

Apr 19th, 6:00 PM - 6:15 PM

Eliciting Student Voice to Explore the Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching in Secondary Schools

Henna Lopez Rahimi
Dominican University of California

Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.

Lopez Rahimi, Henna, "Eliciting Student Voice to Explore the Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching in Secondary Schools" (2018). *Scholarly and Creative Works Conference 2020*. 104. <https://scholar.dominican.edu/scw/scw2018/all-conference/104>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarly and Creative Works Conference 2020 by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact michael.pujals@dominican.edu.



Eliciting Student Voice to Explore the Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching in Secondary Schools

Hanna López Rahimi
Dominican University of California
Department of Education
April 19, 2018



“And sometimes—this may sound weird—but sometimes I just go into the city to be around people that look like me because there just aren’t very many here.”

Statement of the Problem



Year after year testing statistics, dropout rates, and post-high school success consistently expose a **major gap in achievement between White students and students of color**. The color of a student's skin has a significant impact on their academic experience beginning as early as preschool, and continuing through higher education (Moon & Singh, 2015; Simba, 2014).

Contrary to common beliefs, **"Traditional measures of socioeconomic status (consisting of income, wealth, and parental education) account for at most one-third of the gap"** (Singham, 2003, p. 587).

Statement of the Problem



Culturally responsive pedagogy argues that one of the **most crucial factors** toward shrinking the achievement gap is to deny a deficit paradigm of thinking and instead focus on **building a positive school climate, meaningful relationships, and consistent academic rigor.**

