ends (e.g., blind study, randomization, comparison group/comparative study, triangulation, peer review, member checks, utterance charts, among many others). Therefore, in resistance and counterhegemonic fields, there is critical exploration and application of indigenous, collaborative, and other social justice-oriented approaches to inquiry concomitant with the conduct of that inquiry. Exploration/application is guided by the overarching value that *inquiry matters*: it is a "social theoretical act" that must be grounded in "just and equitable praxis" that is "contextualized in its surroundings" (Steinberg & Cannella, 2012, p. ix). As a result, radical researchers engage in multi-perspectival analysis and implementation of various criticalizing processes embedded in each inquiry approach. Because most inquiry exists "in a complicated web of power, neo-liberalism, linear thinking, and elitism," these researchers intentionally push back against Western egocentrism in order to reclaim and surface anew knowledge derived through restorative and transformative action (Steinberg & Cannella, 2012, p. ix).

Hence, CSIEME and related fields continuously challenge what is traditionally counted as legitimate and legitimizing (rigorous and valid) knowledge production, at the same time that they ground research that is traditionally dismissed as anecdotal and cursory and/or partial and polemic in myriad sociopolitically-located methodological points of entry to debate that are

further contextualized historically (not either/or, but both/and). Adept analysis and application of complex theories and concepts to real world contexts is a central feature of rigor and validity in these fields. Of particular note in this regard us the use of intersectional analysis. Intersectionality as an analytical tool is not simply focused on the cross-section or bi-section of two or more dimensions of identity or fields of study (Crenshaw, 1995). Having two or more (multiple) dimensions of identity—for example as a black, working class woman, with a learning disability, or as a white, middle-class, able-bodied male—while interesting to tease out in scholarship contexts, is not the same as having an intersectional identity. Likewise, conducting research from a shared (interdisciplinary) point of entry of—for example, African American studies, sociology, Women's studies, and disability studies—while, again, may be intellectually engaging, is not intersectional scholarship and may not employ intersectional analysis. This is because, according to Crenshaw, the purpose of intersectionality is to reveal the interests of those who are rendered invisible by "the system" precisely because they lack power in that system. So, for example, if the system "sees" white and male interests, it can be made to also see white female interests buoyed by race (whiteness), and black male interests buttressed by gender (maleness). In so doing, it reveals that it cannot see blackness and femaleness. With this purpose in mind, in engaging the concept of intersectionality, drawing from and building on intersectional scholarship, and employing intersectional analysis, the interests of those who are persistently unseen in education can be brought forth: students of color, poor and working class students, female students, and students with disabilities whose educational experiences are, in sum, increasingly captured by the term 'school-to-prison pipeline,' as they are physically funneled into this pipeline" (Horsford & Clark, 2015).

Intersectional analysis in resistance and counterhegemonic research can be further understood structurally, politically, and representationally. Structural intersectionality is "where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, as they do in the experiences of battered women of color, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1246). "The concept of political intersectionality highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas. The need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront. Indeed, their specific raced and gendered experiences, although intersectional, often define as well as confine the interests of the entire group. …Among the most troubling political consequences of the failure of antiracist and feminist discourses to address the intersections of race and gender is the fact that, to the extent they can forward the interest of 'people of color' and 'women,' respectively, one analysis often implicitly denies the validity of the other. The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women. These mutual elisions present a particularly difficult political dilemma for women of color. Adopting either analysis constitutes a denial of a fundamental dimension of our subordination and precludes the development of a political discourse that more fully empowers women of color" (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1251-2). Finally, representational intersectionality contends that "with respect to the rape of Black women, race and gender converge so that the concerns of minority women fall into the void between concerns about women's issues and concerns about racism. But when one

discourse fails to acknowledge the significance of the other, the power relations that each attempts to challenge are strengthened. …Scholars in a wide range of fields are increasingly coming to acknowledge the centrality of is- sues of representation in the reproduction of racial and gender hierarchy in the United States. Yet current debates over representation continually elide the intersection of race and gender in the popular culture's construction of images of women of color. Accordingly, an analysis of what may be termed 'representational intersectionality' would include both the ways in which these images are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race and gender, as well as a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representation marginalize women of color" (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1282-3).

