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EDITORIAL



## Racially-just epistemologies and methodologies that disrupt whiteness

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### Motivation for the special issue

I begin this special issue editorial with a message of hope at the possibilities of facilitating positive change in the educational research landscape through pause and reflection, unlearning and learning, and confrontation and dialogue. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014), in his book *Epistemologies of the South* shows us that disrupting current methods and epistemologies that sustain racism is possible but only if we are open to experiencing ‘surprise and wonder’ (p. 11). He posits that this will be a significant challenge for those of us socialised and trained to see alternative ways of knowing as irrelevant and inferior. To be open to untraining and unlearning can seem threatening to those who have for far too long been privileged from an othering discourse. *Disruption* can mean many things. Hope is one of them.

What ecologies of knowledges can we, as educational researchers, discover if we embrace Santos’ (2014) ‘principle of incompleteness of all knowledges’ (p. 189)? The principle of incompleteness of all knowledges simply advocates that all knowledges are incomplete, they have internal and external limitations and that we should be driven by the principle of co-presence and challenging oppressive knowledge systems. In the summer of 2020, at the annual board meeting of IJRME, the board members paused and deliberated on challenges of researching in the face of global political and national events. These events enact symbolic and physical violence and create increasing uncertainty, hostility, and inequality. The editors stressed the importance of educational researchers to continuously ‘work together, to tangle with the myriad of interconnected issues’ (Rose and Todd, 2021, p. 1). This work would require us to reimagine and expand ‘our repertoires of research practices’ (Rose and Todd, 2021, p. 1).

We can no longer deny that, as researchers, we have access to multiple pathways, epistemologies, theories, methodologies, and research practices that could confront the hidden curriculum of educational research (Matias, 2021) that imposes problematic racial stereotypes, or worse perpetuates racism in our understanding of the causes of inequalities within education. This danger is neither imagined nor a reality distinct to the European context; for instance, across the Atlantic, there have been several strategic attempts to ban or question the role of critical race theory (CRT). More than 42 states in the U.S.A. are currently introducing legislation that either ban or restrict the teaching of CRT and other forms of inequality such as sexism, homophobia, etc. within school curricula (Villarrea, 2021; Morgan 2022). In a similar vein, in the U.K., The Report of the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities (HMG, 2021), which is also known as the Sewell Report, effectively rewrites the official narrative on state of racism within the U.K. and denies any form of institutional racism (Tikly, 2022). Tikly (2022) argues that the report itself magnifies the danger of objectivity that is often used as a tool to silence knowledges produced by scholars, many of whom are Black, Indigenous, from Global majority and/or minoritised/racialised identities. The report repeatedly reminds the reader that it is ‘evidence-based and data led’ (Tikly, 2022, p. 4), and yet it systematically excludes

research and academics that identify institutional racism as a significant factor in explaining social inequalities. Similar attacks on the counternarratives and critiques of other nation-states can be observed in different parts of the world, all using different apparatus for control (Dogan, 2022). Walter Mignolo (2017) reminds us that what we are witnessing in research and in higher education is epistemicide; the silencing of dissent and knowledges by way of so-called 'patriotic laws' that attack scholars and knowledges that challenge a dominant oppressive system. He proposes epistemic disobedience as a way of de-linking from dominant knowledge systems and 'changing the terms of the conversation' (Mignolo, 2011, p. 50). Epistemic disobedience does not necessarily mean a new beginning, a new epistemology, but a 'different place, to a different beginning' outside of western thought (p. 46).

