ABSTRACT: In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa wrote of a borderland and the identity construction and culture of the inhabitants of borderlands. In the twenty years since, the terms continues to have applications in understanding both the geo-political and psycho-social particularities of inhabitants of this space. This article examines the concept of the "borderlands and what it can tell us about educating minority students, and inquires into how facets of critical social theory can be applied to understand students in the borderlands.
The New Colossus
Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"
—Emma Lazarus, 1883

To live in the Borderlands means you
are neither hispana india negra espanhola
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;
...To survive the Borderlands
you must live sin fronteras
be a crossroads.
-Gloria Anzaldúa

There are interesting parallels to be drawn from the experience of African-Americans in education in the United States over the past fifty years to the experience of immigrant and undocumented children in education today. Immigrant children are at a critical juncture; nearly thirty years after they were guaranteed a free public education (see Plyler v. Doe, 1982) children of immigrants continue to be faced with racial and ethnic discrimination, issues of language, and cultural adaptation. In addition to these concerns, faced by many racial/ethnic minorities who are native-born, first-generation immigrant children provide additional challenges to the school systems of which they are a part. Immigrant populations are growing, and they are growing in unexpected ways, as new areas accommodate an influx of students whose demand for different services can put a strain on local resources. These students exist in the borderlands, on the fringes of mainstream education, in special classrooms and special tracts, taught differently, assessed differently, and often prepared for an altogether different future than their native-born peers.

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1 In Plyler v. Doe, (457 U.S. 202, 1982), the Supreme Court struck down a state statute denying funding for education to children who were illegal immigrants. The majority opinion stated that denying the children in question a proper education would likely contribute to “the creation and perpetuation of a subclass of illiterates within our boundaries, surely adding to the problems and costs of unemployment, welfare, and crime.”
This article will examine, first, what is the borderland(s) as it relates to education and educational research, and second, what are the ways in which Critical Social Theory (CST) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) can provide valuable insight into both the form and content of describing and understanding the borderlands of education.

In education research, there is a strong tradition of seeking to understand power structures in education, looking at the specific structural and systemic issues which allow a model of dominance/subordination to continue. Many seminal figures in the field, such as Paulo Freire, Pierre Bourdieu, Franz Fanon, and Louis Moll have written extensively on the nature of power and how it constructs the education experience for different groups of students; with a particular focus on how there can be a vast structural inequality while at the same time those in power profess a fervent dedication to equality. This is a key issue in education. It is one of the fundamental rights of our country that we provide access to free, public education to all; even undocumented children and children of undocumented parents. It is arguably one of America's most deeply and dearly held beliefs that education is the "great equalizer;" the first major U.S. educational reformer, Horace Mann, wrote "Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery...It does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich; it prevents being poor" (Mann, 1848). In the 150 years since Horace Mann said these words, there undoubtedly has been progress towards this ideal, and yet there remains very far to go before education reaches this goal. Critical Social Theory and Critical Race Theory provide a valuable framework for evaluation this progress, a framework which privileges the voices of the oppressed and requires researchers and educators to inquire deeply into the structural, fundamental construction and functioning of education institutions.

What are the Borderlands?
This article will examine several different, complementary, uses of the term borderlands. Historically, etymologically related words such as the French frontière, Spanish frontera, and English frontier have had widely different connotations. Even within the anglophone world we have the terms frontier, boundary, and border, which have overlapping, but not identical connotations. Their use in geopolitical discourse mark conceptual differences. For example, boundary is often used to describe a precise and physically/geographically delimited location. The term frontier, on the other hand, carries with it connotations of “the territorial expansion of nations or civilizations into ‘empty’ areas” (Baud, p. 213). While border and boundary serve to delineate in the physical and cultural realms, between an us and an other, frontier has the distinction, at least in America, of negating the other: there is only the us, free to expand into the untamed, virgin wilderness. The term borderland therefore carries with it the historical connotations of each of these terms, but with the added layer of a post-modern conception of the borderlands as a zone of overlapping definitions.

Borders create political, social, and cultural distinctions, but simultaneously imply the existence of (new) networks and systems of interaction across them. The existence of a border is our point of departure, but at the same time we draw attention to the social networks that reach across that border. The paradox of border studies is noted by Sven Tägil and colleagues in their statement that ‘boundaries separate people (or groups of people) and the separating qualities of boundaries influence interaction between them’(Leonardo, p. 216).