At the same time that CSIEME and related fields use both/and approaches, as well as complex theoretical and conceptual analytical frameworks to establish and maintain rigor and validity in research, these fields also critique these frameworks as potentially condescending and elitist, especially to the extent that they are applied in overly homogenizing manners, thus prone to obscuring important nuances, differences, dimensions within and across research contexts. To guard against these threats to radical legitimacy, research in CSIEME and related fields is sociopolitically-located, employs an indigenous standpoint, and/or is critically conscious— meaning it is ever-attuned to the manifestations of power, privilege, oppression, and discrimination. These research considerations were first academically codified in what is termed Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT emerged at the intersection of radical jurisprudence, the practice of especially Civil Rights law, and legal activism in the middle 1970s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2005). Recognizing that progressive social change predicated on legislative victories was not only not continuing to progress, but regress, legal scholars, practitioners, and activists sought out new mechanisms for combatting racism and other forms of discrimination, especially in their more insidious, stealthy, furtive, and surreptitious forms (Banks, 2004; Bell, 1987, 1992, 1995a; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Orfield, 2001).

CRT examines the intersections of race, racism, and institutional power from a radical point of entry into debate and related praxis (Berry, 1994; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lawrence & Matsuda, 1997). Rather than employing these examinations toward bringing about social change in the same manner that typically suits the societal status quo, CRT questions the capacity of this manner of change to bring about real, structural change at all (Bell, 1995b; Guiner, 1994; Perea, Delgado, Harris, & Wildman, 2007). In so doing, CRT cultivates a highly academically grounded and strategic, but unapologetically resolute and impatient, dispositional cadence in pursuing social change, including through research.

CRT, perhaps not surprisingly, made its way from radical jurisprudence into other radical fields of study, including, restorative and transformative education, in the 1990s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2005; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). One tool of CRT—the use of counter-storytelling—has, unfortunately, been overused and largely uncritically employed in applying CRT to the educational arena (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The goal of counterstorytelling is to reveal deficit thinking embedded in so-called objective research located within dominant narratives, with an explicit focus on non-dominant groups. Further, counterstories aim to reveal the deficiency of law and policy that derives from, and favors, dominant groups. By challenging dominant narratives, while locating research in the experience and knowledge bases of non-dominant groups instead, counterstorytelling challenges the embedded biases of researchers from historically over-represented groups at the same time

that it produces research findings that testify to the resiliency and ability of non-dominant groups, even in the face of sustaining systemic discrimination.

In educational research, however, the use of counterstorytelling has often been watered down to the point where the counterstories lack the critical consciousness to challenge dominant paradigms; hence, they become simply alternative stories. Alternative stories, although often framed as counterstories, simply present a different perspective on dominant narratives without revealing their absurdity or the real-life perils of the hegemony they promote. Because alternative stories claim to be counterstories, they create confusion as to what actually counts as counter-story in CRT. Typically, alternative stories can be distinguished from counterstories, because they embody neoliberal perspectives that lack the critical consciousness necessary to effectively trouble dominant ideologies (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

In the effort to guard against this trend emerging in the invocation of CRT in radical educational research, researchers who use counterstorytelling as a part of their inquiry are asked to couple its use with at least one other foundational CRT tenet: 1) a critique of liberalism (and, in this historical moment, also neoliberalism); 2) a discussion of the centrality/centering of whiteness, the exchange value or currency of whiteness, and/or the concept of whiteness as property; 3) an examination of interest convergence in undermining and/or leveraging equity/diversity work; 4) an analysis of the permanence and pervasiveness of racism; and, 5) an assessment of the roles of restrictive views of equality (which focus on discriminatory *intent* in the long-term process of bringing about equality) versus expansive views of equity (which prioritize the *impact* of discrimination in seeking more immediate and concrete redress from it) (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1995a; Berry, 1994; Collins, 1998a; Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997a, 2001, 2005; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Haney-López, 2006; Harris, 1993; Lawrence, 2005; Lawrence & Matsuda, 1997; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Perea, et. al., 2007; Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999; Stefancic & Delgado, 1996; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The dialectical integration of imperial (Delgado, 1984) *and* critical (Bell, 1995a) scholarship elevates the rigor and validity in resistance and hegemonic disciplines above/beyond that in traditional/Eurocentric research, because non-traditional research embraces the postmodern tenet that all wisdom much be challenged, even wisdom's own wisdom (in the case of this example, even the wisdom in this postmodern tenet should be challenged (Slattery, 2006)).

