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ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Professional Discourse Through a Critical Race Theory Framework by William G. Garrow, Ph.D.

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In this issue of “CTL on the Cutting Edge,” Dr. Garrow shares some thoughts about research and his transformational view of education...

For far too long, our education system has been oppressive in that not everyone benefits equitably; it has been utilized as a tool of the oppressors to maintain the status quo in our society. Several people in positions of authority have tried to put people in their place. Critical players have not effectively engaged through critical thought and discussion to dismantle this system in order to create true transformational education. At the end of the day, tearing down the systems of oppression are going to benefit everyone. It will make the world a more equitable place. But right here, right now, challenging the systems of oppression that exist in our education system will create people who can be their own authentic selves to the table in order to make real change in the world. And I think that's what I'm trying to do. And I think that's what my research has the possibility to do.

For any topic or project that I work on, there are two main things driving it. First, I work in solidarity with intersectional communities in the role they have given me. That way I am able to “give back” to those communities that have taught me so much...I could never “give back” nearly as much as I have received. I try to “give back” by building further research and working together with community members within that research. Second, all of my research and projects revolve around one thing—tearing down systems of oppression that rule this world, specifically in the United States. If it does not do that, I will not be doing it. That is what my passion is. It is who I am. And it is what I do.

My framework for any project is critical race theory because all of my work is intersectional and centers on racialized oppressions. The work I do focuses on tearing down a system of privilege. Let me share an example. Something I deal with on a daily basis is hearing students say, “I just don't think I fit [in the ivory tower of academia].” Sixty-seven percent of our incoming students at CSUN are students of color. That means, if 67% of our new students don't feel like they belong here, they feel like they're imposters here. How are they ever going to succeed? How are we going to ensure they have a more equitable future? By working in solidarity with both faculty and students from various oppressed communities, we can work towards ensuring a more equitable educational space for ALL students. So that's just one example to illuminate a little bit of how I approach all of my professional endeavors.

I like to call what I'm trying to create an “authentic space” in education and research by telling radical truths. This is my radical truth. Everything that I do in some way goes back to decolonizing education and research. When we look at communities and their experiences over time, that's where the real knowledge is. We must honor those communities; they have what's called cultural community wealth and it is our responsibility to bring that forth into today's education. And that will radically change education, by decolonizing it. This is a process I call “inspiritizing”—to make authentic space. That's what I'm hoping to add to this field. I believe that education is the one true thing that we can pass down generation after generation. That's the only way we'll make this world more equitable.

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Want to Learn More? RESOURCES ON CRITICAL RACE THEORY

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