[21CLEO Presentations and Publications](#)

[21st Century Learning Ecosystem Opportunities (21CLEO) Research Project](#)

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Adult Literacy and Learning: What Does Analysis Based on Critical RaceTheory Reveal?

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Citation Details

Adult Literacy and Learning: What Does Analysis Based on Critical Race Theory Reveal?

LRA 2020
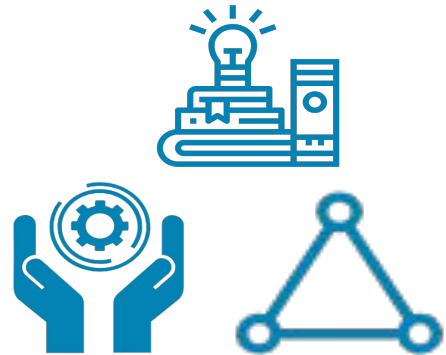
Land Acknowledgement

It is important to acknowledge the ancestors of the places we live and work and to recognize that we are here because of the sacrifices forced upon them. In remembering these communities, we honor their legacy, their lives, and their descendants.

Kathy Harris and Gloria Jacobs are at Portland State University, which is located in Portland, Oregon. We honor the **Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Tumwater, Watlala bands of the Chinook**, the **Tualatin Kalapuya** and many other indigenous nations whose traditional and ancestral homelands we stand on.

Jen Vanek's home office in Minneapolis, Minnesota is located on the traditional land of **Wahpekute Band of the Dakota Nation**

Jill Castek is at the University of Arizona, which resides on the traditional land of the **Tohono O'odham Nation homelands** and the lands of the **Pascua Yaqui Tribe**.

Video Introduction

As white women we can only see so much because of our whiteness. We can't understand racism fully or in the same ways as people of color.

We are still learning the discourse of critical race theory. We acknowledge that our whiteness has advantaged us in large and small ways; we've benefitted from lifelong white privilege.

We are diving into this work because we are answering the call for whites to do our work; to learn how to see white supremacy and systemic racism and identify how it plays out in our attempt to change it. We do this work with humility, trying to be allies.

This Link will Shared In the Session's Chat

Session Handout for Summary Information https://bit.ly/CRTinAdultWorkplaceEd

Contains a link to Read/Follow Our Blog

Background and Context

This work is part of a larger project focused on understanding a changing and dynamic learning ecosystem

- frontline service workers participate in workforce or employer supported learning opportunities.

- includes data from 45 interviews with worker learners and individuals who provide support to them, such as teachers, managers, and career navigators.

- Interviewees come from all parts of the United States and work in retail, healthcare, hospitality, transportation, and other industries.

https://www.pxfuel.com/en/free-photo-jrxay

Interview protocols

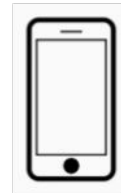Designed to bring working learners' voices into the conversation

- Examine workforce and employer supported learning opportunities

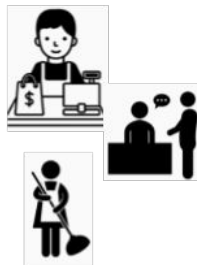- Factors that support participation

Coworkers

Computers

Mobile devices

Family

Working Learner

Home

Work

Personal learning spaces

Formal learning spaces

Purpose

Adult Literacy and Learning: What does a CRT Analysis Reveal?

Presentation 1: Adult learners' lives and perspectives, Kathy Harris (Portland State University) & Gloria Jacobs (Portland State University)

Presentation 2: Providers' interpretations of support, Jen Vanek (World Education) & Kathy Harris (Portland State University)

Presentation 3: Theoretical triangulation: Revealing tensions between participant perspectives, Gloria Jacobs (Portland State University) & Jill Castek (University of Arizona)

Discussant: Kathleen Hinchman (Syracuse University)

(Crenshaw, 1991), (Solorzano, 1997), (Bell, 1980), (Yosso, 2005), (Gotanda, 1991), (Closson, 2010)

