

School Leader's Perception of Critical Race Theory

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ABSTRACT: *While the academic concept of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is more than 40 years old, the debate over whether CRT should be included in today's K-12 educational system has surfaced over the last decade, leading to highly contested political races and dividing school systems. Individuals who support the teaching of critical race theory believe that it is a means of analyzing and recognizing how race and racism are historically foundational to American law and institutions. Opponents believe that teaching CRT only serves to reinforce viewing all aspect of American society through a racial lens and that arguably people indirectly inherit guilt as a result of racial oppression caused by their ancestors. School leaders face accusations of indoctrinating students by teaching CRT and grapple with finding a balance in ensuring that there are not inequalities in education. This research analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data on the perspectives of school leaders as it relates to the teaching of CRT. The research uses a quantitative data set with 96 respondents and a qualitative data set with 80 respondents for data analysis.*

KEYWORDS: *Critical Race Theory, school leaders, racism, equality*

I. Introduction

Before one can understand Critical Race Theory (CRT) it is important to understand the historical context of contemporary racism and the racialized history rooted in Western colonialism, slavery, and racial violence. European colonialism shaped and influenced power in other areas which continued the foundation of global racism. This model became an organizational construct comprised of direct and indirect rule, control, and classism to which white settlers were subjected. As time passed, racial management and control over different groups grew and white supremacy (here meaning superiority) became the basis for white structures and ideology (Christian, 2019). Over time, scholars have deemed the examination of whiteness and whitening of the global sphere as critical to understanding oppression and economic powers and structures that reproduced themselves, only to serve as oppressive practices.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was pioneered by critical legal scholars and theorists including Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Patricia Williams, and others who studied the normalization of white supremacy, unconscious racism, the construct of law serving the interests of one group over another. By definition, CRT is the belief that racism is systematic woven into every aspect of society and as a discipline focuses on bringing about understanding of how racism shaped laws and how those laws have continued to impact the lives of people of color. Ideally CRT can be a powerful tool in analyzing the way elements of racism are engrained in policies, law, and economic systems in ways that adversely impact marginalized groups (Winterhalter, 2021).

The fundamental questions related to CRT are (LTHJ Global, 2021):

1. How does the law construct race?
2. How has the law protected racist policies and institutions?
3. How does the law reproduce racial inequity?
4. How can the law be used to dismantle race, racism, and racial injustice, and inequity?

Today, CRT has become more of a legislative and political issue rather than a significant historical concept. Recent research has documented the critical race disconnect between communities of color and their schools, teachers, and administrators. According to Parker & Villalpando (2007) parents have high expectations for their children to succeed in school, but when schools are faced with problems, whether related to discipline, curriculum, inequitable administrative policies, or poor instruction, they find themselves dealing with threats of racial related tension and conflicts as there is often a correlation between race and how these issues are resolved or addressed. In those schools where there is a black (or brown) school leader, the experiences of that leader inform any action as it relates to those problems as cited by Parker and Villalpando however the key difference here is that there is race-based knowledge as to how social, political, and cultural systems impact students and those leaders of color often engage as activists and can successfully challenge discriminatory systems often with the help of the community.

While they may not focus completely on CRT, advocacy in a wide range of areas is part of their vision as a school leader. Those areas included disabilities, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other issues impact historically marginalized members of the student population (Klupchak, 2014). Klupchak (2014) argues that culturally relevant and responsive leadership should be part of a principal's or head of school's pedagogy, thus making the case for social justice activism and advocacy for all students, hence making a concept like CRT one that can be incorporated into practice but not necessarily foundational. In doing so, Smith asserts that a more humanistic commitment and concern for students and members of the community that support students becomes the framework for addressing wider issues that impact marginalized groups of students who are statistically more often black and brown. From this perspective, CRT can provide a lens rather than be a blanket perspective when it comes to tackling these issues.