Far from a mere political or geographical or even physical barrier, the border “becomes a unifying factor illuminating surprising similarities among borderlands inhabitants living on both sides” (Garza, p. 4). For the individuals living in the physical borderlands space, their identity becomes increasingly intertwined with the fluidity of the people, goods, language, and culture which cross back and forth, until their physical borderland presence is mimicked by their psycho-social world.

The idea of a psycho-social borderland was first used by Gloria Anzaldúa, in 1987, in her work entitled, Borderlands/La frontera (Also in Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza, 1999) where she takes the geo-political term and applies it to one’s inner space. Borderlands becomes “a vague and
undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary...a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25). For Anzaldúa, the particular history and identity of persons of multicultural heritage defines their existence is being perpetually in a borderland that is no longer simply geographic, but which encompasses their blended cultures and sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory identities. This notion of “complementary/contradictory” identity is important, and runs through much of the research discussed here. The term “complementary/contradictory” designates a process of identity and culture construction that is simultaneously balancing and negating various aspects of the multiple, overlapping identities held by an individual.

While Anzaldúa first conceptualized borderlands as an emotional space as parsed through her creative work of Spanish/English poetry and prose, others have continued in the same vein, expanding into education and looking at how teacher work in and teach about borderlands. Norma Gonzalez (2001) looked at identity formation among Mexican-American mothers and their children; her participants represented both geographic and cultural borderlands and her study examined them as subjects of geographic as well as psycho-social spaces. Chawla and Rodriguez see Brownness as a metaphor for people who “chose to reside in borderlands and other conceptual spaces that locate us at the center of the world” (p. 698-699); they write of these intercultural spaces as being a “new diversity” that is “post-ethnic” (p. 701) in the sense that “a post-ethnic perspective favors voluntary over involuntary affiliations...resists the grounding of knowledge and moral values in blood and history, but works within the last generation’s recognition that many of the ideas and values taken to be universal are specific to certain cultures” (Hollinger, 1995, p. 3, as cited in Chawla & Rodriguez, p. 701). In this context, Brownness describes not only having overlapping and blended racial/ethnic backgrounds, but also the mental/psycho-social situatedness of individuals who see themselves in the conceptual space of overlapping and complementary/contradictory identities.
In a sampling of forty-six articles published in education research over the past ten years which are linked to the keyword “borderland,” fully twenty-five of these articles use the term in the psycho-social sense, eight articles were about the geographical borderlands and the teaching of them as a geographic location; eight dealt with teaching in the borderland as a geographic location, and five used borderlands to describe a literary phenomenon. (See Appendix A). This sample, while small and informal, indicates that along with other, more traditional, uses of borderlands terminology, in education research the term is increasingly liked to the concept of a psycho-social space where cultures and identities overlap in fluid, sometimes complementary, and sometimes contradictory ways.

The borderlands that teachers today must acknowledge, work with, and work within, are not only physical spaces, but defining cultural and psycho-social ways of being. These are the students who, in common parlance “fall between the cracks,” who are lost in “the achievement gap,” who can be labeled “ELL,” “LEP,” “special ed,” or “other.” Their parents pick tomatoes, clean houses, patch drywall, serve food; while they may come from as many different backgrounds as there are countries in the world, the one thing they have in common is that they are the unseen workers, the unregistered emergency room visitors, the temporary renters. As students, although they can claim multiple languages, multiple cultures, even multiple identities, rather than feeling at home anywhere, these students most often are left feeling at home nowhere. As Elsa Major asserts, “Being a foreigner in your own former homeland, critiquing the formerly familiar social context as an outsider would is a said feeling shared by many expatriates sojourning home. ‘You can never go home again’ rings true to cultural border crossers” (Major, 2005/2006, p. 124). Similarly, Bhatia and Ram write of the “dialogical negotiation” that is identity construction within the borderlands and which “create(s) a symbiotic relationship of ambivalence. One can feel such constant ambivalence and still continue to function, because the two dialogical processes live off each other in a dynamic loop” (Bhatia & Ram, 2003, p. 305-6). The borderlands is an area of cultural symbiosis, where two or more cultures meet, overlap, and
construct new complementary/contradictory identities.

Chavez writes of a “borderscape,” claiming that there exists “A borderscape of immense proportions that, to a great extent, continues to be ignored, negated, and denied by an American duality that only reluctantly entertains Levine’s notion that multicultural and social education is comprehending ‘the widest possibly array of the contributing cultures and their interaction with one another’ “ (p. 249). Chavez’s borderscape is the space where engagement in the construction of a shared vision of reality is social justice in action, where “counter stories unmask the hegemony of social injustices” and where his counter essay “attempts to make the invisible visible” (p. 250). By writing a counter essay recounting the stories of the invisible, Chavez emphasizes the importance of privileging non-traditional forms of writing and research as well as non-traditional stories themselves.