Literature Review

Critical Race Theory

- Race Affects Educational Experience
- The Racial Achievement Gap Persists

Adolescent Identity Formation

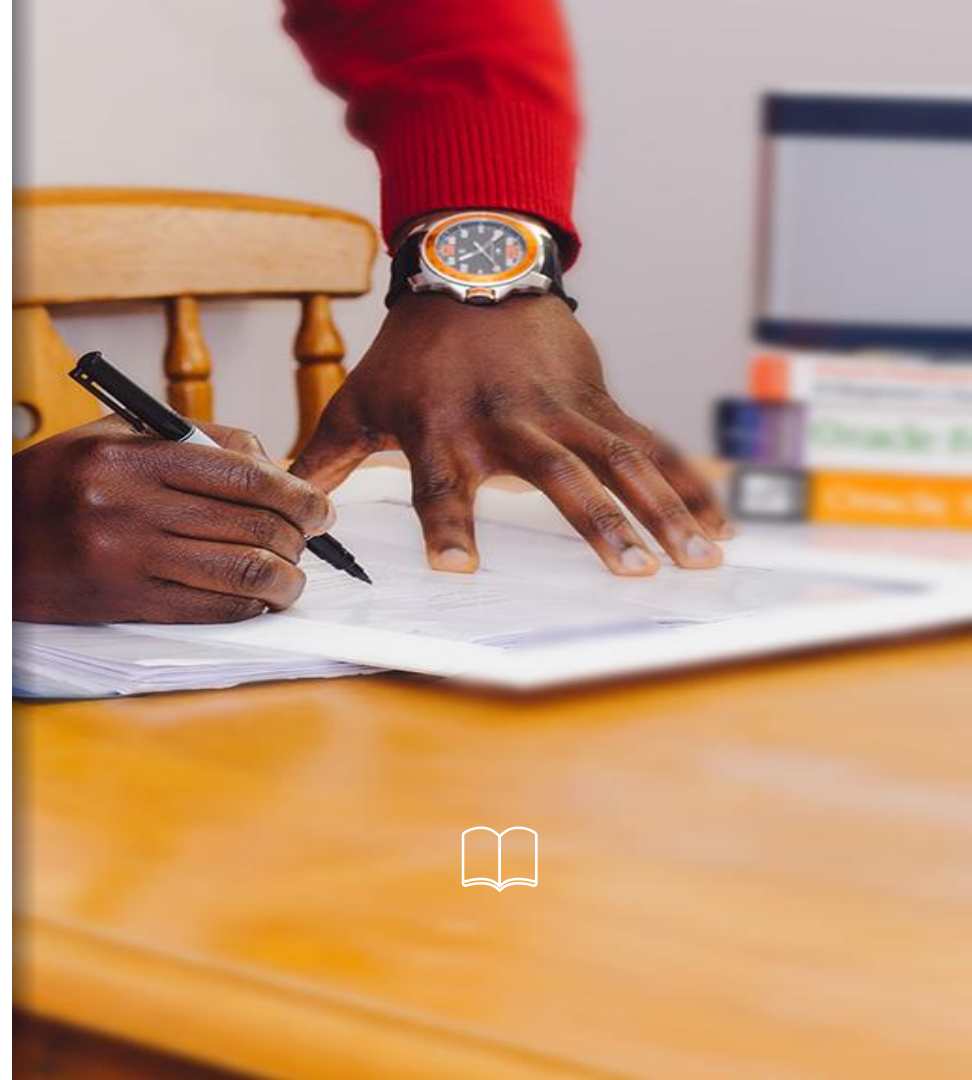
- The Importance of Self-Efficacy

Culturally Responsive Teaching, Race, and Culture in the Classroom

- Neurological Findings that Inform Culturally Responsive Teaching
- The Impact of Strong Student Connections with Adults at their Schools

Belonging

- Discrete School Environments Exist for Students of Differing Races or Backgrounds



Literature Review: Critical Race Theory



Critical Race Theory demands that the insidiousness of deficit thinking be **confronted and challenged with a counter narrative**. If research shows that the problems do not lie with the students, and do not stem from SES, culture, or biology, then we must look to the larger truths of how **our individual choices as educators and policy makers contribute to a system** that perpetuates the hegemony at the cost of all others.

"When operating from a deficit thinking paradigm, educators and policymakers believe that culturally and linguistically diverse **students fail in school because of their own deficiencies** or because their families don't value education, not because of social inequities, unfair school policies, or differential treatment in the classroom."

-Zaretta Hammond

Literature Review: Adolescent Identity Formation



- ❑ Erikson's (1968) theory of identity versus role confusion states that at this point in their lives, adolescents first grapple with the existential questions of **who they are and where they fit in society**.
- ❑ When adolescents are exposed to positive family, peer, and community models of their ethnic identity, it is more likely that they will strengthen their connections to others, and thus develop a stronger sense of **ethnic and racial identity (ERI)**.
 - ❑ Greater sense of belonging, commitment, and self-identification with that ethnic or racial group
 - ❑ Protection from acts of discrimination
- ❑ When students attend a school that maintains an ideology of **colorblindness**, this process of forging a healthy ERI is stunted by the perception that recognizing differences is taboo and unacceptable.

Literature Review: Culturally Responsive Teaching, Race, and Culture in the Classroom



Neurological findings inform culturally responsive teaching.

The brain seeks to minimize threats and maximize connection

Positive relationships temper our fight or flight reactions

We process information based on our culture

All learning is driven by attention

New information is only learned if tied to prior knowledge

The brain physically expands due to challenge and rigor

Literature Review: Belonging



Belonging contributes to students' overall emotional health, by providing them with that sense of safety that is a vital environmental characteristic for any learning to take place. Students' emotions toward school have a direct correlation to their academic success. Emotions such as hope, joy, and pride are associated with higher performance, while emotions such as hopelessness or boredom are extremely detrimental to academic performance.

Research Questions



How does race affect students' day-to-day experience in a school with predominantly White students and staff?

How do school programs, extracurricular programs, and actions by other students and teachers affect students' perception of school climate and belonging?