Despite how challenging, school leaders should be concerned about critical race theory. It offers a different approach to looking at American history and those underrepresented in society. While the perception is that viewing American history from a CRT perspective is distorted and anti-American, it should be a tool that can help teachers to have difficult conversations about a time in American history where oppression and inequality existed (Watkins, 2022). The overarching question is how school leaders perceive critical race theory generally. The following research questions serve as a means of gaining a better understanding of what school leaders actually know about CRT and how this understanding impacts their leadership and engagement.

The research questions to be investigated are as follows:

- RQ₁: How familiar are school leaders with the history and principles of critical race theory? Do they understand critical race theory as a concept?
- RQ₂: What stance (politically/socially) do school leaders take on critical race theory? Is it a mostly positive or negative perspective?
- RQ₃: In what way do school leaders' view the place/role of critical race theory in K12 schools? Do they believe that it is being taught in schools and if so, is this positive or negative?
- RQ₄: Do school leaders feel prepared to examine laws, district policy, and school procedures that impact one race differently than another?

II. Literature Review

To answer these four research questions, an extensive review of the literature as it relates to school leaders and critical race theory is necessary. This review will look at the following variables: understanding of CRT, school leader's perspective of CRT, teaching of CRT, the examination of race in schools.

2.1 Understanding CRT

Critical race theory (CRT) is a significant framework for focusing on educational equity in American educational systems and it has been helpful in reframing thought and perspectives around diverse students (Miller, Liu, & Ball, 2020). The challenge is breaking down what CRT is and recognizing the benefits of this theory. One of the most important facets of CRT is being able to create a space for the voices of people of color to be heard. In terms of understanding CRT, one has to grasp that the *voice* come in the form of personal narratives, parables, chronicled incidents, some revisionist histories and even the creative arts; all designed to help to illustrate the needs of these individuals and to serve as a counter-narrative to some of the stereotypical narratives and to expose some of the normalization of viewing these stereotypes as valid (Miller, et al, 2020).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2013) another strength of CRT is that it helps individuals to name their own reality in three specific ways: 1) much of social reality is socially constructed, 2) stories provide members of outgroups a vehicle for psychic self-preservation and for lessening their own subordination, and 3) stories help members of ingroups enrich their own reality. The reason this is so important is that it creates opportunities for individuals to really take time to learn from one another rather than making assumptions or using unusual conventions to make assumptions about individuals from different groups. Moreover, this is a way to encourage people to think outside of their own world view.

Martinez (2014) asserts that we need to understand CRT because the question of whether racism still exists is relevant and the meaning of racism has taken on a more contemporary position surrounding the definition. It is now more than a matter of prejudicial attitudes and often crosses the lines into what becomes a common practice that is not to be challenge; and if it is challenged individuals become negatively scrutinized rather than viewed as advocates. Throughout history there has also been the ideology of color-blind racism which relies on a set of tenants: abstract liberalism, naturalization of race, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Because of these frames of reference, the dominant racial ideology continues to exist either explaining away racism or ignoring the plight of underrepresented groups; all of which make the concept of CRT one that should be understood as it does not perpetuate the status quo and the institutionalization of racism and injustice. Rather it serves to make the case for how we study, uncover and advocate for changes in law and policies that are deeply constructed in race (Martinez, 2014).

One important factor that should be considered when expressing the importance of understanding what CRT is, becomes whether those in the educational system can look beyond the terminology for better understanding of the concept as often times confusion results when the term is defined. In 2021 EdWeek Research Center Study educators' responses varied depending on whether they were given a definition of critical race theory, which has become a catchall phrase for anything having to do with race. When asked whether they supported just the teaching of this idea, without labeling it critical race theory, 47 percent of educators said no. But when asked if the same idea defined as critical race theory should be taught, 52 percent said no. Approximately 55 percent said critical race theory should not be taught when not offered any definition (Pendharkar, 2022).