In addition, the attention to epistemicide is not a new concern because scholars of colour have been calling for a 'paradigmatic revolution' for almost four decades (Stanfield, 1985, p. 411). This illustrates how calls for a radical analysis and reappraisal of knowledge construction within social sciences, which critique and question dominant theories and methodologies, have tended to receive little institutional support (Matias, 2021). Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002) raised concerns about the existing demarcation lines between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' forms of knowledge, and of utilising culturally deficit frameworks to study the reasons why communities of colour endure poor educational experiences (Dillard, 2000; Huber, 2009; Santos, 2014). Contributors in this special issue are eager to overturn this apartheid of knowledge, apply an asset-based lens, and show us fresh and innovative research strategies, epistemologies and methods which have been developed by researchers committed to racially just educational research. Despite some advances, there is still a lack of understanding within the teaching of research methods of how racism is an epistemic issue. This may be because educational researchers comprising scholars from White, Black and Indigenous backgrounds, as well as scholars from the Global Majority are all currently trained within the traditions and socio-historical contexts which only validate western knowledge systems (Matias, 2021). These dominant systems/traditions do not recognise, and subsequently undermine, the epistemologies and methodologies developed by Black American, Pan-African, Indigenous, Asian, Latina/Chicano, and Global Majority scholars that could challenge the 'ways in which racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other systems of oppression' are sustained within the educational landscape (Huber, 2009, p. 642).

This special issue also draws on existing research on social justice research methodologies that have been undertaken by women of colour, who needed to carve out 'theoretical and methodological spaces' of their own (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 14). These scholars have challenged the domination of gatekeepers who have a history of 'shaping the rules which have historically guided formal educational research, the system of knowledge production within higher education, and the meanings and legitimacy surrounding research processes' (Dillard, 2000, p. 676). Linda Tillman (2002) outlines racially-just epistemologies and methodologies as an enquiry that is grounded in 'an ethically responsible agenda' and motivated by social justice (p. 6). In centring culturally sensitive research, Tillman promotes the value of experiential knowledge in analysing, understanding and reporting social issues. Much of the existing scholarship on racially-just epistemologies and methodologies are included under the umbrella of critical qualitative inquiry. Whilst critical qualitative traditions have generally been commended for their justice-oriented focus, nonetheless, some of these traditions have been developed within the context of White social history and as Scheurich and Young (1997) argue, 'virtually all of the different critical approaches ... have been repeatedly criticised for their racial biases' (p. 10). Therefore, it is important that the traditional critical paradigm promotes the development of new racially-just epistemologies deriving from non-Eurocentric and non-White social contexts.

This special issue is underpinned by two central beliefs: (1) that whiteness in educational research is sustained by the epistemological ignorance of race (Mills, 2007) and that European colonisation contributes to epistemicide, i.e. the destruction of knowledges held by the subaltern; and (2) that communities of colour are creators of knowledge and should be central to developing knowledge

in way that helps them 'talk back' to the western construction of their lived experience (bell hooks, 1989, p. 9; Hill Collins, 1990).

## Contributions for part 1

In response to the call for papers, the journal received fantastic contributions on a range of themes, which went beyond our initial expectation that this would only be a single special issue. The editorial board, therefore, took the much-needed decision to publish two special issues dedicated to this theme. Part One comprises seven papers that provide plenty of food for thought and, dare I say, nourishment for the soul. These papers share with us different and sometimes new epistemological, theoretical, and methodological works as well as making us rethink how existing methods such as interviews and focus groups can become more racially-just. This special issue is deeply reflexive, not just in terms of researcher positionality but also in how we understand the field of educational research.

Cee Carter and Korina Jocson start off this special issue with a theoretical framework that helps us critique the performative nature of 'racial justice university statements' that have increasingly become the trend after every global event or local incident of racialised violence. Carter and Jocson share with us their experiences of how epistemic erasure is not just limited to the content and teaching of research methods courses within graduate programmes, but also within the university's own research practices. In this paper, they look at what is involved in breaking away from this 'disciplined path' (2022 p. 2), to becoming untameable and to forging new paths for themselves within and outside these educational spaces.