Methodology



Focus Groups:

1. 7 students
Alex (Asian or Pacific Islander male), Chris (White female), Elodia (White female), Gem (Asian or Pacific Islander female), Lucy (White female), Olivia (White and Hispanic or Latina female), and Yen (Asian or Pacific Islander female)
2. 3 students
Jordan (Hispanic or Latina female), Karina (Black or African American female), and Patricia (Hispanic or Latina female)
3. 3 students
Samantha (Hispanic or Latina female), Sol (Hispanic or Latina female), and Sophia (Asian or Pacific Islander female)

Online Anonymous Surveys:

- 52 students
- 51.9% female
- 48.1% male.
- 33 White
- 7 Hispanic or Latino
- 6 Asian or Pacific Islander students
- 3 Black or African American
- 3 students who selected "other" and self-identified as "part Native American, part white," "Ugandan, and "White and Latino."

Methodology



- Convergent parallel mixed-methods research design
 - Quantitative data from a larger number of students (Anonymous online surveys)
 - Qualitative data from a smaller focus group of students (Three distinct focus groups)
- The mixed-method design is ideal to elicit student voice
 - Quantitative surveys => more participants can be reached
 - Qualitative focus groups => the participants can express themselves with more depth
- Constructivist and Phenomenological Approaches
 - Participants as a source of deep, complex, understanding of a phenomenon

Findings

Pervasive Awareness of Differences and its Effects on Identity-Formation

- Distance from Home to Campus Affects Social Connections
- Campus Layout Hinders Connections
- Visual Markers of Identity Further Impede Connections
- Racism and Stereotyping on Campus

Daily Interactions with School Peers

- Friendships
- The Transition from Middle School to High School
- Extra-Curricular Activities Impact Friendship and Sense of Belonging
- Culture of College Readiness

Personalized Educational Experiences Constructed by Adults

- Personal Interactions and Kindness
- Best Practices-According to Students
- Self-Efficacy





Findings

Pervasive Awareness of Differences and its Effects on Identity-Formation

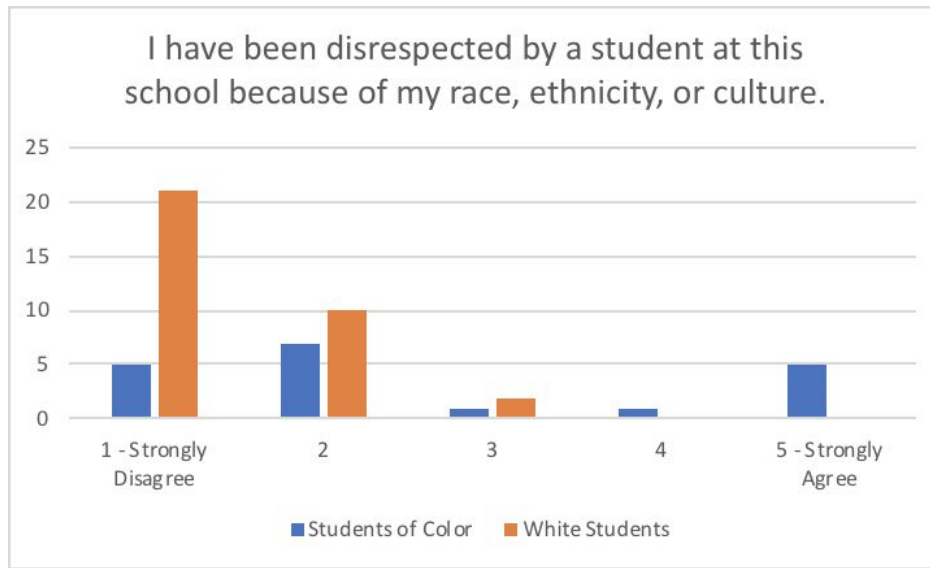
- **Distance from Home to Campus Affects Social Connections**
 - *"Because of where I live, that makes me feel not a part of the community here."*
 - *"I don't really get the full experience, I guess."*
 - *"It makes me feel like I'm missing some thing about Fairview."*
- **Campus Layout Hinders Connections**
 - *"There's so many people. We all came from small schools and just coming into this school it's like ten times bigger than the schools we went to and it was scary."*
- **Visual Markers of Identity Further Impede Connections**
 - *"I feel like being White has kind of in a way—not just in school, but in other situations—has given me this kind of presumed innocence and good intent. And also that I feel like people trust me more, and are not trying to...victimize, vilify, or make me look bad; they're not trying to find a way in which I mess up, or trying to antagonize me."*