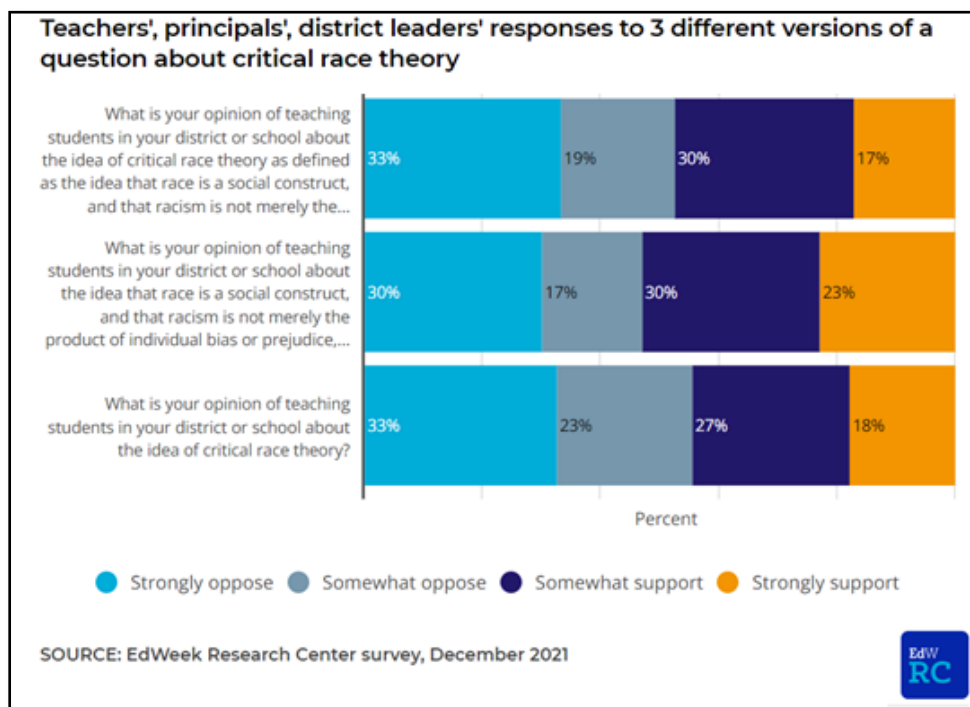


Figure 1: School Leadership's response t CRT questions

2.2 School Leader's Perspective of CRT

A school leaders' function in a pressure-filled environment. Long before CRT became a campaign issue, educators in the K12 system understood the value in the classroom. School leaders view CRT as a powerful framework that allows analysis and critiques of the various ways in which race are intertwined in law, policies and practices ultimately impacting every aspect of life. Most school leaders understand how challenging this subject matter can be however they understand the value of honest, critical discussions about the legacy of racism in America (Parker, Mahady, Marcovitz, 2021). Parker et al. (2021) believe that these discussions are not necessarily anti-White or anti political but are

"...fundamental to the mission of training teachers and educational leaders to recognize and eliminate barriers for students in the pursuit of equity and the promotion of schooling environments that are engaging, affirming, safe, and free from discrimination. CRT remains a foundational tool to train and prepare educators and yet for the vast majority of people it is wholly unfamiliar."

Marvin Lynn, a renowned Education and CRT scholar has suggested that CRT's greatest potential exists in its ability to move beyond just a problem-posing orientation and toward a problem-solving orientation. This is how most school leaders view CRT (Parker et al., 2014).According to Stovall (2004) school leaders become easy targets in the approach to the application of CRT. School leaders are perceived as gatekeepers focused on protecting staff and students and often fall short of addressing issues central to the needs of student success. Some leaders believe that there is a gray area between CRT and the tolerance that is often associated with multiculturalism however if they go against the grain and fully support the principles of CRT, they become vilified and accused of indoctrinating students. Even more challenging is how the school leader addresses CRT when they are working in a predominantly urban school district. Here, issues of race are silences as the impacted race is the majority.