Supporting Peshkin's (1988) value of the *subjective I* in scholarly work, voice is clearly a consideration in how research is conceptualized in CSIEME and related fields, and in turn, how researchers in these fields craft their inquiry. In academia, a dispassionate voice is taken as objective and, therefore, more valid. Resistance and counterhegemonic disciplines assert that the dispassionate voice can be used to erroneously persuade listeners/readers toward a particular perspective in exactly the same way that an intentionally passionate and subjective voice is assumed to persuade them. Accordingly, the focus of research in CSIEME and related fields is on the care with which any voice reasons, rather than assuming there is 'a voice of reason.' And, yet, despite this posture, there is still an element of dispassionate voice in indigenous research that can be attributed to the traditional academic training that even most social justice researchers have had to endure (though the converse is not the case) to learn to speak 'credibly' and 'cautiously,' both of which ultimately serve neoliberal and right-leaning interests. Accordingly,

social justice researchers encourage listeners/readers to trouble this dispassion in their consideration of social justice research.

It is also important to note that even traditionally conceived (rigor and validity) scholarly work has been less warmly received if it's content focus challenges status quo perspectives; for example, such work typically does not find its way into the most elite knowledge codification (publishing) venues. Of course, when alternative *ways of knowing*, especially by members of non-dominant groups, are foregrounded in research, the academy has been even slower to accept it as legitimate, thus the rationale for writing this piece (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997).

References

Banks, J. (2004). Remembering *Brown*: Silence, loss, rage, and hope. *Multicultural Perspectives, 6*(4), 6-8.

Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N., & Tarule, J. (1997). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind (tenth anniversary edition)*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bell, D. (1995a). Brown vs. Board of Education: The interest convergence dilemma. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotananda, G. Peller, and K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed a movement* (pp. 20-29). New York, NY: The New Press.

Bell, D. (1995b). Racial realism—after we're gone: Prudent speculations on America in a post-racial epoch. In R. Delgado (Ed.), *Critical race theory: The cutting edge (first edition)* (pp. 25-32). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Bell, D. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bell, D. (1987). *And we are not saved: The elusive quest for racial justice.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Berry, M. (1994). *Black resistance to white law: A history of constitutional racism in America.* New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Collins, P. (1998). *Fighting words: Black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1991a). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241-99.

Delgado, R. (Ed.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple

University Press.

Delgado, R. (1984). The imperial scholar: Reflections on a review of civil rights literature. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review, 132*(3), 561-78.

Delgado R., & Stefancic, J. (Eds.). (2005). *The Latino/a condition: A critical reader (second edition)*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Delgado R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (Eds.). (1997a). *Critical white studies: Looking behind the mirror*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Dixson, A., & Rousseau, C. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 8*(1), 7-27.

Guiner, L. (1994). *The tyranny of the majority: Fundamental fairness in representative democracy*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Haney-López, I. (2006). *White by law: The legal construction of race (second edition)*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Harris, C. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review, 106*(8), 1709-91.

Horsford, S., & Clark, C. (2015). Inclusive leadership and race. In G. Theoharis and M. Scanlan (Eds.), *Leadership for increasingly diverse schools* (pp. 58-81). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3-12.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47-68.

Lawrence, C. (2005). Forbidden conversations: On race, privacy, and community (A continuing conversation with John Ely on racism and democracy), *The Yale Law Journal, 114*, 1353-1403.

Lawrence, C., & Matsuda, M. (1997). *We won't go back: Making the case for affirmative action*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Matsuda, M., Lawrence, C., Delgado, R., & Crenshaw, K. (1993). *Words that wound: Critical race theory, assaultive speech, and the First Amendment*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Orfield, G. (Ed.). (2001). *Diversity challenged: Legal crisis and new evidence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Publishing Group.

Perea, J., Delgado, R., Harris, A., & Wildman, S. (Eds.). (2007). *Race and races: Cases and resources for a diverse America (second edition)*. Eagan, MN: Thompson West.

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—one's own. *Educational Researcher, 17*(7), 17-22.

Popkewitz, T., & Fendler, L. (1999). *Critical theories in education: Changing terrains of knowledge and politics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Slattery, P. (2006). *Curriculum development in the postmodern era: Teaching and learning in an age of accountability (second edition)*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Stefancic, J., & Delgado, R. (1996). *No mercy: How conservative think tanks and foundations changed America's social agenda*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Steinberg, S., & Cannella, G. (Eds.) (2012). *Critical qualitative research reader.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Taylor, E., Gillborn, D., & Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *Foundations of critical race theory in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.