Findings

Pervasive Awareness of Differences and its Effects on Identity-Formation

- **Racism and Stereotyping on Campus**





Findings

Pervasive Awareness of Differences and its Effects on Identity-Formation

- **Racism and Stereotyping on Campus**

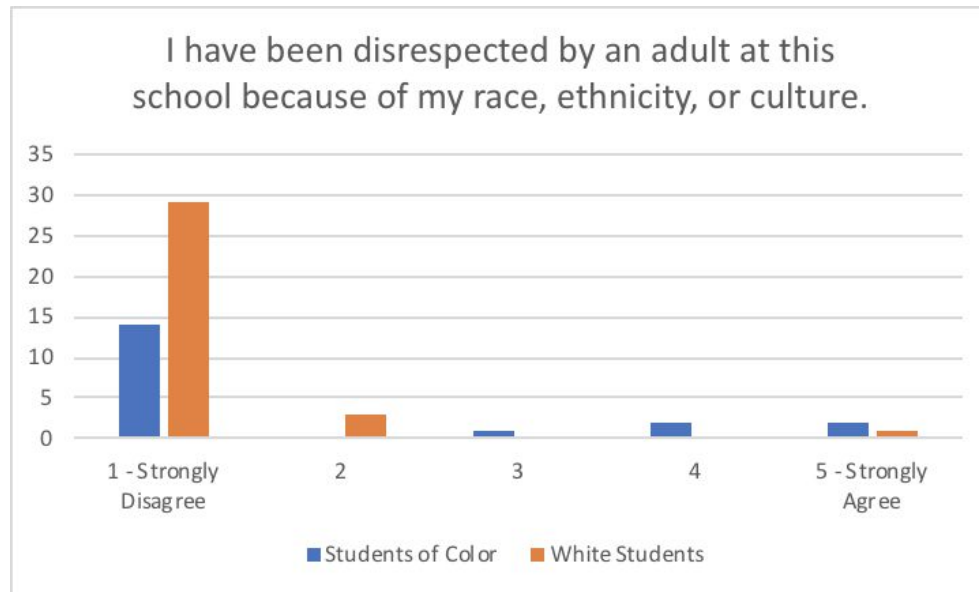
- *"It's like everyone assumes we're in such a liberal time there's no racism, there's no issues, but there is some of that that's underlying that's less of a direct hatred more like lack of understanding."*
- *"I was walking back from lunch and some kids saw me and they were trying to talk in a Chinese accent and they were trying to act as if they were doing something with Chinese take-out, like a Chinese take-out place."*
- *"The remark was that it was easy to get such an award, because Hispanic students are generally unintelligent, and therefore usually receive low scores."*
- *"Yeah a lot of people don't want to come because it's in Meridian and they're like 'Oh it's a bad neighborhood.'"*
- *"Meridian kids are treated differently for their race and where they live."*



Findings

Pervasive Awareness of Differences and its Effects on Identity-Formation

- Racism and Stereotyping on Campus





Findings

Pervasive Awareness of Differences and its Effects on Identity-Formation

- **Racism and Stereotyping on Campus**

- *"I knew a girl who was half black and told by a teacher that she was not going to get anywhere in life because of her skin color and that is the way things are."*
- *"There are multiple instances where I've been in a group project, I do unfair majority of the project, yet my fellow White classmates receive a better grade than me. I can definitely say with certainty that I have had to work harder than the White students at Fairview to gain respect from teachers and authority figures at Fairview."*
- *"I noticed that one of my teachers put all of us black kids in the back row because she thought that maybe we needed more help, but she still didn't help us"*
- *"Whenever they had a math problem with a banker or coins involved they would use my name as an example. This happened enough for me to realize that they were using my name to promote a Jewish stereotype."*
- *"Mr. Smith often disregards students' comments because he says they have a disproportionate viewpoint because they are either White or grew up in Fairview City."*