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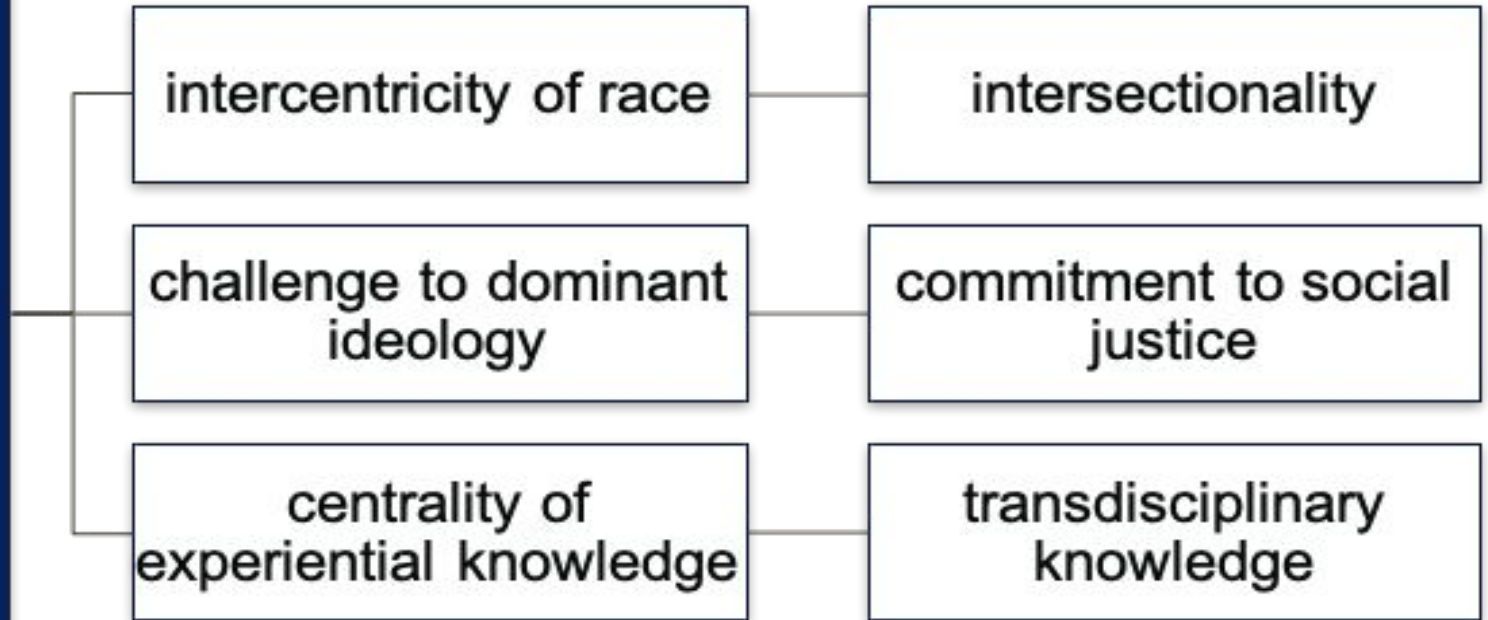
Presentation 3: Theoretical triangulation: Revealing tensions between participant perspectives, Gloria Jacobs (Portland State University) & Jill Castek (University of Arizona)

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Paper 1: Adult learners' lives and perspectives

Kathy Harris & Gloria Jacobs
Portland State University
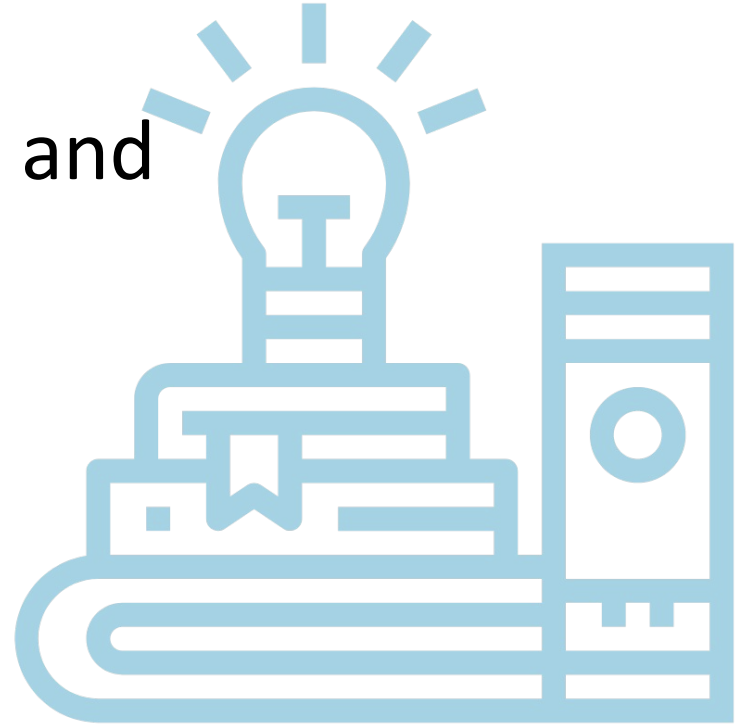
Key Question

What do the perspectives of adult learners reveal when viewed through a CRT lens?