As in Chavez, the idea of the borderlands can also be instructive when considering the methodological framework of the research being conducted. For instance, Elisa Abes' research describes using multiple frameworks to examine student development; she specifically combines a constructivist and queer theorist approaches to lesbian student identity development. Abes convincingly writes of the value of the "assumptions of multiple realities, multiple stories, and multiple identities" which underlie her approach to the data. Within the borderlands of overlapping, sometimes conflicting, frameworks, a fuller picture of the multiple, conflicting identities of participants becomes clear. Working within the post-modern concept of multiple valid realities allows researchers to see the participants through many lenses, "acknowledging that no one perspective presents a complete view of reality and that multiple realities must be simultaneously held, even with contradictory and even though the practicality of the simultaneous application of contradictory theoretical perspectives remains to be understood“ (Abes, p. 154). Just as identities of many students and teachers are constructed of overlapping identities which more or less fluidly defined boundaries, using frameworks which provide complementary and contradictory interpretations of data can yield a richer, more
nuanced understanding of the experiences of the participants.

**What is Critical Social Theory and Critical Race Theory?**

"Critical Social Theory (henceforth CST) is a multidisciplinary framework with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge" (Leonardo, p. 11). Following in a long line of education scholars and reformers who have examined these emancipatory issues (e.g., Rousseau, Dewey, Freire, Bourdieu, Fanon), proponents of CST aim to analyze education systems and institutions, critique and deconstruct the power structures, and then reconstruct the systems and institutions to reflect a new, equitable, order.

Originating in the post-Marx era of inter-war Germany, the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, the “Frankfurt School,” was led by Max Horkheimer. Horkheimer delivered an inaugural address of the Institute on January 24, 1931, entitled “The State of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research” (Bronner & Kellner, 1989). In this address the social philosophy of the Institute is defined as concerning:

> "[the] fate of human beings, insofar as they are parts of a community, and not mere individuals. It concerns itself above all with the social life of people: state, law, economy, religion, in short, with the entire material and spiritual culture of humanity" (Bronner & Kellner, 1989, p. 33).

This “supradisciplinary” (Kellner) emphasis would become an important component of CRT, whose interdisciplinary emphasis seeks to examine the truths and stories which traditionally have not been privileged nor heard. This inter- or supradisciplinariness is woven throughout critical theory, and is vitally important to giving voice to the alternate truths and lived realities of borderlands inhabitants.

Pierre Bourdieu wrote extensively of a framework of cultural, social, economic, and political capital which both constructs and constrains the environment (the field) of individuals; the different forms of capital represent different modes of power, and can be exchanged (i.e., economic capital buys one an education, which increases one’s cultural capital). While stemming from a strong Marxist view of
the power structures of society(-ies), Bourdieu (1989, 1991) ascribed special power to the idea of cultural capital and its influence in social institutions, particularly in educational systems. He posited that individuals possessing a certain cultural capital would express that capital through their dispositions, or *habitus*, and that these dispositions (e.g., table manners) are passed down through families and social circles, serving as both marker of and point of exclusion from certain circles. In education, students possessed of certain forms of higher-privilege cultural capital are more likely to match in their disposition and knowledge base the most desired forms of institutional knowledge, and this meeting of the socially accepted norms of valued knowledge is what makes these students successful in school. Bourdieu argued that institutions, such as education, recreate the norms that keep certain people in power and prevent others from acquiring power. This structural determinism, the fact that the structure of an institution influences how it works, is premised on both the powerful and powerless, or, to use Freire’s terms, the oppressors and the oppressed, tacitly and complicitly maintaining the power structure. In other words, both the “haves” and the “have-nots” must continue to operate according to the rules of the power structure for the structure to perpetuate itself. What Bourdieu and Freire, among other Critical Social Theorists, spoke out for was the rejection of the current norms of power structuration and a harsh inquiry into how power is formed, distributed and transmitted.