For some school leaders there is the belief that empirical evidence supports the notion that civil rights laws continue to serve the interest of a predominantly white educational system. For those individuals it is very

important for them to bring to the education space an understanding of where the interest of White people and people of color intersect. This is done by allowing the voice component of CRT to be exercised. Those school leaders support the engagement necessary to bring a deeper understanding of race to the educational system. Those leaders support teachers becoming more process-oriented versus skill-oriented so that they are able to navigate the systems that are often oppressive and become a hinderance to black and brown students dependent on these systems (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

School leaders who perceive CRT as essential to running a school and the practice of teaching often center professional development around issues of race in a meaningful way. In those schools where teachers have little knowledge and experience working with students of color, professional development is paramount. In urban schools where leaders are more socially-conscious there is more empowerment to facilitate conversations around issues of race and engage in effective dialogues that support teacher development and provide a safe and equitable space for students (Stovall, 2004).

2.3 Teaching of CRT

Some leaders believe that teaching CRT falls under the category of culturally responsive teaching; that is focusing on a student's cultural experiences and embracing the differences in the way they respond to questions posed in class. Further, culturally responsiveness also means making sure that teachers understand the cultural identity of their students and how that will impact learning. Educators believe that we should not stray away from teaching CRT and that more attention should be given to the "C", critical. Boyd (2021) asserts that educators should be concerned with teaching students how to think critically about race and that when the focus becomes solely on the issue of race that we miss an opportunity to ensure that children can think broadly and critically about everything from our institutions to policies, and even history. Boyd goes on to say that instead of pushing back that we should change the narrative and change how we think. Strong thinkers challenge what is shared constructively, and everyone in an educational system, whether teacher or student should feel that it is one's responsibility to learn to understand and defend what we say, rather than distance ourselves from some of the problematic stories and harsh truths of the past (Boyd, 2021).

Egbert and Roe (nd) believe that teaching CRT using the Model of CRT (Figure 1) is one way to deconstruct the concepts that make up the parts to the whole. Looking at the causes of racism and oppression and understanding how to advocate against them can help to counter the narratives that are often supported by a dominant culture.