Analysis Timeline

1. Selected key participant interviews
2. Applied CRT a priori codes
3. Developed emerging theme
4. Conducted theoretical sampling
5. Refined theme and raised new questions
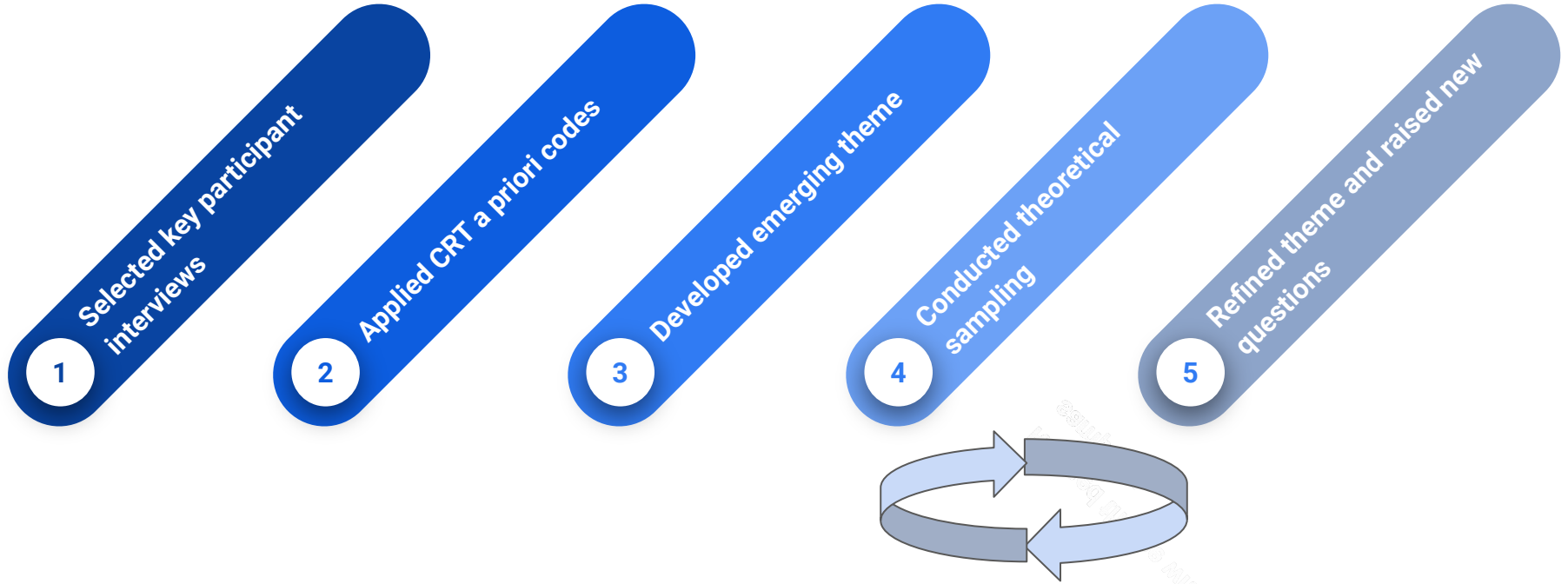
Maggie

-From Haiti

-French as a first language

-Bachelor's degree

-Banking as a former career

-Currently working as a security guard

-Has completed CNA training

-Hopes to become a RN

"I went to university for four years. I study science economic for four years, and I studied accounting, critical for accountant for one year. And I studied like a computer training for three years. Yes, I did. The job I did for my country ...was in that to work in my bank."

Winta

-From Somalia

-Somali as a first language

-Bachelor's degree in accounting

-Currently working as a retail clerk

-In English classes

-Hopes to become a CPA

[the English class is] too easy for me. So I try more the difficult one, okay? Then I will try-maximize, what you call it maximize my mind?"
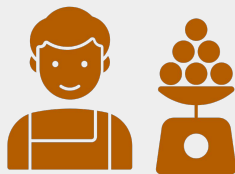
Julie

-From Columbia

-Spanish as a first language

-High School diploma & English classes

-Currently working in a food pantry

-Has completed Dental Assistant training

-Hopes to become a dental assistant

"I found a job as a dental assistant, but it was hard for me. I feel like overwhelming because of my language. So, I had to back up. [I thought], maybe I can volunteer first and get the experience."

