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Towards a Theory of Critical Consciousness: A New Direction for the Development of Instructional and Supervisory Leaders

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Abstract

COVID-19 and the demand for racial justice caused the dark underbelly of white supremacy to be laid bare during 2020. These events call for a reexamination of the ontological and epistemological frameworks in academe and specifically within the field of educational leadership. The legacy of white supremacist ideology prevails as the existing and accepted ontological and epistemological perspectives of history offered in PreK-12 through post-secondary education. The political, economic, and social context highlights the need for instructional and supervisory leaders to be culturally responsive school leaders. This requires that programs preparing these leaders must grapple with and problematize the existing narratives purported in PreK-12 and post-secondary education; and recognize that racism, implicit bias, discrimination, and anti-Blackness are foundational issues in the field. Reimagining preparation programs by incorporating critical theories and liberatory praxis to support the development of culturally responsive instructional and supervisory leaders is imperative.

Keywords

educational leadership; Critical Race Theory; leadership preparation programs; instructional leadership; supervision; anti-Blackness in education; anti-racism

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Introduction

The Need for Critically Conscious Instructional and Supervisory Leaders

The COVID-19 pandemic and the demand for racial justice and the humanization of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities caused the dark underbelly of white supremacy to be laid bare during 2020. These events call for a reexamination of the ontological and epistemological frameworks in academe and specifically within the field of educational leadership. To date, the accepted ontology validating the field of education is anchored in a global white supremacist, Eurocentric, anti-Black, ahistorical, single-story narrative of a Western dominance (Mills, 1997; see also Dumas & Ross, 2016; Fields, 1982). To sustain and ensure the maintenance of this narrative, the accepted epistemologies within the field of education are constructed to deem any critique threatening the legitimacy of this story by challenging the validity of both the critique and the individual or entity questioning the structure.

Within education, the legacy of white supremacy has shape-shifted starting with laws making it illegal for enslaved Africans to be educated, creating schools to indoctrinate Indigenous communities via Indian Residential Schools or Native American Boarding Schools and creating segregated schools for Chinese children in California (Asia Society, 2021; Little, 2018). After slavery ended, it shape-shifted into Black codes, Jim Crow, and for the last 40-50 years towards the deficit narrative 'achievement gap' which persists to plague Black and Brown communities. However, national, and international data indicate that the United States, collectively, lags other advanced and industrial nations (Camera, 2019). White children are being outperformed by some Asian children. The unintended consequence(s) of white supremacy also impacts White communities as the hierarchy of whiteness established an intra-racial caste system reinforcing a system of tiered privilege (Isenberg, 2016; Mills, 1997).

Within the field of education, the role of instructional and supervisory leaders (ISLs) has evolved as ISLs are no longer limited to the past school of thought, which restricted their role to that of the school building administrator and the executor of managerial tasks (Murphy, 2003). Currently, ISLs are required to be the chief instructional leaders and high-level visionaries that support faculty and staff in accomplishing the mission of the school, providing adequate and appropriate support for teachers and students, cultivating, and developing positive school climate and culture, being shrewd fiscal and budget managers, and the leading thought partner for parents and the broader community. The current political and social climate demands that national organizations, which grant accreditation, and state departments of education, which credential graduates from educational leadership preparation programs, shift their approach. It is my position that the current state of education in the nation requires an innovative approach to the preparation of ISLs; with a specific focus on developing program graduates to be actively anti-racist, critically conscious, culturally responsive ISLs.

Education is ahistorical, uncritical, and inherently racist. The legacy of white supremacist ideology prevails throughout the existing and accepted ontological and epistemological perspectives of history offered in PreK-12 through post-secondary education. To prepare ISLs to be effective, programs must grapple with and problematize the existing narratives purported in

PreK-12 and post-secondary education. This is necessary because racism, implicit bias, discrimination, and anti-Blackness are foundational issues within education. Critical theories such as Critical Race Theory coupled with liberatory practices should be explored as a vehicle to help develop actively anti-racist, critically conscious, culturally responsive ISLs.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the political and social unrest call for reimagining the programs charged with preparing ISLs to help them become culturally responsive school leaders (CRSLs). This shift is necessary as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, People of Color, and historically excluded communities broadly are demanding the end of federal, state, and local municipal sanctioned violence against Black bodies. The position of this paper is that ISLs report feeling ill-prepared to navigate challenges around cultural and racial tensions because curriculum within preparation programs is ahistorical and taught through an uncritical lens (Johnston & Young, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016). I also assert that this shift requires an adaptive, critical approach which begins by developing SLs capacity to become critically conscious educational leaders.