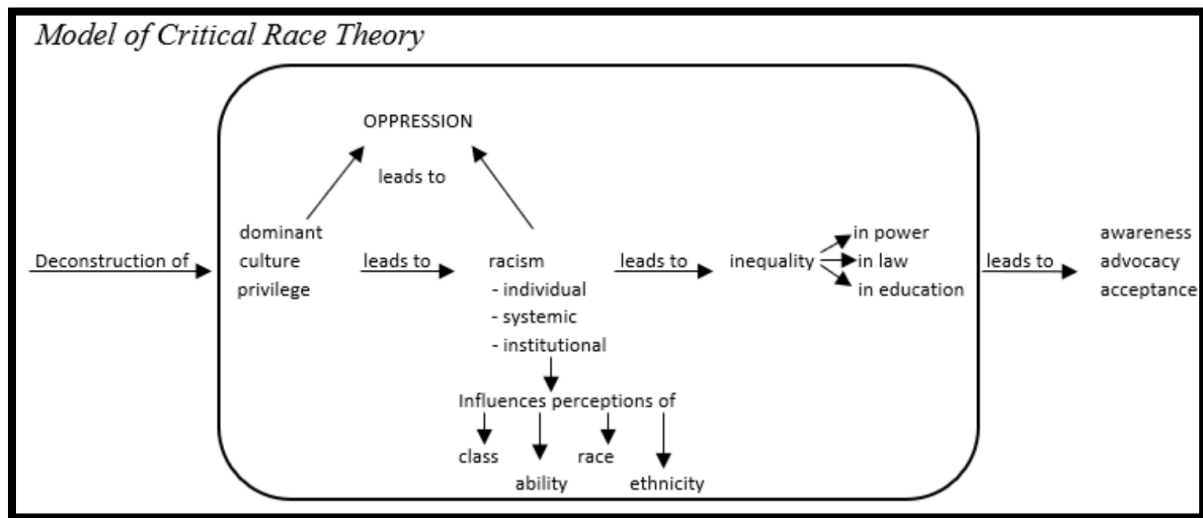


Figure 2: CRT Model

2.4 The Examination of Race in Schools

Eliminating the teaching of race in schools does not promote change or dialogue. It is the assumption of some scholars that leaving out a discussion about systematic race in the education system and society as a whole is contributing to the problem. In The Learning Network (2021) student writing prompt survey, students provided their perspective on efforts to limit teaching about race. In this narrative study, students from four schools in the United States and one school in Islamabad, Pakistan were asked the questions. Students overwhelmingly wrote that there needs to be continued teaching about race and racism in schools. Students were aware of the fact that some perceived teaching about race is a form of activist indoctrination they were also vocal about using this as a means of teaching future educators and that actions taking to ban the promotion of CRT exacerbates the problem (The Learning Network, 2021).

Those that want to examine race in schools must fight against the prioritization of individual needs over discomfort of the greater community. By not examining race in schools, systems perpetuate a false view of the whiteness of American history and culture and take away the ability to teach students about equity and social justice so they can thrive in a diverse society. Allowing students to think about racial disparities helps them to understand and comprehend the subjugation of black people hence opening the door to better understanding of other groups that have been historically oppressed in American Society (Carter, 2021).

III. METHODOLOGY

To examine leaders' perspective on CRT being taught in the classroom and their understanding of the theory as defined by scholars, two data sets were analyzed. Qualitative data collection is vital in qualitative research as it helps to give voice to a research area from the perspective of those who either are most impacted by a given situation or who are most knowledgeable. In this instance, it is important to hear what educational leaders think about CRT and how their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and personal experiences inform their work. The first data set was a qualitative data set and engaged 80 respondents who provided feedback to the following interview prompt: *In your words as an educational leader and to the best of your knowledge explain the concept of critical race theory.* These interviews focused on the school leader's knowledge of CRT as it is critical to be informed about how a leader is able to make their understanding of the concept shared across a group of individuals who may not necessarily have the same frame of reference or experiences. Using the Voyant-tools software the text was analyzed and thematization was completed.

The quantitative data set was analyzed using the Intellectus Statistics online computer software. Using a quantitative method allowed the researcher to capture participant's beliefs regarding an educational leader's ability to examine laws, district policy and school procedures in relation to the framework of legal analysis. This analysis allowed me to get an impression, in the aggregate, of how many participants felt that it was their responsibility to understand the law. Additionally, a similar correlation was done to determine what respondents knew about the application of CRT and whether they had prior knowledge. It was important to have some quantitative data as there are times when a qualitative analysis does not give the depth of data needed to fully understand a phenomenon. This type of data analysis helps to inform a greater understanding of how leaders perceive CRT and their role in understanding and or embracing CRT as a theoretical concept foundational to the experiences of teachers and students.

3.1 Results and Discussion

This study was designed to ascertain what school leaders understand about CRT and whether they believe they are held to a standard of being practitioners of this theory and thus responsible for ensuring that teachers and staff are knowledgeable and are able to use this as a tool for cultural competency. The overarching question being investigated is how school leaders perceive critical race theory generally. The qualitative data set yielded the following findings. As it relates to the inquiry *in your words as an educational leader and to the best of your knowledge explain the concept of critical race theory*, there were actually 80 statements from leaders regarding their understanding of what CRT is. Emic coding, which allows for the creation of codes grounded, first, in what participants described as their meaning-making within the organization was used during the thematization of the data. Emic coding presumes that there may be gaps in the espoused theoretical framework that are best fit by analyzing what respondents say about their experiences as it relates to in this case contextualizing CRT. Table 1 reflects participants understanding of CRT. The majority of respondents (N=48) referenced the fact that it was an ideology or teaching practice associated with race. Nineteen (N=19) respondents referenced the phrase *theoretical concept* in their definition of or explanation of the term.