Intersectionality: The role of race/ethnicity, language, and gender

Muhazzim
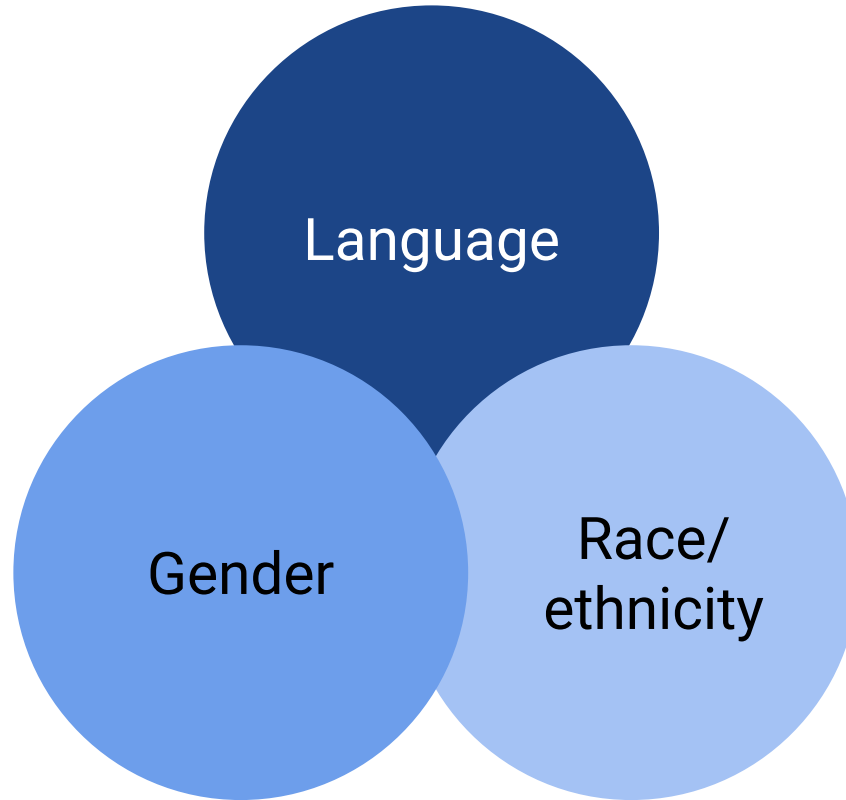
-From Pakistan
Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi as a first languages, English starting age 5
-Master's in Business Administration
-Currently working in a drugstore chain as a database support
-Has completed a retail supervisor certificate
-Hopes to go into management

"I keep asking and even, you know, in every evaluation my supervisor commends for me. He said, like, hey, he's the one who will question most of the time, and I love it. He said he literally said, he said, I love it, how much questions you ask, and that's, that's a lot of learning."

Destiny

-From the United States
-English speaker
-Took hospitality courses online and at local university
-Currently working as an hourly front desk supervisor in national hotel chain
-Has completed Linked-In courses
-Hopes to go into hotel management

Took Linked-In courses on "*what type of person you are and how you deal with people...how to strategize and how to get the team motivated, and I like that one, because that's a really important tool. As well as difficult conversations because they are always coming up.*"

Victoria

-From the United States
English and Spanish speaker
-BS/BA
-Currently working as mechanics
supervisor in transportation
-Has completed a supervisor
certificate
-Hopes to go into management or
look to broader career
opportunities

"Um, I'd always known about it, but I had a bad attitude. So I didn't care. ((laughter)) So you know when I finally grew up someone says to me —his name is (...)— he says if you sign up for it, I will vouch for you, but I expect you to give it your best. And I'm like, Okay, and just because he asked me, I signed up for it and I got turned down the first time but accepted the second time."
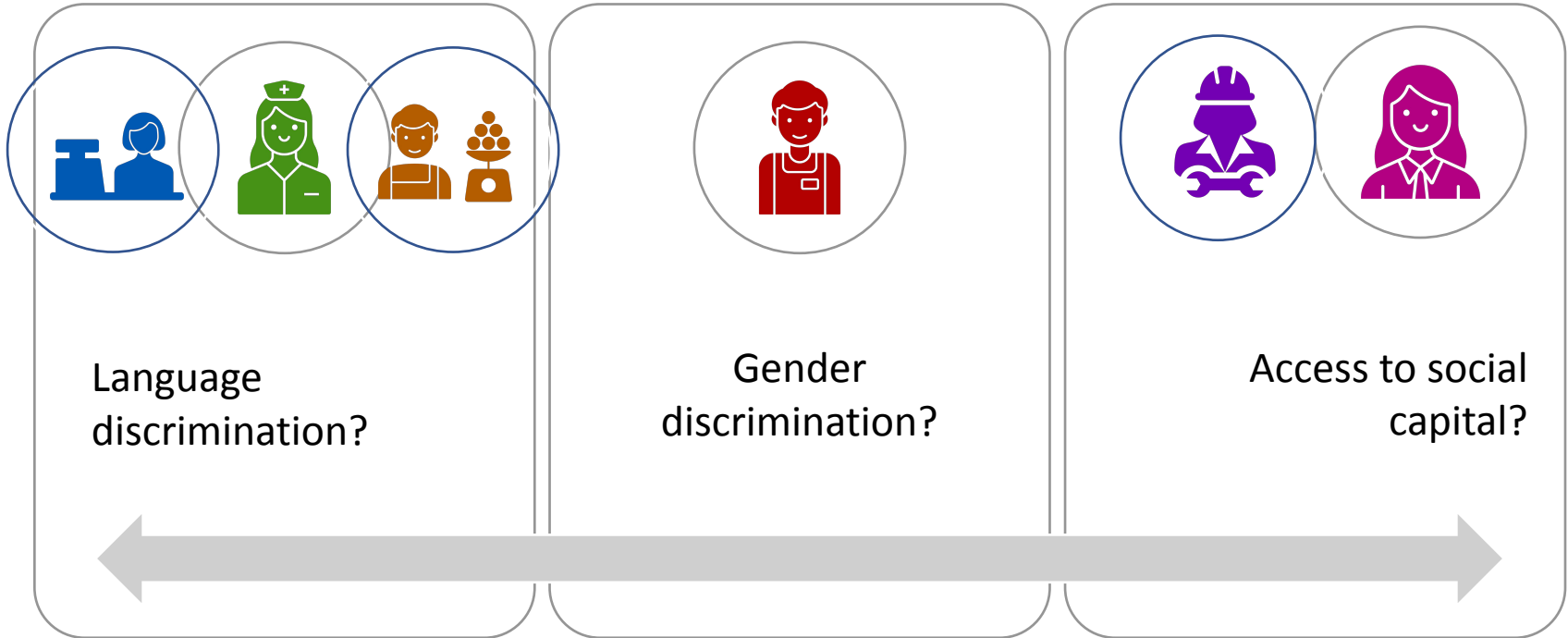
Community Cultural Wealth