Literature Review

In 1997 Charles M. Mills published *The Racial Contract*, which challenged the accuracy of history globally. Mills (1997) asserted that there was "...a global theoretical framework for situating discussions of race and white racism, and thereby challenging the assumptions of white political philosophy" (p. 2). Mills challenged accepted social, political, and economic theories and articulated a clear, concise counternarrative against the dominant narratives on social and contract theories in society. Building upon and extending Pateman's (1988) school of thought in *The Sexual Contract*, Mills (1997) proffered the existence of a global "racial contract" anchored in a global white supremacist power structure. He interrogated the accuracy and validity of the global historical narrative used to articulate the existing dominant narrative. Mills asserted that this contract "...is political, moral, and epistemological; the Racial Contract is real, and economically, in determining who gets what, the Racial Contract is an exploitation contract" (p. 9). He orients his argument by assailing the foundation of globally accepted standards of epistemology:

The establishment of society thus implies the denial that a society already existed; the creation of society requires the intervention of white men, who are thereby positioned as already sociopolitical beings. White men who are (definitionally) already part of society encounter nonwhites who are not, who are "savage" residents of a state of nature characterized in terms of wilderness, jungle, wasteland. These white men bring partially into society as subordinate citizens or exclude on reservations or deny the existence of or exterminate. In the colonial case, admittedly preexisting but (for one reason or another) deficient societies (decadent, stagnant, corrupt) are taken over and run for the "benefit" of the nonwhite natives, who are deemed childlike, incapable of self-rule and handling their own affairs, and thus appropriately wards of the state. (p. 13).

The erasure of Africa's contributions: the continent, its countries, and its people frame the white supremacist, patriarchal, heteronormative, and hegemonic ideologies designed, developed, and purported as the ontological and epistemological frameworks in society (Waite, 2021a). These

perspectives, flawed, faulty, and false, are cornerstones in education and disseminated in PreK-12 education today. The global commitment to white supremacist ideology as the orientation or mark of developing civilized societies has been utilized to construct hegemonic caste systems and hierarchies for centuries (Fields, 1982; Freire, 2000). These ideologies have been weaponized to subjugate countries and people physically, mentally, and financially throughout history (Anderson, 2016; Mills, 1997). The consistent theme that has prevailed is that White men are the originators of ideas and are the standard-bearers, and validators, who dictate what is and is not legitimate. This is the prevailing ontology in academe today and continues to persist in PreK-12 because teachers and ISLs at the building and district levels are educated to maintain the racial contract in schools, ergo, in communities throughout the United States (Leonardo, 2009; Wilder, 2013).

The Construction of the Ideology of Race in America

Barbara Fields (1982) dismantled the constructs of race and racism based on race in *The Ideology of Race in American History*. She proffered that race is a social construct born out of the need to create an economic caste system based on race.

As Christopher Lasch pointed out many years ago, the idea of the Negro took time to become distinct “from related concepts of nationality and religion—from the concepts of African, heathen, and savage.” It was, he argued, “at the very point in time when large numbers of men and women were beginning to question the moral legitimacy of slavery” that the idea of race came into its own (1982, p. 152).

Dr. Fields boldly asserts this argument based on historical context that is difficult to refute. Her assessment aligns with sentiments expressed by Douglass (1849), Du Bois (2003), and Woodson (1933), about the false, archaic, and immensely flawed arguments regarding the antecedents of slavery as well as the enslaved Africans relegated into a race-based economic caste system in America. Anti-Black narratives persist in education largely because of the origin story of the enslaved Africans who were brought to America in the 17th century. These deficit narratives were constructed, weaponized, and perpetuated about the enslaved Africans back then and they continue to serve as the foundation for the prevailing narratives about Black students today.

Ahistorical narratives about history continue to persist in education. History books continue to reference the enslaved Africans that survived the middle passage as ‘slaves’ which communicates a negative connotation about them intimating that their humanity is subjective. Black children, all children really, continue to learn that the orientation of Black people in this country was in subjugated bondage. Just like the textbooks continue to perpetuate a White settler colonial narrative eviscerating the history, culture, and contributions of the Indigenous communities that inhabited this land long before 1492. However, today, in schools, children continue to learn about the conquests of Spain and other European countries without hearing about the impact of colonization on the colonized.