Drawing on the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva on theorisation of raciality, and utilising *kuwento* and *plática* methodologies which are infused with Black creative works, they invite us to 'notice, appreciate, anticipate, hear' (p. 3) so that we too can become untameable and begin to see how we risk ascribing to colonial practices. Using da Silva's theoretical lens, Carter and Jocson offer us three ways to trace instances of raciality in university statements, and recognise how they are embedded in the logic of obliteration. Firstly, performative statements rewrite the subaltern subject as lacking in agency and subject to another's power. Secondly, these statements excuse and provide justification for the violence. Thirdly, these statements reinforce the transparency thesis. Instead, they propose da Silva's value of equation to disrupt this form of structural and strategic racism. This equation has parallels with Mignolo's (2017) epistemic disobedience, in that it requires de-linking from existing knowledge systems that utilise a deficit-based lens to understanding educational issues experienced by minoritised communities, and move towards an asset-based approach that takes into consideration the socio-political-historical contexts that minoritised communities experience.

The second paper by Gilda Ochoa (2022) embraces a Latina Feminist epistemology and picks up on Carter and Jocson's concerns of the need to break free from researcher taming that occurs within research training and practice within higher education. Ochoa illustrates how, by being rooted within one's own community, can help researchers become more cognisant of the role they can play in shifting the narrative of communities that are being portrayed through a deficit-based lens to one that builds on community knowledge and practices. The paper focuses on 'becoming neighbours' with local community members, activists, city councils, school boards, minoritised students and families, and other local stakeholders.

Ochoa points to the real struggle of doing this research within the academy; for instance, knowing that her participants wanted to be named for the knowledge they had co-constructed with her, whilst she was obligated to anonymise them due to university ethical guidelines, thereby erasing their contributions. She also highlights the cost of invisibilising her own community because the university determined which communities of colour embodied popular topics, thus meriting their focus and funding. Choosing to disseminate her research within accessible texts over academic journals meant that her academic progression was impeded for not producing 'research outputs',

nonetheless, her community was able to benefit from her work. Privileging dialogue, storytelling, poetry and other forms associated with Latina Feminist methodology, meant that her research sample size and methods were always considered outside of what constitutes 'academic research' and yet these methods allowed her to be a 'part of enduring relationships and participate in collective action' (p. 10). Ochoa's journey provides a valuable lesson of the path taken by minoritised researchers, and the emotional, physical and professional toll it takes to disrupt whiteness in educational research.

Cindy Escobedo and Lorena Camargo's (2022) paper offers readers 'another possible world' (Santos, 2014) through a new theoretical guide, namely *Critical Race Feminista Praxis (CRFP)* which merges Critical Race Theories, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x feminist frameworks and history methods. They ascribe to Delgado-Bernal's (1998) Chicana/Latina 'cultural intuition' as central to their research episteme, and see it as a 'complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective and dynamic' (Delgado-Bernal 1998, p. 567–568). Escobedo and Camargo provide us with separate examples of research tools that they each utilised in their work to reclaim community history that has been largely ignored within mainstream educational research.

Like Carter and Jocson, Escobedo utilised the *plática* methodology in creating motherscholar-daughterscholar historical archives. Escobedo's work centres on researching how Chicana/Latina mothers and daughters navigate college education at various intersections. Escobedo utilises a range of Chicana/Latina practices to conduct her research such as writing letters, analysing archives that included news articles, photographs, other artefacts, and oral educational narratives, all of which challenged the official records of mothers and daughters' educational histories. Camargo's research focuses on analysing the representation of communities of colour within children's literature and libraries, and again utilises a variety of practices associated with Chicana/Latina methodology such as oral histories, personal narratives, and artefacts such as resumes, correspondences and pictures. These practices helped Camargo document a counternarrative of communities of colour as well as allowing participants to become collaborators and writers of their own histories. Both Escobedo and Camargo, through their research methodologies, show us how neutrality and 'objectivity' can often marginalise communities of colour because they are excluded from research processes, and that drawing on CRFP, they can effectively 'talk back' (bell hooks, 1989, p. 9) to this deliberate exclusion.