Adult Literacy and Learning: What Does Analysis Based on Critical Race Theory Reveal?

LRA 2020

Literacy Language & Technology Research

Adult Literacy and Learning: What does a CRT Analysis Reveal?

Presentation 1: Adult learners' lives and perspectives, Kathy Harris (Portland State University) & Gloria Jacobs (Portland State University)

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Presentation 3: Theoretical triangulation: Revealing tensions between participant perspectives, Gloria Jacobs (Portland State University) & Jill Castek (University of Arizona)

Discussant: Kathleen Hinchman

Providers' interpretations of support

Jen Vanek
EdTech Center@World Education

Kathy Harris
Literacy, Language & Technology
Research Group
Portland State University

Key Questions

What do the perspectives and practices of adult education support providers, including teachers, reveal about representation of race and power when viewed through a CRT lens?

Participants

	Site	Job	Notes about Role
■ Carmen	SE - workforce development CBO	Career Navigator	Refer learners to educational opportunity
■ Ivana	SE - workforce development CBO	Career Navigator	Refer learners to educational opportunity
■ Matthew	SW - Taught in an adult education program	Teacher	Course supported by workforce development agency
■ Leslie	Midwest - multiple employers in workplace	Teacher	Taught in the workplace, but employee of an adult education program
■ Lynn	Midwest - multiple employers in workplace	HR employee	Administered the course taught by Leslie
■ Ralph	SW - retail organization	Manager	Participated in the course in order to recruit learners

Analysis

- CRT themes (Closson,2010): endemic racism, interest convergence, color-blindness, and social justice orientation.

- We marked "critical incidents" (Finch, 2010), where participant discourse represented salient tension or alignment with the codes and thus became visible as a possibly racialized representation of power.

- By analyzing critical incidents, we unearthed tensions between individual stated intent and endemic, systemic racism as represented in language used to describe their work.
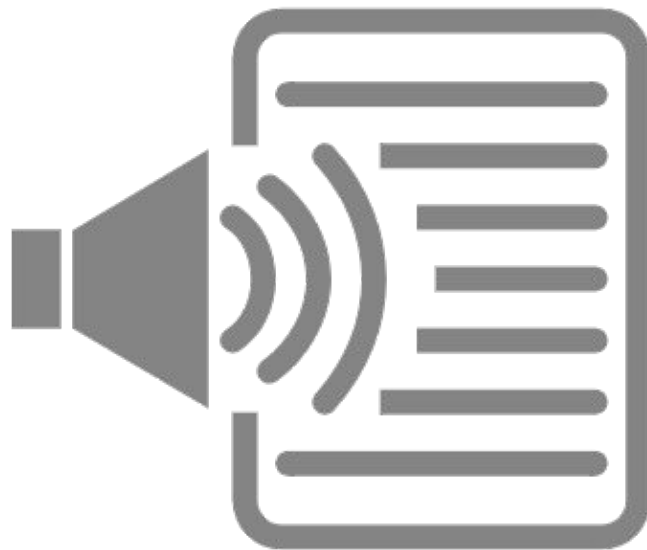
A. Not identifying an issue	B. Identifying an issue but not problematizing	C. Identifying an issue and taking action
Discourse (or lack of it) that had the potential to perpetuate white supremacy though not named as such. Codes (Closson, 2010): Endemic racism, color-blindness	An observation reflection the recognition of a willingness to create opportunities, but not questioning the limitations of a course set up with the intention of benefiting the employer Codes (Closson, 2010): Color blindness, Interest convergence	An observation that reflected the potential of course/policy to perpetuate white supremacy AND description of means by which they work to mitigate the potential for it. Codes (Closson, 2010): Social Justice Orientation
● *Ex. Ralph - "what are you doing that you can't afford a couple hours a day, or, or, you know, half of your Saturday or four hours one evening to, to help further your career?"* ● Matthew; failed to notice race at play in identification of jobs available for BIPOC students	● Lynn noted: location of class in the workplace benefited both the employer setting and the learners. ● Carmen noted: workers needed "*understanding [of soft skills] how to be, how to be someone that the companies would want to hire…*"	● Ivana assisted learner by working to get internet access and laptops ● Leslie advocated for changes in curriculum and HR training resources to make them more accessible ● Matthew allowed students to bring children to class

Column A - "Didn't identify"

Ralph: didn't recognize barriers to learning AND comment shows he may be perpetuating problematic views of learners.