In 2021, history textbooks continue to teach school aged children that ‘all men were created equal and endowed with God given rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’. Black, as well as communities of color and historically excluded communities, live under the threat of

state-sanctioned murder with impunity, as history has taught us. History should be taught from a critical perspective because it offers robust and rich opportunities for students to learn about the tragic aspects of our history in the hopes that they will be equipped to interrupt the pathology of white supremacy and disrupt patterns and cycles of oppression. All people are not free in America and the myth of meritocracy as a universal aspirational value that is applied evenly to everyone is a misnomer, at best. The founding fathers were not talking about all men; they meant White, cisgender, heteronormative, wealthy, landowning men, like themselves (Waite, 2021a).

Yet, meritocracy, equality, tolerance, and colorblindness are still taught as crucial American values in education. These narratives are taught in PreK-12 education today as standard 'American values' and anchor the ontological and epistemological bedrock of education (Anderson, 2016; Wilder, 2013). These narratives are presented as "norms" that are prevalent in dominant society throughout the world and are foundations for racist and anti-Black ideology in the US (Dumas & ross, 2016). Shifting the field of education will take a tremendous and collective effort from various stakeholders; families, teachers, ISLs, preparation program faculty, researchers, etc. To accomplish the goal of disrupting the aforementioned narratives in education, all ISL preparation programs must make the appropriate investments in order for their graduates to be equipped to disrupt and dismantle systems of inequity; this calls for a theory of critical consciousness and a new direction for developing ISLs.

Using Critical Theories and Liberatory Praxis to develop ISLs

At its heart, inclusive teaching as liberatory praxis is about fostering students' learning and nurturing their freedom. It partly entails affirming every student's humanity in ways that: demonstrate care, resist bigotry, acknowledge and counter structural inequalities, promote critical thinking, and make learning enjoyable and socially and culturally relevant. It further involves teachers upholding high learning expectations of all students (Andrews, et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Rojas & Liou, 2017), recognizing the political nature of teaching (Bartolomé, 1994; Freire, 2000; Gutiérrez, 2013; hooks, 1994; Naylor & Keddie, 2007), and striving to advance students on a path to self-determination (Wilson et al., 2019, p. 6).

Liberatory praxis undergirds pedagogy; it centers the goal and shifts the educational philosophy in classrooms, schools, and districts. Educating students for the purposes of their liberation is different from improving student achievement, which is what accrediting organizations and preparation programs identify as goals for the ISLs they prepare (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011). Liberatory praxis accepts that teaching is a political act and rejects the position that it is politically neutral (Pitsoe & Mahlangu, 2014; Freire, 2000). Liberatory praxis centers the act of liberation requiring examination, interrogation, and exploration of the dynamics, constructs of power, and relationships in education broadly, and specifically, within schools. Integrating liberatory praxis is a necessary step in reimagining preparation programs for ISLs.

Liberatory praxis must be linked to critical theory; one cannot truly become awakened or aware of their status as oppressed without examining the conditions surrounding said oppression. Critical theory provides the lens through which individuals may challenge the dominant

narrative. The use of critical theories and liberatory praxis is well documented in the literature (Ladson-Billings, 2000; King, 1991; Wilson et al., 2019). Using critical theories such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit, DisCrit, Mattering, Sense of Belonging, Opportunity Gap, Racial and Social Justice, and Asset-Based Pedagogies assists in the liberation process by providing a different lens to examine persisting problems of inequity for historically oppressed populations. CRT offers a critical perspective about the inherent racism in education that is longstanding throughout history (Baldwin 1963; Bell, 1992; Douglass & Garrison, 1849; Du Bois, 2003; Woodson, 1933).

Utilizing CRT as a framework allows for critical examination and thoughtful exploration about the systems and structures in place that sustain failure and maintain barriers to equitable access to education. When ISLs are empowered to honestly examine their role in sustaining inequity in schools, positive and transformative change can occur (Fahey et al., 2019). Preparation programs have a moral and ethical obligation to consider reimagining both existing programs and curriculum as they contribute to this growing crisis by endorsing program graduates for licensure that may be ill-equipped to lead the work of liberation (Johnston & Young, 2019; Rogers & Tienken, 2020).