The fourth paper examines how *TransHipHop* Pedagogy can be a form of epistemic disobedience to challenge formal schooling spaces that marginalise young people in Senegal. Noella Niati and Payal Shah utilise a new framework that is underpinned by critical consciousness, culturally relevant pedagogy, and cultural modelling to understand how young people negotiate their identities, claim their rights, and engage in civic education. Their work recognises historical contexts that include political instability, civil war and western interventions, and centres on how 'Y'en a Marre', a campaign group consisting of Senegalese rappers and journalists who engage with young people to challenge people in power. Utilising the Comparative Case Study (CCS) approach and carrying out semi-structured interviews with 'Y'en a Marre' members, their research centres on the role of local experiences and linguistic practices in challenging the status quo.

Niati and Shah use *TransHipHop* Pedagogy because this allows them to meet young people 'on their own turf' (2022 p. 3), and authentically capture their views through creative form. They offer us a different 'ecology of knowledge' (Santos, 2014, p. 189) by drawing on *Transnégritude* as an epistemology, which challenges the colonial discourse through addressing how erasure and epistemicide occurs as well as how certain groups become 'racialised Others'. I was specifically drawn to how Niati and Shah present YEM members' views in their own creative *TransHipHop* form: 'You see, we are rappers in one way or another. You see, so this our generation' (p. 7). Such representation shows us how research dissemination can 'de-link' from dominant western practices, showing how Black and Brown participants should be portrayed as agentic.

Melanie Gast, James Chisholm, Yohimar Sivira-Gonzalez and Trisha Douin make a compelling argument for how a colour-evasive lens in real-time data collection is effectively whiteness in

action, and why an ‘intentional attention to patterns of racial oppression and actions’ (2022 p. 1) is a crucial task for all researchers within educational research. Their paper provides a reflexive retrospective view of their experiences of conducting interviews with mentors participating in a multilingual peer mentoring programme at a school. As a research team that included an Asian American, White American, Latina and Black researchers, they recognise how traditional qualitative research methods training is inadequate in preparing researchers to address incidences of racism and microaggression during the data collection process, and consequently sustaining/reproducing racial injustices.

The research by Gast et al. pushes us to think of various critical moments that are presented to researchers and our possible responses (or lack thereof) in listening to ‘minimization of racism, and racially coded stereotypes during discussions of race-related issues’ (p. 5), and the toll it subsequently takes on Black and Brown researchers by simply ‘moving on during interviews’ (p. 7). They offer us practical strategies for future work that includes discussing the role of White researchers/allies in teams, being well versed in racial and historical contexts, anticipating colour-evasive narratives in interviews, and actively addressing structural racism as part of a dialogue.

In the sixth paper, Michael Moses II (2022) shares similar concerns to Gast et al. over the appropriateness of existing research methods when researching race and racism. He reminds us that whilst racialised violence and rhetoric, specifically anti-Black violence is evident through visual means such as YouTube, TikTok and other social media platforms for the world to witness, nonetheless, our ‘methods are far from visual’ (p. 1). As the video of the brutal murder of George Floyd by a White male police officer became public, the world saw truth through undeniable and powerful visuals that would otherwise be hidden. A truth that Black communities in the U.S.A. knew all along – the institutional forms of anti-Black violence. Moses brings to our attention to the urgency of innovating existing research tools like focus groups by including visual elicitation tools to disrupt whiteness.

The paper first interrogates ‘methodological dissonance’ and ‘methodological niceness’ (p. 2) that exists within current research method traditions, that sustains whiteness and prevents researchers from becoming change agents. Moses provides an exemplar from his own research underpinned by principles of CRT and culturally responsive enquiry, to show how a meaningful dialogue can take place on racism on campus using visual-elicited focus groups. The focus groups consisted of Black, Latinx, Indian American, and White students, and who were asked to watch an actual viral video of anti-Asian hate featuring students from the same university and then encouraged to share their thoughts. The visual element brings the reality of racism that Black and Brown students often face on campus and encouraged them to name the ugliness of racism. Whilst this innovative technique offers a powerful potential to rupture/break away from ‘niceness’, Moses provides a cautionary note of how exposure to visuals of the ugliness of racism can be triggering for the members of that subject community, and that researchers need to be careful of how ‘talking back’ does not further traumatise the participants.