"***Anyone can find two hours a day*** to do some learning. Ask yourself, what else are you doing?"

Matthew: didn't identify racial equity at play in identification of the types of jobs that are available for students who are Black and People of Color

"Now, many of our ***other students*** are working, but they are, because of our socio-economic area, ***they're, they're fast food. They're at the low end of the scale on wages and that is a different type of student than what we get with [program name]."****...* "You get into the fast food and the students (are) fortunate if they've got the same manager at the end of the semester they had at the beginning of semester. Lots of turnover, working very strange shifts. ***They just struggle much more than, than the sponsored students.***"

Column B. Identifying but not problematizing 1

Lynn described learner and employer convergence; both "benefit" from program

"So we have a jobs committee that we created a couple of years ago that was a r**esponse to our tenants struggling to be able to hire enough people to fulfill the open jobs at the airport...** So if they're struggling to recruit. Then we're going to focus our initiatives on the recruitment side…. [**Shows] the opportunity to work at the airport; that we were invested in careers and that we had ample opportunities here to develop and grow a career**." (lines l61-173)

"**Convenience is got to be one of the motivating facto**rs because you know this is here" (lines 266-273)

Column B Identifying but not problematizing 2

Carmen described convergence showing how through job preparation activities one can be perceived as a valuable potential employee; both employer and employer benefit. Perhaps also characteristic of color-blind approach to education and employability; learners must change, not the system.

"My job is really to help them connect to those resources, help them navigate the challenges of the job search and understanding how to be, **how to be someone that the companies would want to hire** here in the West…" (83-85)

"I think also understanding certain cultural principles or notions that they might not have been familiar with before. We have actually a **lot of training me on soft skills and customer service expectations in us and what employers expect from you as an employee** in the US (417 - 423)

Column C Identifying and taking action - 1

Leslie advocated for learners to ensure they truly benefited; created opportunities for learners to direct instructional content choices; worked to scaffold workplace training videos

"...more like just basic customer interactions. And *we do some listening, that's, I mean, this is what they [the students] asked for… Like understanding what their bosses say or what the customers are saying*" (lines 37-42)

"… And the videos online… You know, use to make some activities out of or whatever. … *They [HR] said they tried to make it simpler, which I told them about. I was like, are you kidding me? 80% of your employees are immigrants and you have this you know video that so idiomatic English you*" (lines 58-65)

Column C Identifying and taking action - 2

Ivana assisted learners by working to get internet access and laptops.

"Yes, technology is a big, big challenge for our clients. It's a huge challenge"
"I plan to buy laptops for two of these clients. Again, I found very cheap laptops $220 and that program , **the [program] will buy these laptops for them**, and I will enroll them in this basic computer, basic computer skills program. "

Matthew lets students come to class with their children.

I've had students come to class with their small children. **Some teachers just won't allow that and it never bothered me. I didn't let it bother me.** And my students to their credit didn't let it bother them either. "

Discussion & Conclusion

- *This lack of awareness supported interest convergence, which, if the sole motivator for providing opportunity for economic advancement, can foster systemic racism.*

- *While white support providers reflected on themselves and their experiences, and sought to connect to the lives of the adults with whom they work, they tended to be color-blind and missed how their experience differed from that of the Black or People of Color learners.*