The lack of critical theory within programs preparing ISLs has resulted in students graduating from these programs with their racist views and implicit biases intact. They go on to advance racist and oppressive ideological policies and practices that shape the systems students, families, and school communities must navigate (Kharem, 2006; Leonardo, 2009). As a result of a global deficit of historically accurate context in the field, individuals and organizations responsible for creating standards for preparation programs for ISLs are ill-equipped because they, too, are impacted by the gap in accurate accounts of history. The impact of this historical gap has resulted in the ahistorical, colorblind narrative that is widespread in the field of education. “Historically, the places that we call schools have consistently failed children of color in general—black boys and girls in particular—under the guise of “colorblindness.” This reality is confirmed in the opportunity gaps, graduation rates, and school discipline data culled from schools across the nation” (Watson, 2019, p.1). Colorblindness and White settler colonial ideologies help sustain, maintain, and perpetuate racism, classism, entitlement, and elitism in school districts nationwide (Hasson, 2020).

Many ISLs who graduate from preparation programs have not been successful in implementing sustainable, transformative change, in part, because they have not been trained to think critically. They graduate from programs where they have not been challenged to question the dominant narratives within schools and districts or to interrogate how they contribute to sustaining and perpetuating racist and oppressive systems, policies, and practices. (Waite, 2021a). Consequentially, these students graduate woefully underprepared because they were not exposed to theories that might push them towards the development of the skills needed for radical, transformational leadership (Alston, 2005; Shields, 2010). CRSLs are the type of leaders that research indicates significantly influence schools (Khalifa et al, 2016).

Unless ISLs are challenged to do the work required to manifest true equity in schools across the nation, education reform will continue to yield mediocre results no matter how much money federal, state, and local governments funnel into systems. Preparation programs for teachers and

ISLs alike must intentionally design programs to challenge the dominant narrative. This means preparation program faculty must interrogate the racism and white supremacy that is intricately woven into the fabric of education. Until this happens, no reforms or initiatives will be successful, and graduates from these programs will continue to be ill-equipped to become the transformative leaders needed in schools and districts across the nation.

It is critical and necessary to disrupt the pathology of whiteness and white supremacy, specifically, in preparation programs producing ISLs. These programs should use critical theory to counter the ahistorical and uncritical narratives propagated in PreK-12 education. Teachers and ISLs in school buildings and district offices are gatekeepers and have an immense amount of power and influence on shaping the narratives which impact the life trajectories of schoolchildren in this nation. Preparation programs have a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that the ISLs graduating from these programs are prepared and equipped with tools that will truly allow them to be transformative CRSLs (Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields, 2010).

Critical Consciousness and CRSL

In 1991, Joyce E. King introduced the concept of dysconscious racism to the field as a means of articulating what she described as “an impaired consciousness” in *Dysconscious Racism: Ideology, Identity, and the Miseducation of Teachers*. She highlighted the need for the students she worked with in a course to be introduced to “...the critical perspective that education is not neutral; it can serve various political and cultural interests, including social control, socialization, assimilation, domination, or liberation” (King, 1991, p. 140). She theorized that a means for attending to the issue of dysconsciousness was the strategic and intentional incorporation of liberatory praxis and the development of student’s critical consciousness. King (1991) highlighted that “...white students sometimes find such critical, liberatory approaches threatening to their self-concepts and identities...my experience is that most students from economically privileged, culturally homogeneous backgrounds are generally unaware of their intellectual biases and monocultural encapsulation” (p.142). Her assessment was that these students experience this specific challenge she describes as dysconsciousness because of their miseducation over time. She utilized liberatory practices as a part of her teaching praxis to counter the narratives dominating her student’s misperceptions.

Freire (2000) discussed the use of liberatory pedagogies, specifically the use of criticality in the development of critical consciousness in those who are oppressed. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire (2000) defined conscientização as “the awakening of critical consciousness” which he proffers could lead “...to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation” (p.36). He stated that the “awakening” of an individual's consciousness is what leads to their “liberation”. His premise is that there are those who are oppressed and are unaware of their status as oppressed. It is through using what Freire refers to as liberatory pedagogies, and critical literacies, specifically, that these individuals may gain awareness of their status. Once aware they can only gain freedom or liberation through struggle.

Freire contextualized his position by centering humanity, humanization, and dehumanization and then laid out a complex and intricate philosophy which anchored his pedagogy of the oppressed.