Table 1: Understanding of CRT

Respondents (R)	Data Report
R = 19	reported that CRT is a theoretical concept being reported by participants
R = 17	Reported that CRT is connected to the systems that impact people based on race.
R = 17	Reported that CRT is a concept connected to society (social) beliefs about a particular race.
R = 48	Reported that CRT is associated with the teaching, ideologies, associated with race

In 2021, the National School Board Association (NSBA) published an informational document designed to help school leaders to better understand CRT so that they could answer questions related to the theory. In that publication, CRT was first referenced as a framework of legal and academic topics that examine cultural, social, and legal issues related to race and racism (National School Board Administration, 2021). To this end, none of the respondents used words/phrases as supplied by the NSBA, including *framework of legal and academic topics that examine cultural, social, and legal issues* to inform their definition or understanding when answering this question. From this analysis it can be assumed that many school leaders do not have a clear understanding of CRT to be able to articulate that to stakeholders as there is no connection to the legal framework which in the basis for the development of CRT by scholars.

Conversely, when analyzing the quantitative data focusing on whether school leaders should understand the framework of legal analysis and be prepared to look at laws, district policy and procedures an overwhelming majority answered Strongly Agree ($n = 9, 52.94\%$). Frequencies and percentages are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Frequency Table for Nominal Variables (Descriptive Statistics)

Framework of Legal Analysis			
<i>Sample Size N=61</i>			
<i>Educational leaders should be prepared to examine laws, district policy, and school procedures that impact one race differently than another</i>			
Variable	Yes	No	Missing
Strongly Agree	41 (93.18%)	9 (52.94%)	0 (0.00%)
Somewhat Agree	3 (6.82%)	3 (17.65%)	0 (0.00%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Somewhat Disagree	0 (0.00%)	4 (23.53%)	0 (0.00%)
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0 (0.00%)	1 (5.88%)	0 (0.00%)
Missing	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
TOTAL	44 (100.00%)	17 (100.00%)	0 (100.00%)

What these two data set supports is that while school leaders may not know how to define or express their understanding of CRT qualitatively, they do understand the fact that there is a responsibility to be prepared to examine the laws, policies, and procedures and how these things impact one group of stakeholders versus another: specifically in terms of race. What this data informs is that in order for school leaders to be able to engage others in understanding CRT that a strong understanding of the legal framework and responsibilities of a leader as it relates to law and policy should be foundational to any professional development or implementation of CRT.

In doing a descriptive analysis of how many respondents understood the legal framework of CRT before entering the profession in relation to the category framework of legal analysis, within the Yes category of UnderstandingCRT before was Yes ($n = 3, 75.00\%$). The most frequently observed category of Framework of legal analysis within the No category of UnderstandingCRT before was Yes ($n = 6, 75.00\%$). Frequencies and percentages are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Frequency Table for Nominal Variables

Variable	UnderstandingCRTBefore		
	Yes	No	Missing
FrameworkOfLegalAnalysis			
Yes	3 (75.00%)	6 (75.00%)	0 (0.00%)
No	1 (25.00%)	2 (25.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Missing	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Total	4 (100.00%)	8 (100.00%)	0 (100.00%)

Note. Due to rounding error, percentages may not sum to 100%.

In looking back at the quantitative data what is captured here is that in the thematization of the word/phrases there seems to be more of an understanding of CRT as related to policies (N=18), social construct/social system (N=38) and theory (N=19). To this end, the data does correlate the fact that school leaders do have a broad understanding of CRT by way of definition. While this data does not inform whether school leaders are engaging in praxis or any form of professional development as it relates to CRT, this does provide a deeper understanding of where to meet school leaders in their quest to utilized CRT as a tool that can be associated with cultural competency and in terms of address disparities related to race. The qualitative data also show that

school leaders have similar launching points for explaining what CRT is. This also informs us that the majority of respondents understand that CRT is closely tied to social constructs, society and the systematic challenges associated with trying to address racial inequalities which is closely tied to the framework as shared by many legal scholars attributed with the development of the theory.