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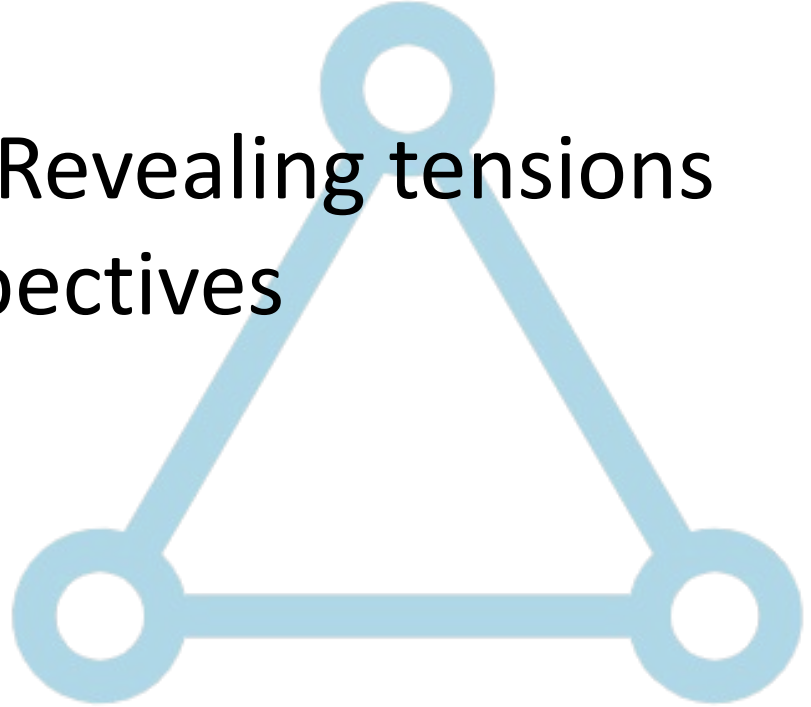
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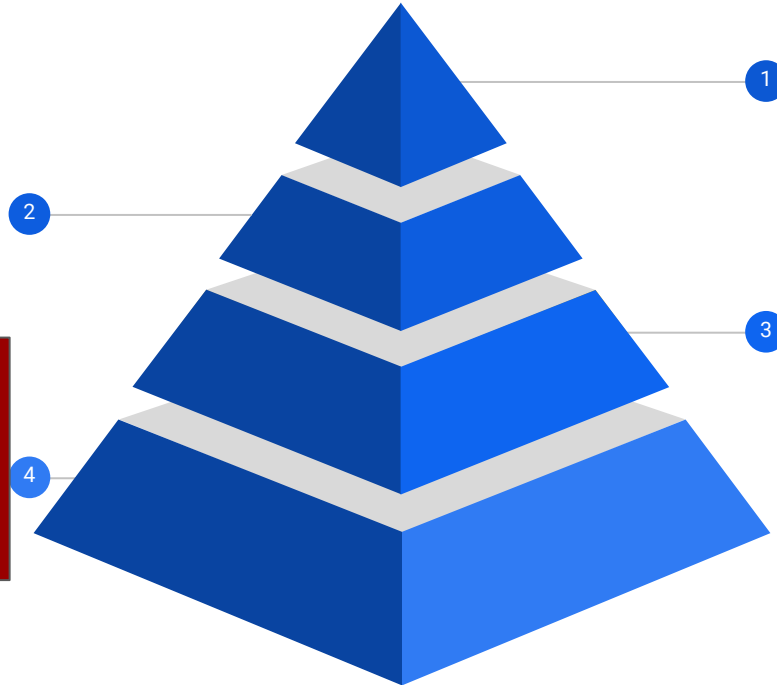
Discussant: Kathleen Hinchman

Denzin (2009)

Denzin (2012) "meanings and politics are refracted off the edges of crystals" (p. 85)

Investigator Triangulation.

Theoretical Triangulation

1 **Data Triangulation**

2

3 **Methodological Triangulation**

4

Theoretical Triangulation (Denzin, 2009) allows researchers to see the data from multiple perspectives
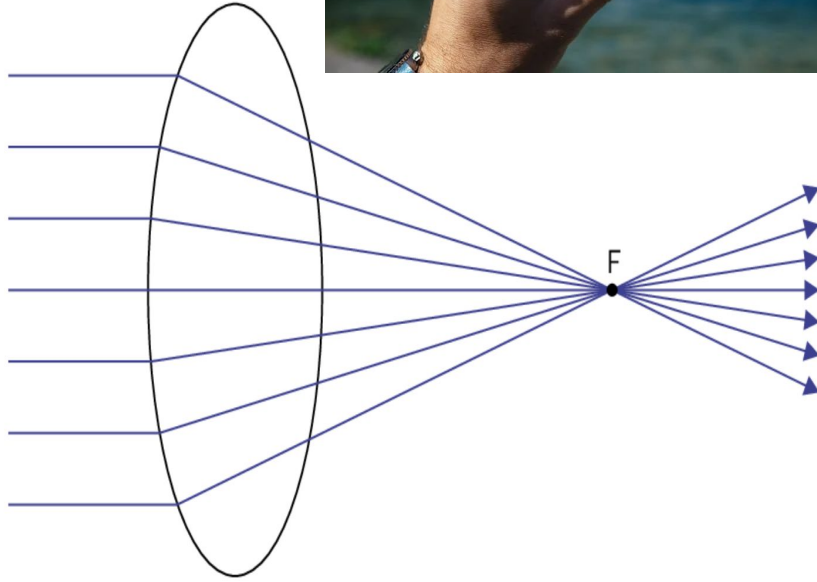
A CRT lens helped us
go deeper and expanded our
understanding of what was
going on beneath the surface
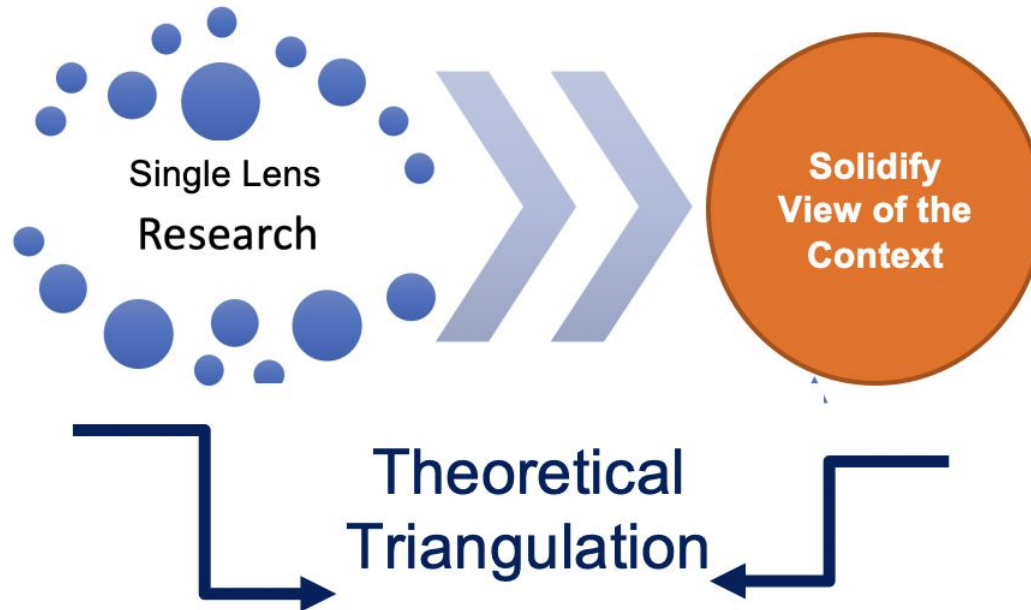
Sociocultural Lens (CHAT)