He likened the struggle for liberation to “childbirth” and suggested that for both the oppressor and/or the oppressed, this process might afford them the ability to emerge as a “new person” (p. 49). He asserted the following:

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. (p. 49)

According to Freire the oppressed must participate in the struggle to liberate themselves and *cannot be liberated from oppression*; “The oppressed can overcome the contradiction in which they are caught only when this perception enlists them in the struggle to free themselves” (p. 49). He described crucial components of the struggle or ‘awakening’ as a process.

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or “sub-oppressors”. The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity (p. 45).

Developing one’s critical consciousness requires the incorporation of liberatory praxis and implementing liberatory practices in education. It is the application of theory to practice that results in education; Freire highlights this to be true in and outside of formal structures of schooling. Education and liberation occur inside and outside the formal classroom setting.

Inside classrooms and school buildings, ISLs are responsible for building culture and climate. A key component of building culture is remembering that culture eats strategy for breakfast (Brown, 2018). To navigate 21st century challenges amidst the current state of political, economic, and social events in the country, there is an even greater demand that ISLs are prepared to successfully navigate racial and cultural challenges, gender disparities, discrimination based on ability, SES, and challenges around disproportionality which contribute towards limiting opportunities for students from historically excluded communities in schools. Just as students come to schools and teachers are expected to meet them where they are and provide the appropriate supports and scaffolds to help them realize their full potential, ISLs are expected to provide the appropriate support and professional development to help teachers realize their full potential and positively influence student achievement. If teachers possess deficit perspectives of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander and/or historically excluded or “poor” communities based on *their own* ahistorical, uncritical education, how are ISLs supposed to support them? Those narratives are rooted in a global white supremacist racial construct and sustained through the White settler colonial narrative. These constructs undergird ideologies such as colorblindness, tolerance, and the myth of meritocracy. How are ISLs supposed to help them improve instruction when there may be dysconsciously racist teachers impacting the quality of educational experience in schools daily? More importantly, how are ISLs supposed to help teachers provide a high-quality education if preparation programs do not prepare them adequately to do so?

Khalifa et al. (2016) examined existing literature and identified four behaviors demonstrative of developing culturally responsive school leadership or CRSL. The four components were critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and engaging students and parents in community contexts. The authors highlighted that “critical self-reflection also establishes the foundation for the development of critical consciousness in leadership preparation programs” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p.1285). They further proffered that “scholars have also started to recognize the need for professors of social justice leadership to develop their own critical consciousness before they attempt to impart this knowledge or affect the work of those they train as educational leaders” (p.1285). It is this concept of self-reflection that is key to developing critically conscious educational leaders. Programs designed to prepare ISLs must embed and incorporate CRT and liberatory praxis into course curriculum and programs.

Developing Critically Consciousness ISLs

It should be noted that it is the position of this paper that educational leadership preparation programs producing ISLs *do not* bear the sole responsibility of developing critical curriculum and equipping the students they graduate to be transformative CRSLs. Instead, it is my position that PreK-12 education needs to be completely overhauled to offer a more thorough, historically accurate, and un-sanitized depiction of the factual, unabashed, and complex history of this country. And until that occurs, it is the responsibility of academe to do so; and ISLs at both the school building and district are the last opportunity to disrupt the ideologies of white supremacy, racism, and otherness. Thus, the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the programs that prepare these leaders.

Additionally, it is important to identify my positionality as a faculty member in an educational leadership preparation program producing ISLs. I am a Black woman who is the mother of two brilliant, beautiful Black girls that attend elementary school in the district where many of the school and/or district level ISLs are my students. This work is of particular importance to me as a mother with children that may attend school in a building where one of my current or former students may teach or lead. I teach and work with the aspiring and current ISLs in my courses as if my children *will* attend school in a building they will lead. This perspective inspires a particular and distinct sense of urgency to ensure that my students begin or extend their personal journey of developing critical consciousness. As a result, I practice what I preach by utilizing critical theories, namely CRT, and incorporating liberatory practices into my teaching to support the development of critical consciousness in my students. The current global crises have exacerbated the need for CRSL; this work was sorely needed prior to both the pandemic and the 2020 #Blacklivesmatter movement ignited by the murders of unarmed Black men and women. What follows is an example of what these practices can look like when incorporated into praxis.