With antecedents in Marx’s analysis of capitalism and Kant’s critiques, and adherents in Bourdieu’s cultural capital, Friere’s critical pedagogy, and Fanon’s psychopathology of colonization, Critical Social Theory made ripe the conditions for the creation of critical legal studies, and later, Critical Race Theory:

CST begins with the premise that criticism targets systematic and institutional arrangements, how people create them, and how educators may ameliorate their harmful effects on schools. This platform does not negate individual instances of oppression, but in order to understand their pervasiveness, CST attempts to lay bare their social, rather than personal, sources. By social, I mean those objective arrangements that have a stolid existence outside of our
ability to articulate them. By personal, I mean more accurately “personalistic” sources of suffering, which are in and of themselves difficult to overcome, such as students’ family dynamics and interpersonal relations. When these conditions become part of the overall rationalization of society and how it functions, we can say that such personal histories become instances of social patterns, not determined by them but certainly inscribed by them (Leonardo, p. 13).

These “impersonal” structures affect actual people in schools; for instance, Jonathan Kozol’s (1991) *Savage Inequalities*, where he describes the degradation that minorities and poor students suffer as a result of racial stratification and capitalism.

In their introduction to *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, the editors posit that the purpose of Critical Race Theory is, first, to understand “how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America” and “to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as ‘rule of law’ and ‘equal protection’” (p. xii). The second goal of CRT is to change this relationship.

In another primer, *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, the foundational premises of CRT are spelled out. First, “CRT begins with a number of basic insights. One is that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture” (p. xvi). Speaking of the ingrained or institutionalized forms of racism

According to Matsuda et al. (1993), there are six unifying themes that define the movement. Within these six themes, important implications for the application of CRT to the field of education can be posited:

*Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.* Too much of the diversity awareness that goes on in professional development for teachers is about respecting multiculturalism and being aware of discrimination on an individual basis. Far less often do teacher education programs attempt to engage their students in an in-depth analysis of racial, ethnic, and linguistic discrimination.
Rarely are these future teachers asked to examine the larger institutions which allow the perpetuation of these forms of discrimination. Absent this acknowledgment of the institutional and structural nature of modern American racism, the focus cannot move beyond the individual acts, beyond the "perpetrator perspective" of racism, or the belief that racism is "intentional, albeit irrational, deviation by an conscious wrongdoer from otherwise neutral, rational, and just ways of distributing job power prestige and wealth" which allows us to both acknowledge that racism exists and to insist that occurs irregularly and is of limited significance (West, xiv). While a stance that allows one to be critical of isolated racist events when they occur is a good thing, it doesn’t prepare individuals to be critical of the structures that allow "isolated" racist events to occur, or of the ways these structures construct the dialogue and schema of society. CRT in education, in particular, recognizes that racism has many forms. For example, as Ronald Schmidt maintains, “linguistic prejudices and discrimination have become surrogates for the arguments and practices of white supremacy” (Schmidt, 2000, p. 5).

*Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy.* In education, as in law, we make vast claims about neutrality. We point to standardized tests, standard college admissions processes, to make the argument that educational success is all about merit. The myth of meritocracy is perhaps the greatest falsehood about our education system today: that any student, no matter their background, their socio-economic position, or their race/ethnicity, can compete against any other student on a level playing field that their schooling provides. As has been proven again and again, there are students “falling through the cracks” of achievement, and these students are disproportionately minority students.

*Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law.* Context is of extreme importance in the borderlands; in both the physical sense, where every student in a classroom might come from a different country or speak a different language at home, as well as the emotional sense, where every student’s story is a vital actor in their education, A contextual
or historical reading of education in the borderlands will demonstrate that, while undocumented children are legally allowed to attend school, there are many other forces at work—legal, social, economic, racial—which prevent these children from taking advantage of their “equal access” to education. Understanding how the past has influences how these students are treated today, and acknowledging the unique positions—physical and psychological—that these students are in is crucial to ensuring that the education they receive is truly equal.

Critical race theorists ... adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage. This is particularly illuminating of the contemporary discourse around immigration and undocumented workers. Much of the discourse frames anti-immigrant sentiment around economic or legal issues, which elides the underlying tension of racial/ethnic discrimination. While much is made of the “cost” of illegal immigrants, there is little in the way of testable, substantiated data; and yet, this notion of the economic costs of immigration is what drives the common discourse, as if the real people can be reduced to numbers of jobs lost or gained, amount of taxes not paid, dollars spent on healthcare costs or statistics purporting increases in crime. While greater clarity around these issues would no doubt be of benefit, a focus on the economic justifications for anti-immigrant sentiment and legislation glosses over the fact of the underlying racist sentiments and structures.

Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society. Educators often pride themselves on supporting experiential learning, but too often this means valuing the experiences of the mainstream majority. In the borderlands, however, all experiences must be brought in, evaluated, and weighed fairly. CRT in research, too, privileges the personal and specific over the general and generalized, allowing the uniqueness of each experience to come through without being dismissed as statistically insignificant.

To return briefly to the topic at hand, the borderlands, many researchers investigating identity
Critical Theory and the Borderlands of Education

and culture in the borderlands privilege the voices and experiences of the individuals, even going so far as to incorporate the experiences of the researchers themselves in narrative form in their written works. As Rudolpho Chavez wrote in his article, “W(R)i(t/d)ing on the Border: Reading our Borderscape,” the power of CRT is in the “experiential and intrinsic complexity of story knowledge depends explicitly on the Other’s lived experiences” (Chavez, 1999, p. 248). In the spirit of CRT, Chavez wrote a large section of his article in story form, with family history, biography and narrative woven throughout, asserting that these components were “all central to CRT’s genre” (p.248). Proponents of CRT recognize that the power of narrative is in showing that reality is not fixed or singular, and that understanding contexts requires one to read the world as critically as one would a text. For outgroups, Richard Delgado asserts, “stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understanding, and meanings, The cohesiveness that stories bring is part of the outgroup’s strength, An outgroup creates its own stories, which circulate within the group as a kind of counter-reality” (Delgado, 1998, p. 259). This counter-reality is purposefully constructed out of a counter-narrative which contradicts the majority opinion or experience.

Bhatia and Ram (2001) wrote of “Locating the Dialogical Self in the Age of Transnational Migrations, Border Crossings and Diasporas,” and of the difference between a self-ful and self-less perspective, where the “self-ful perspective maintains a clear opposition and demarcation between the self and the other, whereas in the self-less perspective, the person is essentially fused or merged with the social world” (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 298). Writing as they do of the importance of dialogical voices, they argue that immigrants to the U.S. intertwine their development of an immigrant identity with the stories of those in their ethnic or national group who have come before them: “Through personal and collective remembering, tales of discrimination, hardships and sheer exploitation are kept alive in immigrant communities. Many of these narratives are circulated as unofficial histories of immigrant communities and are intimately bound up with the formation of an individual immigrant’s
identity” (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 303-4). This idea of the self-less individual, whose identity is merged with the social world, provides an interesting perspective on the importance of stories to helping people link their own feelings and experiences to those who have come before them, replacing the community of their home with a new community built on immigrants’ shared experiences. Many other researchers have used their own personal stories to illuminate a point or to provide an alternate telling of the “truth,” (Chawla and Rodriguez, 2007; Major, 2006; Helfenbein, 2006; Dlamini, 2002; Swift, 1995; among others).

Critical race theory is interdisciplinary. The interdisciplinary nature of critical theory is vital to studying, working with, and working in the borderlands. In terms of studying the borderlands as a phenomenon, it is not simply a geo-political entity. To work within the borderlands concept demands that teachers and researchers cross disciplinary boundaries, linguistic boundaries, and cultural boundaries, so that they can understand and support the students.

Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. Clearly, students whose existence is hidden, who are written about only as numbers, who are off the map both literally and figuratively, are oppressed. Their identities, their rights to personhood are whited out as they move from town to town, or as they leave ESL services and aren’t assisted to transition successfully to mainstream classrooms, or as they simply feel less and less valued and fall farther and farther behind. These are all ways in which the majority dysconsiously silences the voices of minority students and families.

What can CST/CRT tell us about the borderlands?

Critical Race Theory's challenge to oppression and the status quo sometimes takes the form of storytelling in which writers analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdom that make up the common culture about race and that inevitably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (West, p. xvii).
Narrative and storytelling are key methods through which the borderlands must be explored. Because of their fluidity, their hiddenness both in the school and out in society, the inhabitants of the borderlands are often not counted; their voices are not heard or, if heard, heard only in a limited, singular identity. Where numbers fail them, voices must raise up to demand that they be heard and counted; this is a key component of CRT: the power of voice, of even one voice, to counteract the oppressive power of numbers. Where multicultural students are forced to check “white,” “black,” or “Hispanic” on a form, CRT gives them a fill-in-the-blank.