F

CRT Analysis

Endemic Racism

Capital is differently available

Systems Level Change

Kathleen Hinchman,
Syracuse University
Discussant

I love that this symposium **takes on the oversimplification, blaming the learner , albeit with empathy,** common to many conceptualizations of workplace literacy (and literacy instruction).

I also love that the iterative nature of the work allows for understanding the **synergy among stakeholders' perspectives as they build narratives of what they do**, why they do it, and where they want to go from here. I esp am looking forward to learning more about how individuals' narratives are situated in community and professional contexts.

And I think you're right that understanding ecosystems gets us closer, but then CRT helps to explain **a/the** major social dimension likely shaping their experiences.

Understanding learners', their aspirations, and how these are situated amidst other actors and within systems **is likely key to developing workplace literacy initiatives with more impact than those in our recent history**—(needs assessment in Syr factories where I heard, Honey, I would like to be able to read better, but don't you think they would have fired me already if I didn't do my job the right way?)

Causally speaking, I have a hard time imagining a for profit or not for profit institution focusing on learners' perspectives without some benefit to the org—existence, appearance of altruism, profit, but within the context of standing or newly developing corporate algorithms. As a result, **I wonder how** projects can ferret this out and acknowledge these up.

I also wonder what echo is created in the ecosystem by the more generalist HR/organizational climate literature consumed by executives and middle management in their offerings and whether they offer ed opps as required by what's in vogue, voluntary or "we'll let you do that." How can the impact of these moves be accounted for, for what they are in terms of systemic racism?

I wonder how you build a research process with" rich enough" insights about any particular learner or other contextual perspective to build thick description of communities of practice and individuals' participation in this process—and report it in a way that it's heard—so that it can have impact on systems. And how to report these in ways that the organizations can benefit from hearing about it?

As you know I share your wonder whether white people can see "see" racism in the same ways as people of color have lived, disrupting white supremacy. When we met for a session dry run in November we talked about perhaps **using a whiteness lens rather than CRT** because of this. **The irony** of this approach is how only marginally aware we white people are of all the ways our actions are enabled by white supremacist systems.

I am loath to cite myself in these kinds of settings but I suppose I can do it if I am critiquing-- My now retired colleague Rosary Lalik and I have a couple of old pieces using a power-knowledge formation analysis to critique our own discourses, but these don't account for the things I've been learning more recently about just how advantaged my so called working class background/first gen college student/hero narrative was advantaged by redlining, worker unions post WW2, women's appropriation of the civil rights movement.

Folks who currently get talked about in **whiteness theory grounding is often described as Frankenburg, 1993. Currently often cited are George Yancy and my colleague Barbara Applebaum**. How to operationalize strategies for identifying and dismantling racism in systems can vary. Constructs I've found include considering white privilege, exceptionalism, and supremacy, as well as meritocratic/choice based social norms. But how to see it remains an open question for me. I am thinking learning to see racist structures as it is experienced by black and brown people seems like a lifelong learning process, regardless of how much one puts oneself in places to learn to see…

What questions do folks have about any or all of the papers? OR what else should this group or the field more generally consider when applying a CRT lens, perhaps including whiteness theory to workplace literacy analyses (and resultant systems change initiatives)? **These can go in chat box…**