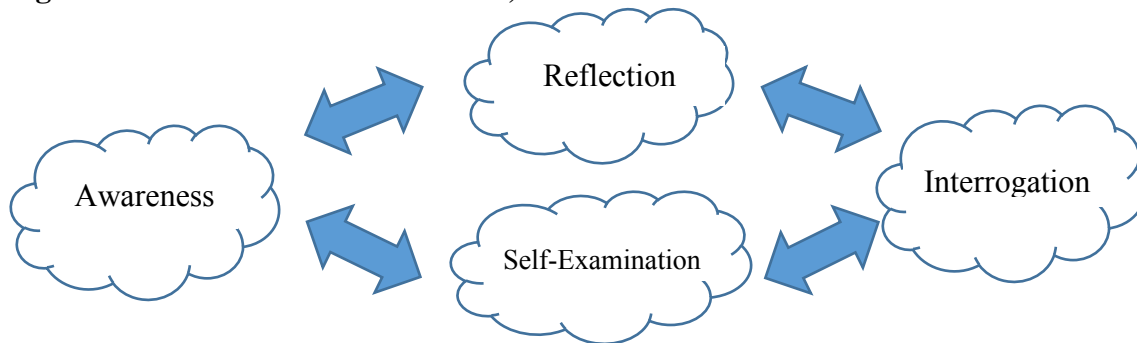
Conceptual Framework

In *Disrupting Dysconsciousness: Confronting Anti-Blackness in Educational Leadership Preparation Programs*, (Waite, 2021a) I share a tool, RISA (Waite, 2021b), which is a conceptual framework and a liberatory pedagogical tool I use in concert with CRT to support or extend the development of critical consciousness in aspiring and current ISLs. RISA is an

acronym (see below) used to describe a specific set of liberatory practices I implement in my work with students to center counternarratives and strategically disrupt any existing dysconscious racism and/or internalized racism/oppression. Additionally, I confront the inherent anti-Blackness which persists in PreK-12 and postsecondary education (Dumas & ross, 2016). These practices are grounded in the literature within the field of educational leadership theorizing research based pedagogical strategies to consider “when teaching racialized content, engaging frameworks, and approaches to leadership and all anchor the need to center students personal epistemological and ontological beliefs (Dumas & ross, 2016; Gooden & O’Doherty, 2015; Khalifa et al, 2016; King, 1991)” (Waite, 2021a, p. 8).

RISA stands for reflection, interrogation, self-examine, and awareness. *Reflection* in the framework allows educators to develop strong reflective practices that call for examining personal core values and beliefs which influence their professional practices. *Interrogation* involves engaging in a deep introspective, internal examination of what norms and narratives are accepted on face value as valid and concretized as standard, interrogating the *what* leads to the *why*. *Self-examination* requires analyzing how one’s personal values influence one’s professional actions and authentically exploring whether those decisions reinforce and sustain institutionalized racism. *Awareness* enables the recognition of and development towards conscientization and the formation of critical consciousness over time, allowing one to make change.

Figure 1: RISA Framework © Waite, 2021a



“The cycle of reflection, interrogation, self-examination, and awareness affords educators the ability to genuinely practice reflexivity and hold them accountable for *doing* the introspective work required for change to take place” (Waite, 2021a, p 14). The framework in figure 1 was conceptualized by reflecting and realizing that these were the practices I engaged in during the struggle for my own liberation and this framework continues to be helpful in navigating this lifelong journey of struggle. I initiate a RISA cycle within each course by engaging students, deeply, in the process of reflection, interrogation, self-examination, and awareness. For example, students are introduced to criticality through readings via course texts and supplemental articles, case studies, and/or media clips on the internet. Students are asked to reflect independently via a written reflection, which is submitted; they are engaged in additional cycles of reflection during class using protocols in small groups, and then again through whole group discussions and share outs. Asking students to constantly and consistently engage in sense making while reflecting pushes them from reflection to integration of *what* they think and *why*. They are challenged to examine their beliefs and practices and asked to analyze the ways they uphold and reinforce

racist and oppressive ideologies in their classrooms, as school building administrators, and in their district offices. Asking them to engage at that level leads them towards their own ‘aha moment(s)’ as they begin to become aware of not only how systems and structures memorialize oppression; they begin to see what their sphere of influence is and whether they are supporting or working towards dismantling racism and oppression.