Findings

Daily Interactions with School Peers

- **Friendships**
 - 70% of student responses included wording about seeing friends.
 - *"Like a few months ago, I used to not want to go to school because I didn't have anything to look forward to, but now it's like 'Oh yeah, I get to see my friends in class, I get to talk to my friends in class, I get to hang out with them'"*
- **The Transition from Middle School to High School**
 - *"There aren't that many kids who come in from smaller schools and it's harder to work yourself into friend groups just because they've been with each other all the way in middle school and everyone already knows each other."*



Findings

Daily Interactions with School Peers

- **Extra-Curricular Activities Impact Friendship and Sense of Belonging**
 - *"It's the culture here to do as much as you can."*
 - 88% of students reported participating in at least one school program, and yet only 9% mentioned any type of extra-curricular activity or program as a reason they look forward to going to school
- **Culture of College Readiness**
 - *"I feel like that whole thing where you spend all your time taking all of these Honors classes and AP classes, and then you just socialize during your sport, then you spend all your other time doing your homework or something else, I think that—more than the introduction of technology and texting and social media and stuff—has made other people more introverted. I think it's more of that, that taking up all your time, rather than kids are on their phones all day."*



Findings

Personalized Educational Experiences Constructed by Adults

- **Personal Interactions and Kindness**
 - *"Teachers are guiders and people that kids can trust, and I really appreciate when teachers are honest and form those connections with me, and I can talk to them after class. I just love when teachers reach out to you personally, because they have so many students, and it makes you feel like you are someone that they remember, and you are part of the student body when they point you out in some way, like it's super subtle."*
- **Best Practices-According to Students**
 - Fun activities within the classroom (notably not content-related) that encouraged students to look forward to class.
 - Put students into groups for collaborative work in class rather than letting them choose.
 - *"Grading scale was really strict, and he had really clear instructions, but as a person he was so warm and approachable," ... "You could be doing bad in his class and still like him as a person," ... "The thing is he related to his students."*



Findings

Personalized Educational Experiences Constructed by Adults

- **Self-Efficacy**

- "When an adult is helpful to you, what are they doing?"
 - 23% - answering questions
 - 49% - explaining academic concepts
 - 9% - a personal aspect such as getting to know the student or expressing empathy
 - 8% - the adult should not provide the answer, but instead help the student reach the answer on their own
 - Repeated words of note: "Extra time," "Push," "Understand," "Listen," "Different way," and "Effort."



Implications

- **Isolate for race:** Unless specifically prompted, participants were much more likely to speak about living location or socioeconomic status than race. This supports the findings of Singleton (2015) - it is crucial to isolate for race, because it is so much more comfortable to talk about any other social issue rather than acknowledge this one. Student experience, however, revealed that, despite a widespread assumption that the community is post-racial, race and racism are extremely prevalent and need to be discussed.
- **Create space for friendships:** The demand to be attractive candidates for higher education creates competition and adds stress in friendships, as well as occupies much of their time both in and out of school, therefore limiting the time they could spend developing meaningful friendships.
- **Course content is not everything:** Students did not focus on course content at all, even when asked what actions teachers take that make students feel like they belong.
- **Self-efficacy matters:** The focus on both relationships and self-efficacy rather than academic content indicates that while students may not be analyzing how effective instructional strategies in class are, they very well may be evaluating whether or not they are being treated as sentient young adults. Students feel more supported and academically capable when adults take the time to guide, rather than tell.