For teachers and other school administrators working in the borderlands—both physical and psychic—unlearning habits of “self” versus “other” can be an important step in breaking down the institutional barriers that prevent certain groups from advancing. Building on Fine’s idea of “working the hyphens” (Fine, 1994, as cited in Asher, p. 1082), Nina Asher writes about the importance of, “integrating—rather than resisting/distancing one’s encounters with difference into one’s consciousness is a productive process that deconstructs the binary of self and other” (Asher, p. 1082). It is especially important for teachers and others working with students in the borderlands to critically examine their own culture(s), their biases, their “encounters with difference” in the context of their self-construction as learners and as teachers. “Teachers of language minority students who are not border crossers or bilingual need exposure to the complexity of the cultural border crossing experiences of their students” (Major, 2005/2006, p. 125).

As a framework, CRT largely looks at the construction of power structures in institutional forms, originally the legal system but more recently the educational system, to examine the ways in which discrimination has operated on institutional levels and the effects this has had on individuals. CRT also attempts to offer ways which society can redress these wrongs. The persuasiveness of CRT lies within the broad system-oriented analysis which incorporates both the actual “wrongs,” the factual instances of discrimination, and the individuals’ perception of these wrongs, their narrative. For instance, CRT
presupposes that race is not a biological determinative, but a social construct. However, Kimberlé Crenshaw maintains that “to say that a category such as race or gender is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in our world” (Crenshaw, p. 375). The factuality of racism can be acknowledged while refuting the notion that race is a valid, objective, biological category. In much the same way, CRT as applied to the field of education helps educators and scholars examine and “decolonize,” as Nina Asher says, the dual pedagogies of teacher and student “the particular interstices at which they [teachers] and their students are situated and within which they work” (Asher, p. 1080). This is particularly relevant for teachers and students in the borderlands, who must go about the business of teaching and learning in the delicate context of intercultural, inter-lingual, identity-constructing communication.

Critical Race Theory and other offshoots of Critical Social Theory, such as Queer studies, Latino/a studies, and feminist or women’s studies, thus provide a valuable lens for examining both the experiences of teachers and students, and for evaluating the methodologies and orientations used to examine these experiences. For individuals whose cultural, religious, linguistic, racial, ethnic, geographic, and sexual identities leave them in the borderlands of overlapping and contradictory/complementary orientations, the stories of their experiences in education and their understanding of themselves as learners and teachers will be much more completely and respectfully told when their borderlands-ness is identified and privileged. Gloria Anzaldúa notes in the preface to the 1987 edition of her book that “the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrink with intimacy” (Anzaldúa, unpaged preface).

My own private borderland
In the forward of “Critical Race Theory,” Cornel West poses an interesting question: "What is our vocation as oppositional intellectuals who choose to stay in a legal academy of which we do not feel fully a part?” (West, p. xi) What if what scholars of color lose is authenticity to their communities by joining the academy? What do they have to give up, and what do they hope to gain by joining the discourse from within academia rather than by abstaining in protest? While not a scholar of color, I believe deeply in the idea that as a scholar one much also be an activist. One of the most important aspects of CRT is the valuing and validating of personal narrative, and to this end many researchers working from the CRT framework include personal, first-person narratives in their scholarly writing. As someone who has spent a good deal of her life in the borderlands, I believe that putting forth a personal narrative will both enrich the discussion of this text and will profess my participation in the traditions of CRT.

My family moved around a lot while I was growing up, although the two key moves were our move to New Mexico from Georgia when I was in second grade, and then a move to Virginia when I was finishing eighth grade. All told, we spent six years living in New Mexico, and I consider that I grew up there; more there than anywhere else, in any event. Living there was my first experience as the "other." My elementary years were spent in a magnet gifted program where I was encouraged, challenged, supported, and believed in. Our teachers were “facilitators” whom we called by their first names; we took class trips to study the pueblo remains in Chaco Canyon, we competed in Odyssey of the Mind competitions, we constructed model rockets and designed and built architectural models. As a multi-grade classroom, I spent three years with the two teachers and with the students of my grade, growing up together as a learning community. I left this warm environment to attend a "regular" public middle school on the opposite side of town. The transition to middle school is a difficult one for anyone, and it was particularly challenging for a shy gringa who didn't attend the local elementary school with everyone else. I was in the gifted classes and even in those classes was often far ahead of my classmates; this didn't make the transition any easier. Arguably there are many worse difficulties to face than being one of the smartest kids in the class, and I'm sure that many of my classmates faced problems at home that far outstripped what I encountered at school. It was, nonetheless, an extremely difficult transition for me, and I felt on what I remember to be a daily basis my difference, my otherness. Three years at this middle school never lessened the feeling that I was distinctly out of place; I was the student who didn't go to elementary school with everyone else, whose surname was not Chavez or Torres or Gonzalez, who didn't speak Spanish at home. I was far from the only White student, but I felt keenly my separate status. Educationally, too, I was isolated; this school was far less prepared to meet the needs of the gifted students. I
remember participating in pull-out math enrichment classes, but as these never had a connection to the regular math curriculum, it was just another way of being set apart from the other students.