The last paper of this special issue documents the colonial violence and generational schooling experiences of Mapuche women in Chile. Andrea Lira, Ana Luisa Muñoz-García and Elisa Loncon situate their research against the historical backdrop of successive governments engaging in epistemicide and erasure of indigenous communities like the Mapuche community. Informed by Mapuchian philosophy and ways of knowing, the researchers do not see methodology as fixed, rather it evolves with each story shared by Mapuche Indigenous women.

Engagement and analysis in the research by Lira et al. is informed by the Mapuchian concepts of *Domoche* and *Azmapu*. *Domoche* means determined women fighting for hers and her community’s rights, and *Azmapu* means the ethical equilibrium and interdependence between the self and the world. These philosophical concepts guide these researchers to develop a methodology that centres on indigenous knowledge, and approaches research as a ‘process of love, ethics and political commitment’ (p. 7). They demonstrate how the physical place where they listened to their participants’ personal experiences was central to their research aims and methodology. Researchers gathering at a Mapuchian activist’s house for data gathering meant cooking food together, and

discussing schooling experiences around the dinner table. These gatherings helped researchers and participants make memories that were healing, since they centred on indigenous experiences of centuries of surviving against forced educational assimilation. Whilst this process of making memories was an indigenous way of developing counternarratives, nonetheless, it should also be approached with caution because it can reveal intergenerational trauma from oppressive regimes. Lira et al. reflect that whilst their research offers no generalisability, it does offer a path to challenge epistemicide and centre Mapuchian women's ways of knowing.

## Possibilities and next steps

All the papers included in Part One of this special issue speak to the importance of recognising and centring histories of oppression and racial, socio-cultural, and political contexts of their subject communities. The historical context in each of these papers reveals the decades or in some cases, centuries of epistemicide and necropolitics that Black, Indigenous, Latina/o/x/, and Chicana/o/x communities of colour all over the world are subjected to, and how that perpetuates a deficit-based understanding of these communities within educational research. This special issue was keen to invite papers that looked particularly at how critical epistemologies and methodologies transform research practices, as well as providing an alternative to current research practices that further silence minoritised or vulnerable communities. It also wanted to promote papers that showed existing, new and innovative race-based critical theories, as a theoretical framework to be utilised in education research that centres on race and other inter-categorical complexity. Finally, we wanted to know how racially-just epistemologies and methodologies speak to the complex relationships between researchers and participants. The papers included in this special issue provide us with different ecologies of knowledges, strategies and tools through which to learn more about, and possibly encourage us to think of, how as educational researchers we could de-link with some of the current educational research practices that are problematic and damaging. These concerns will also be explored in Part Two of the special issue that promises further diverse and critical perspectives.

On a final point as the guest editor of this special issue, I see this as a liberatory project that stands on the shoulders of educational research giants such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, Venus Evans-Winters, Kakali Bhattacharya, Cheryl Matias, Cynthia Dillard, Melanie Nind, and many others from the Global Majority who have advocated for social justice within educational research and within other disciplines that have informed educational research. I hope this special issue too can encourage the discipline to evolve and adapt to the demands of our time. I would like to express my gratitude to those whose emotional and intellectual labour helped to make this special issue possible – Dr Altheria Caldera, Dr Jo Rose and Prof. Liz Todd, and the editorial board members of IJRME. A special thanks and appreciation also goes to the many wonderful academics who volunteered to act as peer-reviewers who provided constructive feedback to our contributors for both special issues. Finally, I would like to thank all our contributors to this special issue. You have shared with us valuable knowledges that will be useful for researchers committed to disrupting whiteness in educational research. The field of educational research is indebted to you all.

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