Implications

- **Policy and Practice:**

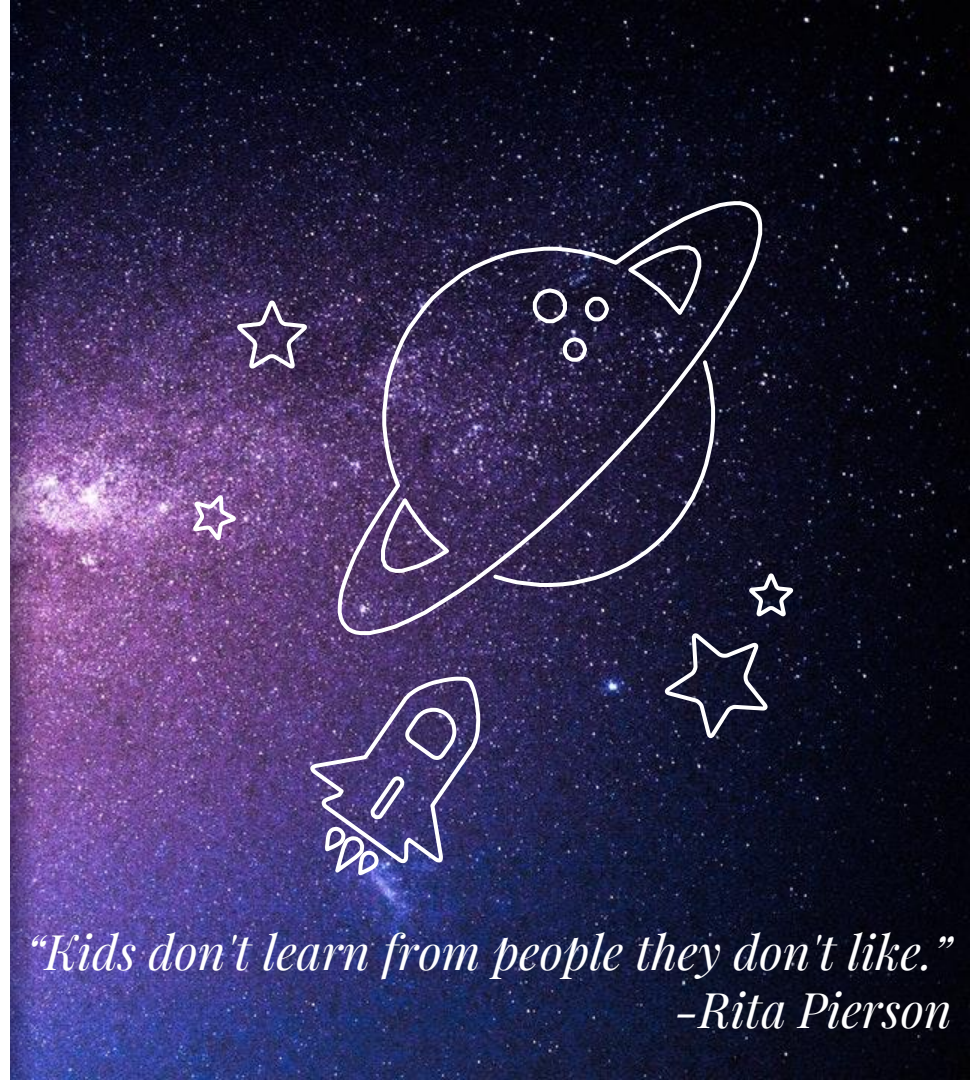
- Culturally responsive methods geared toward closing the achievement gap can positively impact the educations of all of our students, while going a long way toward making school an environment more adapted to the needs of traditionally marginalized minorities.
- Culturally responsive teaching is not a checklist or a set of rules, and it cannot be achieved through superficial celebrations of heroes and holidays; it is a mindset and a philosophy. At the most basic level, teachers can say “Hello” to students in the hallways. To take it a step further, teachers can work to get to know students on a personal level and develop relationships beyond grades and homework checks.
- More opportunities for interpersonal communication and relationship-building structured into the day.
- Create a climate of acknowledging and celebrating race, thus providing more opportunities for students to develop a strong ERI. Overall, the reactions of the student participants in this research reflected a population of young people ready to have courageous conversations about race and enthusiastic about learning more about themselves and others.

Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me at:

- hlopezrahimi@gmail.com



“Kids don't learn from people they don't like.”
-Rita Pierson