Table 4: Thematization/Word or Phrase Frequency

WORD/PHRASE	WORD COUNT
Social construct/social systems/systematic	38
Framework	11
Policies/political	18
Inequities	9
Theory	19
Legal system/laws	23
Society	17
History	13

It was important to understand how many of the respondents had been in the teaching profession for more than five years and how many were familiar with the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw as this is insightful in assessing data points in which people are not familiar with the legal framework associated with CRT and their view of race in the school system. The next section provides a report of those frequencies and percentages.

The most frequently observed category of framework of legal analysis within the 21 years or more category of experience was Yes ($n = 34, 72.34\%$). The most frequently observed category of framework of legal analysis within the 11 – 15 years category of Experience was Yes ($n = 12, 75.00\%$). The most frequently observed category of framework of legal analysis within the 5 – 10 years category of Experience was Yes ($n = 9, 75.00\%$). The most frequently observed category of framework of legal analysis within the less than 5 years category of experience was No ($n = 3, 75.00\%$). The most frequently observed category of framework of legal analysis within the 16 – 20 years category of Experience was Yes ($n = 12, 66.67\%$).

The most frequently observed category for question 19, *I have read the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, I am familiar with her views within the 21 years or more category of Experience* was No ($n = 32, 68.09\%$). The most frequently observed category of question 19, *I have read the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw or I am familiar with her views within the 11 – 15 years category of Experience* was No ($n = 12, 75.00\%$). The most frequently observed category of for question 19, within the 5 – 10 years category of Experience was No ($n = 10, 83.33\%$). The most frequently observed category for question 19 within the Less than 5 years category of Experience was No ($n = 3, 75.00\%$). The most frequently observed category for the 16 – 20 years category of Experience was No ($n = 13, 72.22\%$). Frequencies and percentages are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Years of Experience/Knowledge of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s Work

Variable	Years of Experience					
	21 years or more	11 – 15 years	5 – 10 years	Less than 5 years	16 – 20 years	Missing
Framework of Legal Analysis						
Yes	34 (72.34%)	12 (75.00%)	9 (75.00%)	1 (25.00%)	12 (66.67%)	0 (0.00%)
No	13 (27.66%)	4 (25.00%)	3 (25.00%)	3 (75.00%)	6 (33.33%)	0 (0.00%)
Missing	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Total	47 (100.00%)	16 (100.00%)	12 (100.00%)	4 (100.00%)	18 (100.00%)	0 (100.00%)
I have read the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, or I am familiar with her views						
No	32 (68.09%)	12 (75.00%)	10 (83.33%)	3 (75.00%)	13 (72.22%)	0 (0.00%)
Yes	12 (25.53%)	4 (25.00%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (25.00%)	5 (27.78%)	0 (0.00%)
Missing	3 (6.38%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (16.67%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Total	47 (100.00%)	16 (100.00%)	12 (100.00%)	4 (100.00%)	18 (100.00%)	0 (100.00%)

What this data reveals are that those participants with the most experience are more informed about the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw as well as the legal framework for CRT. This may be the reason data for the 21 years or more category of Experience was No ($n = 32, 68.09\%$). The most frequently observed category of question 19, I have read the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, or I am familiar with her views within the 11 – 15 years category of Experience was No ($n = 12, 75.00\%$). The most frequently observed category of for question 19, I have read the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, or I am familiar with her views within the 5 – 10 years category of Experience was No ($n = 10, 83.33\%$). The most frequently observed category for question 19 within the Less than 5 years category of Experience was No ($n = 3, 75.00\%$). The most frequently observed category for the 16 – 20 years category of Experience was No ($n = 13, 72.22\%$).

IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The scrutiny of critical race theory has become heavily politicized. CRT gained more attention as part of the racial tension experienced nationally after the killing of George Floyd. That led into a political season where CRT was a campaign topic often dividing school leadership, communities, and legislators. It is reasonable to say that CRT is a misunderstood concept that has been used to unfairly racialize almost any concept in which people of color are marginalized. Whenever there is a report of anything negative that is not culturally balanced it automatically gets labeled as critical race theory (Anderson, 2022). CRT is a concept that began in legal studies to explain inequity of achievement in schools and has been mostly used in higher education. However, political conversations have focused on the fear of indoctrination of students in the K-12 environment and have led to things like book banning, legislation that focuses on gender and even issues of diversity and inclusion.

The lack of understanding is a contributing factor in the debate over CRT. This research has been foundational in support of the idea that a school leader must have a solid understanding of CRT and a foundation from which to make assumptions about how and if CRT should be included from a policy, legal and process perspective.

The data also supports the fact that newer school leaders may not be familiar with the legal framework from which Kimberlé Crenshaw and other legal scholars originally discussed and defined this theory.

A first-line recommendation is for school leaders to cultivate strong relationships with the parents and community that they are serving, and they need to be transparent about how and why they will talk about race in the classroom in age-appropriate ways. Further, having a collective understanding about why talking about race is important helps to support the bigger mission of education and that by having these conversations we help students to think more critically, more globally, and more compassionately about others. Moreover, we teach students that oppression and marginalization come in a number of ways and that as citizens we have the choice to ignore these things or be active in helping to change things that are deeply humanistic.

Several years ago, professors at Harvard, who felt ill-equipped to address race in the classroom engaged in research designed a framework for leading race conversations, based on the acronym RACE. This can be a useful tool in helping to prepare educators to facilitate and lead those difficult conversations within the classroom. Having this framework helps to reduce the generalizations or instances in which there is incorrect definitions applied to CRT (Creary, 2020). The Framework is detailed in the table below.

Table 6: Framework for Leading Conversations About Race (Creary, 2020)

R—Reduce Anxiety by Talking About Race Anyway	Educators can help learners feel less anxious and more effective engaging in conversations related to race, equity, and inclusion. One way to do this would be to facilitate a norms-setting activity prior to engaging in difficult conversations about race. Invite students to work in small groups to generate 2-3 norms they would like to observe in the class in order to engage effectively in conversations about differences.
A—Accept That Anything Related to Race Is Either Going to Be Visible or Invisible	The visibility and invisibility of race is a very salient experience for some. Whether your race is visible or invisible to it is important to reflect on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we gain or lose when race is invisible? • What do we gain or lose when race is hypervisible? Facilitators can help learners find the space in between the extremes of invisibility and hypervisibility and normalize race as a dimension of diversity that is meaningful in the workplace, school, or community settings.
C—Call on Internal and External Allies for Help	Cultivate a network of relationships with internal and external allies (diversity leaders, parents, board chairs, academics, etc.) who are invested in your school/school district. helping internal and external allies by sharing tips and resources with diversity leaders and practitioners in one-on-one conversations also helps to build support.
E—Expect That You Will Need to Provide Some “Answers,” Practical Tools, and Skill-Based Frameworks	Create practical tools and skill-based frameworks because they make great learning opportunity. Adapt resources that are research-based to use in the classroom and professional development setting and use these as tools and resources. Lastly empower educators to help learners feel that including race in diversity, equity, and inclusion activities is doable when they use concrete and accessible “how-to frameworks.”

Certainly,Kindergartners do not need to be able to debate and analyze theory, but they can understand the concept of differences and respect in a way that is appropriate for the kindergarten classroom. As students matriculate, the conversations about race should be health, and grade appropriate and by the time students reach high school, they should be prepared to enter institutions of higher education ready to deal with even harder questions from a holistic academic and globally conscious manner. None of this is possible if school leaders are not prepared to build communities of trust and to be engaged around issues that are not always comfortable but

necessary. Educators have the power to change national debate around education that is often led by those outside of the academic realm.

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