I started taking French lessons on the weekend while in elementary school; despite living in a primarily Spanish-English bilingual area, I was determined to instead learn French. By the time we left New Mexico to move to Virginia, I was proficient enough that I would always remain as or near the top of my French classes thereafter. Moving to Virginia was a return to a primarily White school environment, a larger community environment where the race duality was no longer Hispanic/White but Black/White, which was new for me. My high school provided the intellectual and academic challenges that had been so lacking in middle school, and it also was an environment where I fit in and found many peers who looked like me, talked like me, had family backgrounds similar to mine, and so on. When the time came to choose a college, financial need largely made the decision to attend a state school; luckily, it was an excellent school where I was challenged to grow in many, many ways. It was not, however, in looking back, a particularly diverse institution, and despite the academic rigor, I would be hard-pressed to state that there was the same level of rigor extended to critiquing the lack of divergent viewpoints within the university community.

After graduating with a double French/history major, I went to a small town in Picardie, the north of France, to teach English. Picardie is probably the least touristique place in France; the weather is constant rain for nine months of the year, there is one Cathedral that is somewhat well known by the French but mostly ignored by any foreign visitors, and the region's one true claim to fame, the massively impressive English and German military cemeteries from WWI and II, are quickly losing relevance and visitors in today's world. The Picards identify strongly with their regional heritage and were proud of their insularity, and even I as the consummate outsider and only American within many kilometers, could see the divide between the townspeople and the fonctionnaires, or state officials, who were assigned to the region for a short term of duty and who often as quickly as possible returned to warmer and more welcoming climes. I have often thought that my extreme other status as a non-French person actually allowed me to ignore many of the class and linguistic divisions of the area; I was so far outside that I often felt more welcome as the foreign English teacher than I would have been as a French-born teacher from another region in France.

This was the environment I encountered when I first traveled abroad to end up teaching secondary school English "enrichment" classes at a large high school serving students from all the small villages around the mid-size town of Abbeville. Over the course of my first year, I was constantly surprised by the strange stereotypical conceptions these students had of Americans. Looking back, it's nothing that surprises me now, but at the time I was perplexed at the persistent idea that all Americans eat hamburgers and French fries every day, that all Americans are fat and yet, paradoxically, Americans are all blond and beautiful and have perfect teeth. Of course, Americans by and large think of the French as cheese-eating, wine-drinking, baguette-carrying and beret-wearing. So we all have our most basic stereotypes to which we ascribe; it was most likely my own inflated sense of the relevance of American culture in the rest of the world that led me to think that my students would have more finely developed and nuanced ideas of what America and
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As I only taught twelve contact hours a week, I also took a job teaching English to university students in the nearby town of Amiens. Amiens boasted the only university in the area, the fore-mentioned Cathedral, and a fairly vibrant city life. I loved walking around the pedestrian-only area of Amiens. I taught literally in the shadow of the Cathedral, in the converted abbey, and walked from the train station to the school along cobblestone streets that crisscrossed over the canals that ran through the city, eventually running into the Somme River and ending in the English Channel. Here, my students were slightly more worldly and diverse; while many of them came from the surrounding villages, some of them did come from the larger towns, such as Amiens, and all of them were studying business and looking towards being selected to complete an internship abroad. These students had a more sophisticated outlook on culture—French and American—and the place of English in their lives; they very definitely wanted to achieve a passing score on the TOEIC in order to qualify for an internship spot in England, and they wanted the conversation skills to be able to succeed in these internships.

In the context of these professional challenges, then, I found a place in French small-town life. There was a period of adjustment, to be sure, but my nomadic childhood had actually prepared me well enough for dealing with the feelings of loneliness/isolation, and also for finding my way into new friendships and connections with colleagues. My first year there was far from perfect, and I ran into many, many moments of culture shock, no doubt exacerbated by the fact that I was only 22, but by the end of the year I was enjoying teaching and had more or less settled in. My second year in France the fellow English teachers I had befriended all returned home to finish their degree programs, but I had a new group of all-French friends, mostly teachers, with whom I socialized quite a bit. I spent my second year in a bit of a strange place; living almost entirely in French obviously improved my grasp of the language in leaps and bounds, but it also silenced certain parts of my personality. The fact that the year began with the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11th, and the consequent wars and increasing anti-American sentiment in France, made me feel even more isolated than I had my first year, where walking through the town I would often hear students whispering to their parents, Là-bas, c’est l’Américaine! (Over there, it’s the American). This was my second experience as the other. It was during this time that I came to both love and hate America, in ways that remain with me still in a very complicated mix of emotions. Having already decided against returning to the law school spot which was being help for me, I realized towards the middle of my second year in France that teaching was not just something I was doing in France, it was actually something I was quite good at doing. I decided to get my master’s degree in teaching English, and found the FAST TRAIN program here at Mason, which was originally designed to train and certify the spouses of foreign affairs officers.