CRT, RISA, and Disrupting the Pathology of Racism and Anti-Blackness

Without explicitly embedding critical theories and/or race language into coursework within ISL preparation programs, these programs continue to activate and weaponize the myth of meritocracy against Communities of Color and Black communities. In 2021, it is still possible for students to graduate from undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs and not discuss race (Gooden & O’Doherty, 2015). Critical theories allow faculty to develop truly inclusive classrooms. CRT offers a lens to unpack willful and dysconscious racism.

CRT is an analytical tool used to frame the lived experiences of People of Color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Its origins are rooted in critical legal studies, and the application of the theory was established in education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). Other critical theories such as LatCrit, AsianCrit, Queer Theory, DisCrit, and Feminist theory emerged from and operate in partnership with CRT. Dumas & ross (2016) highlight the fact that while CRT in the field of education has served as the lynchpin of critical theories and afforded valuable context for critical race scholars to teach and write; anti-Blackness in the field might well contribute to the fact that in 2021 criticality and the value of utilizing critical theories is still debated in the field and the broader society.

If change is going to occur, the preparation of ISLs must drastically shift. Since ISLs do not feel well prepared by their preparation programs, then faculty who train and prepare these leaders bear the moral and ethical responsibility of interrupting the pathologies of white supremacy, racism, and anti-Blackness in ISLs (Cevik et al., 2020; Hawley & James, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016). Preparation programs that approach the development of ISLs from an ahistorical and uncritical lens help sustain and perpetuate racism in education. The failure to utilize a historically accurate lens by examining history in its totality continues to ground and center privilege, white supremacy, and sustains the myth of meritocracy. These same dysconsciously racist teachers go on to become dysconsciously racist administrators. Armed with an arsenal of tools, decorated with degrees and certifications from nationally and state-accredited ahistorical, uncritical graduate programs. Dysconsciously racist administrators reinforce, sustain, and maintain the status quo, which prevents change from taking place.

Conclusions

The promise and potential of developing critically conscious ISLs is limitless, considering their influence on the climate and culture within school buildings, district offices, and communities. This issue is timely and relevant as many districts are seeing an increase in diverse student bodies and need more CRSLs. The number of racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse students is expanding exponentially (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019; NCES, 2020b). However, the number of available staff members that are racially, ethnically, and/or

socio-economically reflective of the growing student populations in urban, suburban, and rural areas is not growing at the same rate (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019). Education is largely female and White (NCES, 2020a). Statistics do not predict a shift in this trend; consequently, districts must invest in and commit to developing culturally responsive and competent ISLs to lead in schools and district offices. This requires that preparation programs targeting ISLs meet the needs of the districts, and they must also take a moral stand and adopt a curriculum that will develop critically conscious CRSLs.

Oppression is interwoven into the fabric of education and requires a critical lens to examine the myriad of ways it manifests. Critical theories, CRT, namely, continues to offer perspectives and analytical tools to identify the challenges that persist in the field of education. To make impactful change, preparation programs must strategically disrupt the ethos of white supremacy and racism within programs and curriculum, and it begins by acknowledging its role in shaping history. As Charles Mills asserted in *The Racial Contract* (1997),

The Racial Contract requires its own peculiar moral and empirical epistemology, its norms and procedures for determining what counts as moral and factual knowledge of the world... There is an understanding about what counts as a correct, objective interpretation of the world, and for agreeing to this view, one is (“contractually”) granted full cognitive standing in the polity, the official epistemic community (p.17-18).

If the education system, collectively, is not actively working to liberate all students, then it is actively working to sustain and uphold racism, white supremacy, oppression, and inequity and to perpetuate the ideology of anti-Blackness in education. (Dumas & ross, 2016; Woodson, 1933). As difficult as it might be to accept, everyone who is a part of the education system is culpable, including teachers, staff, and ISLs, as well as the faculty teaching in the preparation programs. Unless the pathology of white supremacy, racism, and anti-Blackness is challenged, ISLs will continue to sustain and perpetuate these ideologies in classrooms, school buildings, and district offices, daily.

Preparation programs that develop ISLs have a moral and ethical obligation to terminate their participation in upholding this contract. This may *begin* by intentionally committing to developing the critical consciousness of the faculty charged with teaching ISLs. Preparation programs prepare, graduate, and credential ISLs and are in the best position to disrupt the dominant pathology sustaining white supremacy and racism, which persists within schools and districts across the country.

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