



Critical Race Spatial Lens for Equity and Inclusion in College Planning and Campus Space

Background

In November 2014, Portland Community College's (PCC) Board of Directors adopted a strategic plan to use critical race theory (CRT) as an approach to examine and dismantle systems of inequity.

<https://www.pcc.edu/about/administration/strategic-plan/diversity/>

Since then PCC educators and leaders have developed several CRT praxis-oriented projects to further equity, inclusion, and institutional change. <https://guides.pcc.edu/c.php?g=772356&p=5540387>

In September 2017, PCC's Office of Planning and Capital Construction issued a request for proposals for a new CRT initiative: *CRT in Institutional Facilities Planning*. While working on her dissertation research on applied CRT at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro and serving as a CRT trainer for the college, Amara H. Pérez submitted a proposal that was accepted. This initiative also became the focus of her dissertation study.

Approach

Through a multifaceted approach, Pérez introduced CRT as an equity tool for planning and design with a broad range of stakeholders, students, and partners. In designing the project she brought forward two key strategies: CRT with spatial theory as an integrated lens and a student participatory action research project called, *Space Matters*, created to recruit, train, and support a cohort of 25 students of color to serve as collaborators and co-researchers. This collaborative work served to inform a set of new practices at PCC including architecture selection processes, community engagement strategies, and inclusive design methods.

Theoretical and Praxis-Oriented Framework

Drawing from critical race scholars -- (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; and Vélez & Solórzano, 2017) and spatial theorists (Lefebvre, 1991; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Costello, 2001; Delaney, 2002; van Ingen & Halas, 2006; Price, 2010; Soja, 2010; Friedman, & van Ingen, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013; Samura, 2016) - Pérez developed a model for student engagement and an integrated theoretical framework as a socio-spatial approach to equity and inclusion.

Developing a "working" definition of space and a set of 6 praxis-oriented tenets, Pérez presented a critical race spatial lens to expose, examine, and transform the ways in which college planning and campus design function to reproduce racial inequities and the status quo in education.

Space as:

- Material objects, spatial arrangements, & built environments
- Cultural artifact
- Ideology
- Mechanism of social reproduction

6 Praxis-Oriented Tenets of a Critical Race Spatial Lens for Planning and Design:

- Identity, positionality, and lived experience shape our perceptions of space
- Racism is embedded and engrained in all aspects of society, including institutional planning, design, and space
- Dominant narratives in planning and design conceal institutional racism
- College space is not neutral; it is racialized
- Voice, experiential knowledge, stories of students of color as socio-spatial counter-narratives
- Working to dismantle racism in planning and design advances equity, inclusion, and social justice in education