Life in France was not a completely idyllic experience. Living in France I saw first-hand the dangerous schism that has affected many European countries with large Muslim and/or North African population. Over the course of the two years I lived in France, the tension was increasingly real, marked by frequent car burnings that were always ascribed to the beurs, the Arabs of North African descent, and large riots around the increasingly viable and visible candidacy of extreme right-wing Jean-Marie le Pen for President. Increasingly, driving through the rough banlieues that
surround city centers was to be avoided; much easier was for the French to simply turn their backs on these hotbeds of racial, ethnic, and economic tension. In terms of accepting and integrating, the very things that made the French French, their obstinate insistence that liberté, égalité, fraternité meant that they would fight the foulard, or head scarf, as a symbol of religious ostentation, were the very attributes that made entrance into French-ness impossible for those not born into it.

As the narrative above demonstrates, there are many ways that my history, education, and work experiences have positioned me as the Other. As a shy, White newcomer to a majority Hispanic school in New Mexico, as the American in a small French town, as the wife of an immigrant and wife of bi-cultural children with unpronounceable names; in many different ways I have experienced being other. I also have been the beneficiary of a great deal of privilege in my life: as a White person attending elite academic programs; coming from a supportive, non-divorced parent, upper-middle class family; having opportunities to travel and even life abroad. My life, professionally and personally, post-France has in many ways been a continued search for balance between being Other/subordinate and the Otherer/dominant. Looking specific at my professional experiences working in education, as a teacher-turned-researcher who continued to work with teachers, I was immersed and caught between the theory versus practice debate. In particular, working in test development has given me what I hope is a nuanced view of this divide. For example, looking back on my position as a go-between, I am fully aware of the critiques that can be made from those in the classroom about the forms and purposes of standardized assessment. On the other hand, I can also see that allowing individual or local free reign in terms of accountability and decision-making has not and does not always serve the best interests of the students.

Recounting and understanding this story is vital to understanding the events that led to my joining the education field, to pursuing first a master’s degree and then a doctoral degree. The story is also illustrative of the origins of many of my research interests,

Discussion & Conclusions
Kimberlé Crenshaw poses the question: “[Does] any discourse about identity [have] to acknowledge how our identities are constructed through the intersection of multiple dimensions?” (Crenshaw, 377). Concerning students and educators in the borderlands, the answer clearly is: yes. It is in the interaction of home, community, and school settings where the communication practices of the settings and identity-formation of the participants work either together or at cross-purposes. Critical Social Theory, with its emphasis on critique of existing social systems and power structures, provides an appropriately oriented perspective for examining the institutions of education and how the composition of these institutions delimits the identity construction of the inhabitants. CST also provides researchers with a framework for critiquing how research is done, in both the form and the content, allowing the voices of both observers and observed to be valued.

Critical Social Theory is a powerful lens for examining and giving voice to the stories of the students, parents, and educators who are confronted with issues around difference. Narratives are a compelling and humanizing way to interpret and round out the data provided by statistics and test scores. If, as prominent critical theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw posits, the descriptive project of post-modernism is “questioning the ways in which meaning is socially constructed” (Crenshaw, p. 375), we as scholars and educators must also examine the ways in which we research and educate, we must clearly evaluate the frameworks within which we position ourselves and our research, we must deconstruct the lenses through which we view the observed and the observer. Above all we must be open to the multiplicity of truths, and strive to accurately represent these truths in both the form and the content of our work.

There is still much work to be done in understanding how power structures education at the intersection of policy, economics, class/race, and the borderlands of international and transnational migration. There is also much to be done in continuing to explore that which has been unvoiced and denied, by inviting those voices to the table, by exploring frameworks which value and privilege them,
and b challenging paradigms which leave so many voices uncounted. It is the hope of this author that this work in some small way will contribute to this worthy goal.
Works Cited:


