

FINDING THE POWER WITHIN

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FINDING THE POWER WITHIN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FINDING THE POWER WITHIN

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The enrollment of nonwhite students in public schools is increasing nationwide. The National Center for Education Statistics (2021) predicts that by the fall of 2029, the percentage of students who are white will drop to 44 percent. As a result of an increase in minoritized students, educators need to attend to the needs of their students' changing demographics. This transformative mixed-methods study was conducted to determine if a support group for African American students could improve their educational experience in a predominantly white school middle school. African American students did not have a formal program or system for social-emotional development in this affluent suburban middle school. They need a support system that can provide a sense of belonging and understanding to ensure the opportunity to be successful in a predominantly white middle school. The results of this study reported the African American support group provided social-emotional education and support (empowerment) for the participants. They found ways to express their feelings regarding issues within the African American community by creating content for WCMS's advisory curriculum (action).

Dedicated to my son, Charles, may this achievement be an example of what can be accomplished if you refuse to give up. I look forward to watching you grow into a young man and I love you very much.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to my advisor, Dr. Davin Carr-Chellman, for providing guidance and encouragement throughout this process. Your honest feedback and persistent optimism kept me moving toward the end goal.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTATIONS

WCMS	Water Curve Middle School
PWI	Predominantly White Institutions
CRT	Critical Race Theory
SSA	Self-awareness and Social-awareness Assessment
SCS-R	Self-Consciousness Scale
PAR	Participatory Action Research
IEP	Individualized Education Program

CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Statement of the Problem

Topic

The enrollment of nonwhite students in public schools is increasing nationwide. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), between the fall of 2000 and the Fall of 2017, the percentage of White students decreased from 61 to 48 percent nationwide. The rate of white students is dropping while the share of non-white students is increasing. The National Center for Education Statistics (2021) also predicts that by the fall of 2029, the percentage of students who are white will drop 44 percent. This study aims to identify methods to improve African-American middle school students' social and cultural educational experience in a predominantly white school district. This study created a support group for African American students to build community among African Americans and foster inclusion and awareness in the broader school community (Loyola University Maryland, 2002).

The Problem of Practice

As a result of an increase in minoritized students, educators need to attend to the needs of their students' changing demographics. At Water Curve Middle School (WCMS), African American students do not have a formal program or system for social-emotional development. They need a support system that can provide a sense of belonging and understanding to ensure the opportunity to be successful in a predominantly white middle school. The need to belong, also known as belongingness, refers to a human emotional need to affiliate with and be accepted by group members.

African American students that have found success within predominantly white institutions acknowledge they had help and encouragement from teachers, counselors, and others who have seen potential in them (Griffith et al., 2019).

Background of Setting

WCMS is a public school located in an affluent suburb northwest of a major urban center in the eastern United States. The Superintendent partnered with The Equity Collaborative to conduct an equity audit to find and elevate the voices and stories of those whose experiences are not widely known or accepted and make recommendations for the next steps. The Equity Collaborative is a national consulting firm focused on helping schools, school systems, and youth development organizations create educational equity. The Equity Collaborative specializes in equity coaching. They work with schools, school districts, and youth development nonprofits. Their goal is to help organizations develop their own capacity to create educational equity and social justice by addressing bias and oppression.

The assessment aimed to identify key areas of strength and areas for improvement and further development regarding equitable practices in the district. During the spring of 2019, from mid-April through the end of May, The Equity Collaborative conducted a series of focus group sessions and interviews at 24 schools across the division to review division culture related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and race. Elementary, middle, and high school students, staff, parents, and administrators were interviewed for at least an hour each. Questions asked were used as prompts for deeper discussion. The Equity Collaborative staff gathered all qualitative data, removed all names and other identifiers, sorted the comments by themes, and shared the resulting analysis in a public report.

The superintendent created a strategic plan to address equity and race issues identified within the district once the assessment results were published. Part of the district's mission is to provide a world-class education to every student. Recently the district recognized that addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion is an important element of its mission. The mission statement and strategic plan are available on the district's website, links to the plan were emailed to parents, and paper copies were given to staff and available to families. The school district provides extensive curriculum-based and classroom management professional development for teachers and staff. Few teachers have received training to address social and cultural issues within the classroom because addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion are challenging.

Justification of the Problem

Before sharing the data from the equity audit of Suburban Public Schools, it is important to provide some context for race-related stressors at predominantly white institutions. Although this study focused on African American middle school students, most of the research presented in this section was conducted with college students because of the lack of research involving middle school students. According to an article published in the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, a sample group of African-American students at the University of Virginia reported experiencing a wide range of race-related stressors at predominantly white institutions (PWI) (Griffith et al., 2019). Predominantly white institution (PWI) is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. These experiences included having a heightened awareness of negative stereotypes held by Black people due

to underrepresentation in academic spaces, experiencing unintentional racial insults, and facing intentional, blatant discrimination.

This study was designed to determine how to support African-American middle school students in a predominately white school district. Adolescence is one of the first times individuals begin to think about how their identity may affect their lives (Butler, 2008). During adolescence, people are more self-conscious about their changing identities than at any other stage in their lives (Butler, 2008). Adolescents are sensitive to their social surroundings, as teachers and peers significantly impact students' behavior, decision-making, and self-regulated learning (Kilford et al., 2016; Paris & Paris, 2001). African American students in middle school need help to develop a positive self-identity by giving them an opportunity to 1) realize they are not alone, 2) express feelings regarding race-related stressors and how to reduce them, 3) learn and acquire a broader perspective about African American culture and, 4) gain hope and pride in being African American (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). One of the deficiencies identified in the equity audit was a lack of cultural affinity groups for minoritized students throughout the school district. A racial/cultural affinity group is a group of people sharing a common race/culture who gather intending to find connection, support, and inspiration (Moore-Southall, 2020). Currently, African American students at WCMS do not have a system to support their positive self-identity development.

Deficiencies in the Organizational Knowledge Record

Existing research focuses on the educational experiences of African American students attending predominantly white high schools or colleges. Research suggests that schools must promote and nurture supportive environments for African American

students to succeed at predominantly white colleges and universities (Sinanan, 2016). According to existing research, African American college students must require a new skill set, including advanced study skills, socialization skills, research skills, and the ability to exploit networking contacts. If students began learning these skills during adolescence, they would be better prepared for higher education.

Adolescence is the first time individuals think about how their identity may affect their lives. During adolescence, we are much more self-conscious about our changing identities than at any other stage in our lives. While a great deal of research focuses on the self-identifying life experiences of African American college students, there is less research on younger students (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Audience

The results of this study were shared with the principal, teachers, parents, and participants. Each stakeholder group has invested interest in the success of WCMS. Therefore they were asked to make suggestions for improvement. This study could give the principal, teachers, and parents knowledge of the support needed by African American students that can be implemented in the school setting and at home. The participants in this study could learn how to advocate for their specific needs. The data, results, and findings from the survey is accessible to all stakeholders through a written summary report and an in-person meeting presentation.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

The Libran Theory recognizes the power imbalance between minoritized people and white people and works to redistribute power where all people cohabitate in an

equalized society. The power imbalance is apparent in every facet of society, such as healthcare, education, housing, finances, and business. There are a few definitions of power, but for this purpose, power is defined as a source or means of supplying access. Access is the freedom or ability to obtain or make use of something. The researcher of this study believes the purpose of searching for truth is to understand and help overcome the oppressive social structures we live under (Hesse-Biber, 2017). More specifically, the law and legal institutions are inherently racist. Instead of being biologically grounded and natural, race is a socially constructed concept used by white people to further their economic and political interests at the expense of people of color. Consequently, the researcher aligns herself with critical theorists, particularly race and feminist theorists. Being a black woman, she views the world through both theories, recognizes inequalities and injustice, and lives to eradicate them (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The Libran Theory incorporates two theories and one educational philosophy, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Theory of Love, and Characteristics of Marianist Universities.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed in response to the mid-1970s conservative, reactionary attack on the achievements of the civil rights struggle and the failure of liberalism to stave off this attack, both ideologically and in public policy. The theory can be compressed into four basic tenets. First, CRT recognizes that race is not biologically real but is socially constructed and socially significant. The idea of race was created to categorize people for the benefit of the white people that created the system. American society developed the notion of race early in its formation to justify its new economic system of capitalism, which depended on the institution of forced labor,

especially the enslavement of African peoples (Smithsonian, 2021). This categorization of people became a justification for European colonization and subsequent enslavement of people from Africa.

Second, CRT acknowledges that racism is a normal social feature embedded within systems and institutions. The concept of race was formed and acknowledged during the formation of the nation; consequently, racism is apparent in every system and institution. Regarding race, dominant members can bestow benefits to members they deem "normal" or limit opportunities to members that fall into "other" categories. A person of the non-dominant group can experience oppression in the form of limitations, disadvantages, or disapproval (Smithsonian, 2021). Thirdly, CRT recognizes that racism is codified in law, embedded in structures, and woven into public policy [and] rejects claims of meritocracy or 'colorblindness.' According to Naomi Zack's (2011) proposed *Ethics of Race*, people must acknowledge their wrongs to change. Our nation must address the damage caused by slavery and segregation. The primary cause was to maintain power over black people. White culture is the dominant culture in this nation. Therefore most decisions are made to appease the dominant culture (Hitchcock & Flint, 2015). White cultural dominance causes all other cultures to fall secondary to white people, giving white people power over different cultures. When the oppressed cultures attempt to voice their needs and grievances, the dominant culture does not listen because they believe they know best. This is known as the Silenced Dialogue, creating more dissension between the dominant and the oppressed (Delpit, 2001). Lastly, CRT Recognizes the relevance of people's everyday lives to scholarship. This includes embracing the lived experiences of people of color, including those preserved through

storytelling. Our nation is experiencing growing pains regarding the balance of power and privilege. Consequent to current events, such as the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Trayvon Martin, many systems within our nation are at the precipice of change. CRT believes the narrative has to change.

Critical Theory of Love

In regards to love, Cornell West (2014) said “love is what justice looks like in public.” Then to eradicate inequalities and injustice in this country, the idea of love must be reconceptualized because the type of love shown in today’s society is toxic and dangerous to our well-being, sense of self, and community because of cultural acts of domination (hooks, 2000). Brooks’ Critical Theory of Love (2017) suggests that love must: 1) Be reconceptualized to meet the demands of justice, 2) Be based on Black and Brown lived experiences, 3) Be embodied for social justice, 4) Tend to the whole person, and 5) Be measured by how effective our pedagogy and practice stymy alienation and heal. The active pursuit of oppressed people is fueled by their core understanding of love and willingness to be dehumanized. The work of love, or a critical theory of love, understands the innate dignity of all human life and actively creates practices that reunite and rehumanize (Brooks, 2017).

Characteristics of Marianist Universities

The Libran theory shares two Characteristics of Marianist Universities (2014). The first characteristic is to educate for service, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. Understanding the constant need to work for social justice to ensure equality for people of color, the Marianist belief in justice and integrity of creation was equal in

quality and nature to the Libran Theory. This belief fuels marginalized communities' collective drive to persist in a nation that aims to dehumanize them. The second characteristic is to educate for adaptation and change. This characteristic is essential to the survival of every organization. As knowledge increases, people change and adapt to accommodate their growth. This study aims to find the best strategy to increase the self-awareness of African American students attending predominantly white middle schools. By increasing self-awareness in African American students, these students will gain pride in their race and be better prepared to address microaggressions within the classroom.

The imbalance of power resides within the division within our county. According to Mosley & Smith (2018), understanding and responding to culturally sensitive environmental crises is particularly important for human service agencies. For example, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2020), among public schools, the percentage of White principals declined from 87 percent in 1987–1988 to 80 percent in 2011–2012. Whereas, as of 2020, public school enrollment is 46% students of color. Concerning power structures, if most of the administration is part of the dominant culture and most of the students are part of the oppressed culture, then their voices will not be heard effectively. The Libran theory critiques the balance of power that exists within many American systems. It states that a person's ability to succeed is determined by their race because one race has been given preference over all other races. The non-preferred cultures are necessitated to actively pursue or gain acceptance from the dominant culture to gain equal opportunities.

Limitations

This study is limited to African American students that attend WCMS. Therefore the pool of participants is greatly decreased from the broader population of students. The participants choose to attend the after-school program; consequently, they may be more self-aware than most middle-school African American students. This study uses young participants, which can also be a limitation. Adolescents begin to look around them for their status among their peers, to clues they receive from adults, and even to the larger society and media, for messages about who they are and what they could become (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Students may be too young to identify their level of self-awareness. Therefore, it may be difficult to get accurate data. Also, the participants will need parental consent to participate; some participants may be forced to participate by their parents. Children's consent (assent) must always be sought, alongside parental consent and any other requirements that are necessary for the research to proceed ethically (Sadzaglishvili et al., 2021).

The researcher is employed as a special education teacher at WCMS. She is very active in the school community and lives in the same community as the students, which could pose some ethical concerns.

Review of Related Literature

Durrryle Brook's critical theory of love, in combination with the Libran Theory, informs this study. The critical theory of love both understands the innate dignity of all human life and actively creates practices that reunite and rehumanize (Brooks, 2017). This study focuses on the fourth tenant of the critical theory of love, which centers on

minoritized students' experiences and co-creates rehumanizing practices that heal and restore. The Libran Theory states that a person's ability to succeed is determined by their race or culture because one race has been given preference over all other cultures. This study aims to restore balance by teaching African American students to love their culture. Every lesson created in this study teaches African American students to love themselves and use that love to break down stereotypes.

Framework(s) Informing the Study

In this transformative mixed-methods study, an African American student support group will be offered as an after-school club. Transformative mixed-methods studies are designed to empower individuals and advocate for social justice (Piccioli, 2019). The club will meet monthly throughout the academic school year (Dowden, 2009). I will observe and interact with a small group of African American students participating in a support group. The purpose of the group is to increase self-awareness in African American students by 1.) teaching students coping strategies to employ while attending their predominantly white schools and 2.) affirming cultural pride by teaching Black history.

Participants were exposed to self-advocacy skill development on three levels. Level one will be interpersonal communication (information), level two will be interaction (application), and level three will be reinforcement (comprehension). This design was organized to provide detailed information related to self-advocacy skills while allowing enough time to ensure that students adequately processed the data. Each level will be allotted thirty minutes. The 30-30-30 teaching model provided stimulating and engaging teaching and learning (Jenkins et al., 2002).

The students completed the Self-awareness and Social-awareness Assessment (SSA) at the beginning of the year and the same survey at the end of the school year. The Self-awareness and Social-awareness Assessment (SSA) was created as a small part of a larger cross-disciplinary project between the Engineering Education and Mechanical Engineering departments at Purdue University to explore how transformative approaches to teaching user-centered design influence the professional formation of engineering undergraduates (Joslyn & Hynes, 2016). The SSA was created based on the Revised Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R)⁸ and Measures of (Dis)engagement¹ survey instruments.

Related research

Although much research identifies the need to improve the social and cultural educational experience for African American students in higher education, there is a shortage of research regarding African American middle school students in predominantly white school districts (Dei, 2001). Two emergent themes were identified in the literature; 1) African American students' stress levels and 2) African American students' need for support.

African American Students' Stress Level

African American students in or at predominately white schools experience more stress than their white peers because of race-related factors. They feel isolated in the classroom because they may be the only person of color (Griffith et al., 2019). Often the curriculum does not positively represent minoritized culture. Generally, students come to school backed by different histories. Dominant status makes it possible for white students, for example, to see their experiences, histories, and knowledge as a norm. These

students may, directly and indirectly, insist that they remain the center of discourse and classroom practice. Minoritized students challenge and resist their subordination by remaining or choosing to remain silent (Dei, 2001). African American college students experience negative interactions with members of the surrounding communities and in dormitories (Griffith et al., 2019). They are likely to encounter a host of racial microaggressions (i.e., frequent indignities that, despite possibly being unintentional, communicate racial slights and insults about an individual's racial/ethnic group; (Sue et al., 2007) from faculty, staff, and peers, many of whom possess little personal experience interfacing with the Black community and whose knowledge of Black culture may be limited to negative stereotypes in the media (Griffith et al., 2019).

African American students experience racial slurs, insults, and hostile learning environments. However, they are expected to adhere to the same academic requirements (Equity Collaborative, 2019). Educational requirements are created by the governing body of a school district. The school district does not account for racial disparities and the stress they induce on minoritized students. African American students desire to excel academically just like their white peers. However, African American students have the additional stress of race to contend with.

African American Students Need More Support

African American students seek support from other African Americans and/or other minorities. The opportunity to share their experience and hear how adults have overcome race-related stress in the school environment helped African American students destress (Griffith et al., 2019). Many students do not share their experiences with their parents. However, they benefit from sharing their experiences with an adult (Equity

Collaborative, 2019). African American students choose to confide in those who they believe understand their experiences. The person of choice shares a marginalized racial/ethnic identity, outlook, and values or knowledge of the types of experiences they went through. African American students often confide in those who identify as Black or another racial/ethnic minoritized, allowing for a shared understanding.

African American students benefit from student/teacher relationships beyond the classroom. The most impactful teachers and staff are those who make a real effort to get to know them as individuals, learn about their out-of-school lives, and build the kinds of positive relationships that research has shown to have strong effects on student engagement and educational attainment (Howard, 2014). African American students express appreciation for adults in schools and elsewhere in the local community (e.g., in churches, sports clubs, and community service programs) who empathize with them, choosing to see them as potential leaders, change agents, and success stories (Huerta et al., 2020).

African American students that have found success within predominantly white institutions acknowledge they had help and encouragement from teachers, counselors, and others who have seen potential in them. They credit the support they have received from adults in school and other settings, and they know that many more of their peers would be just as successful if given the same support (Huerta et al., 2020). If more support were provided for all African American students, they could realize more success and possibly require fewer disciplinary actions. For example, other young people, such as Black and Latino boys, deserve effective counseling to help them translate their ambitions into concrete successful plans (Huerta et al., 2020).

Action Research Design and Methods

In this study, the researcher wanted to know if the educational experience of African American students can be improved by providing a support group to increase their cultural awareness. This study is participatory action research (PAR) and a transformative mixed methods study. PAR is a design in action research aimed at improving the quality of people's organization, community, and family lives by incorporating an emancipatory aim of enhancing and empowering individuals and organizations in educational settings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). PAR focuses on social change that promotes democracy and challenges inequality; it is context-specific, often targeted to the needs of a particular group; it is an iterative cycle of research, action, and reflection; and it often seeks to 'liberate' participants to have a greater awareness of their situation to take action (Macbeth, n.d).

PAR practitioners make a concerted effort to integrate three basic aspects of their work: participation (life in society and democracy), action (engagement with experience and history), and research (soundness in thought and the growth of knowledge) (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). This study aims to improve the educational experiences for Black students that attend predominantly white middle schools. PAR seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it because it is a self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake to understand their world better and make changes. The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by an understanding of history, culture, and local context, and embedded in social relationships. The method of

PAR should empower people to have increased control over their lives (Minkler and Wallerstein).

This study is also a transformative mixed methods study. Mixed methods research is the collection, analysis, and integration of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a program of inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A transformative framework includes a person's worldview and implicit value assumptions. These assumptions are that knowledge is not neutral and is influenced by human interests. Knowledge reflects the power and social relationships within society, and the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people in improving society (Sweetman et al., 2010).

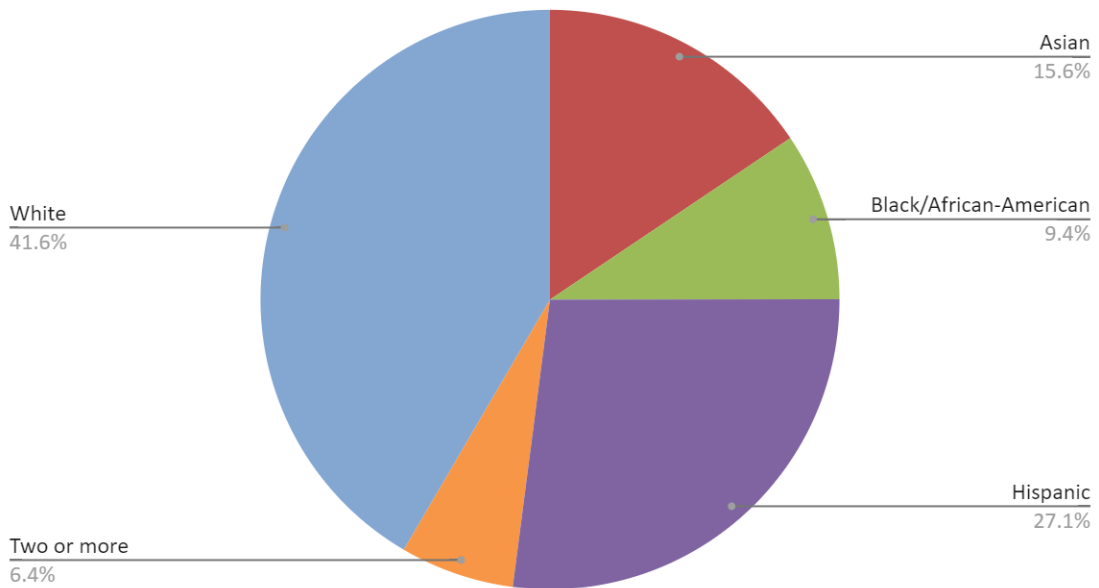
Transformative mixed methods studies introduce the transformative view into the study through the use of a research problem that has relevance to a marginalized community, a theoretical lens that might guide the research, research questions that are relevant to the issues of the community, and a literature review that included key issues of the community, such as diversity and oppression (Mertens, 2009). Transformative mixed methods studies follow the following criteria (Sweetman et al., 2010; Mertens, 2009): 1) reference a problem in a community of concern, (2) declare a theoretical lens, (3) research questions (or purposes) written with an advocacy stance, (4) literature review include discussions of diversity and oppression, (5) appropriate labeling of the participants, (6) data collection and outcomes benefit the community, (7) participants initiate the research, and/or where they actively engaged in the project.

Site or population selection

Water Curve Middle School (WCMS) is a public school located in an affluent suburb northwest of a major urban center in the eastern United States. It has 1,230 students in grades 6-8 with a student-teacher ratio of 12 to 1. According to state test scores, 85% of students are at least proficient in math and 86% in reading. WCMS's mission is to empower students to make meaningful contributions to the world.

The mission is identical to its district's mission. See the demographic enrollment in the chart below.

Student Enrollment at WCMS



WCMS's district was established in 1870 to fulfill the need for free education during the Reconstruction era after the Civil War. For most of its history, WCMS's district served a rural population known mainly for its dairy farms. Since opening a major airport serving the nearby metropolitan area in 1962, the district's population has grown tremendously.

In the 20th century, including during the civil rights movement and the era of massive resistance, the school district was one of the last school districts in the nation to begin desegregation in 1967 (The Washington Area Boards of Education (WABE), 2019). In 2020 the school board, the administration, and the county board issued a public apology for their blatant disregard and disrespect of Black people (Aspegren, 2020). For this study, a group of three Black students met after school monthly in the researcher's classroom. The group was open to both girls and boys to address the social implications of African American adolescents while also attempting to provide inherent support through similarities in race, culture, and experiences (Dowden, 2009). The group size was estimated based on current after-school club sizes. The researcher's classroom can accommodate up to 20 students, and there is space and supplies to complete reflection projects. The participants could have been male and female Black students in grades 6-8 because the group will be open to students that attend WCMS.

Researcher role and positionality

The researcher is employed at Water Curve Middle School as a special education teacher. She leads the emotional disabilities program accessible to all students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). However, if students need to take a break and talk, they are welcome to visit the researcher's program throughout school hours. Many students see the researcher on the morning announcements once a week when she has other students and staff engaging in various games and contests. As an African American teacher and alumni of the school district, it was easy to relate to the students' experiences in the group. The researcher's current and past experiences could have affected her ability to create unbiased content for this study.

As the researcher, she will lead and create the content for the support group. She marketed the support group to students, parents, and teachers. The marketing strategy included creating an announcement for the students, holding an after-school meeting for parents, speaking at the staff meeting for teachers, and being available to answer questions.

The participants shared their feelings, thoughts, or questions about the content during the study. This information was analyzed to determine if the support group effectively improved educational experiences for all Black students attending middle schools within the school district. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and could refuse to participate at any time. The participants' work was reviewed for clarity and did not affect their grades or participation in other school activities.

Ethical & political considerations

This study aims to identify ways to help middle school African American students increase their cultural awareness. Some community members may think this study is teaching critical race theory; however, the researcher is not teaching critical race theory (CRT) in this study. CRT is a framework or practice that examines how systems, policies, and the law perpetuate systemic racism. CRT calls on you to look critically at systems to better understand the origins of racial inequities (2021). This study focuses on the needs of African American students attending WCMS. The researcher takes a critical look at how WCMS addresses African American students' needs to find deficiencies and provide suggestions for improvement.

Before any data was collected, the proposed study was submitted to the Internal Review Board of the University of Dayton. The participants of this study were minors, and their parents signed a consent form before the first meeting. In writing, a clear presentation of the group goals and content was shared with the students and their parent(s). The students and parent(s) provided signed participant agreements. Every participant had the right to disengage at any time. All materials collected were locked in a secure place. The data collected was read back to each participant to ensure the researcher represented their opinions accurately.

Data collection methods

Data for this study was obtained through two sources: an in-person paper survey and an after-school support group aimed at the exploration of information via field notes. The support group provided the opportunity for real-time lessons and discussions. The surveys were developed by Engineering Education and Mechanical Engineering departments at Purdue University and the structure for the support group was developed by the researcher. The survey and the support structure were presented to the school principal, psychologist, and after-school clubs advisor. Feedback was incorporated into the revised formats of the survey and lessons, and all individuals agreed that the instruments provided a good fit for the study.

Surveys

The purpose of the group was to increase self-awareness in African American students by 1.) teaching students coping strategies to employ while attending their predominantly white schools and 2.) affirming cultural pride by teaching Black history.

The school-based psychologist suggested and provided the Self-awareness and Social-awareness Assessment. The Self-awareness and Social-Awareness Assessment (SSA) was created as a small part of a larger cross-disciplinary project between the Engineering Education and Mechanical Engineering departments at Purdue University to explore how transformative approaches to teaching user-centered design influence the professional formation of engineering undergraduates. The SSA was created based on the Revised Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R)⁸ and Measures of (Dis)engagement¹ survey instruments.

The SCS-R is a 22-item questionnaire developed by Scheier & Carver (1985), which measures private and public self-consciousness and social anxiety. Private self-consciousness is defined as attending to one's inner thoughts, particularly when they are of a personal nature (e.g., beliefs, values, and feelings). Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss define public self-consciousness as "a general awareness of the self as a social object that has an effect on others...." However, Scheier & Carver consider it the tendency to focus on matters of one's "public display, qualities of the self from which impressions are formed in other people's eyes..." (e.g., behavior, mannerisms, expressive qualities). Participants rate their SCS-R characteristics (i.e., private self-awareness, public self-awareness, and social anxiety) by responding to 22 statements using a Likert-type scale (3 = a lot like me, 2 = somewhat like me, 1 = a little like me, and 0 = not at all like me).

During the Purdue University study, the SSA was distributed to the same classroom at two different times: time 1, before engaging in the human centered-design project, and time 2, after completing the human-centered design project. In this study, Purdue University used the test-retest method to ensure reliability. The SSA was

administered as a single survey, but it was scored according to the two distinct instruments of which it was composed. The time 1 data set was collected to establish a baseline for students' self-consciousness (i.e., disposition to direct their attention toward themselves and enter into a state of self-awareness) and (dis)engagement (i.e., the importance students place on public welfare beliefs and therefore the likeliness that they will engage in focused attention on those beliefs entering a state of social-awareness) before engaging in the human-centered design project. The time 2 data set affects collected after completing the design project to track significant responses from time 1 to 2. They looked at previous results of the original instruments to see how the data from their study were compared.

When referencing the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance's manual for creating surveys, some existing survey items needed language changes to be relevant to the target population (Irwin & Stafford, 2016). Therefore, the language in the survey was adapted to accommodate younger students. Currently, the survey is written for college-age students, whereas the researcher used the survey for middle school students. This survey was designed to determine the level of self-awareness each participant begins with and how much self-awareness they will have at the group's completion. The survey addresses a topic that requires a great amount of introspective knowledge, which can be difficult for some middle school students. The survey will be printed on paper, and each participant will receive a copy. To address reading complications, the survey will be read aloud. Survey results will be stored in a locked file cabinet with the parental consent forms for each participant.

Documents

During each meeting, the facilitator taught a coping strategy and introduced an influential historical figure, and the participants completed a reflection activity. The reflection activities were written, drawn, and shared verbally. One participant maintained a journal with general prompts or prompts specific to the lesson or group theme but did not want it used for the study because the journal was also used for personal writing. The journals will represent a good source of text data for this study because they will be in the participants' language (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The other participants wanted to share their reflections verbally. The researcher and the school psychologist maintained researcher notebooks. At the conclusion of each meeting, the researcher and the school psychologist compared their notes to ensure all thoughts were captured.

Data analysis procedures

The following section discusses the process of cleaning, transforming, and modeling data to determine how to best address the problem of practice.

Quantitative analyses

The data produced from the survey was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics involved summarizing and depicting data each time the survey was given. However, inferential statistics or statistical tests infer relationships or differences in a population based on the sample statistics (Frost, 2020). Once data was collected, and a table was created using excel, the researcher determined the relationships represented in the data.

Qualitative analyses

Using the grounded theory approach to the study's qualitative data analysis, the researcher used Open coding procedures regarding Critical Race Theory. Open coding is the part of data analysis that focuses on the conceptualization and categorization of phenomena through an intensive analysis of the data (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Data was broken into smaller amounts that were deeply analyzed to grasp each part's core idea and develop a code to describe it. Then smaller analytical pieces were compared with respect to similarities and differences. While creating the categories' dimensions, theoretically relevant characteristics of every category were determined and explicated in the code descriptions (Mey and Mru 2011). Open coding aims to develop a wealth of codes to describe the data by questioning and investigating (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). The researcher used personal and professional experiences and relevant literature to interpret the data and develop codes to describe the interpretation (Strauss and Corbin, 2012).

Quantitative findings

The survey results and a few artifacts from the support group were shared with the principal, teachers, parents, and participants. Each stakeholder group was asked to make suggestions for improvement. The data, results, and findings from the survey is accessible to all stakeholders through a written summary report and an in-person meeting presentation.

Procedures to address Research Study Integrity

Dependability was maintained by providing a detailed outline of the research methods used, enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. Data gathered via surveys and researcher field notes were validated with participants to ensure accuracy (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Confirmability was maintained by the audit trail, including a detailed journal, capturing the researcher's thoughts and challenges as she progressed through the research study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The audit trail also included the examination of biases held by the researcher which are relevant to the topic.

Credibility was maintained by utilizing established research practices with fidelity. This study employed well-established research methods such as member-checked reflection activities and transcription coding during data analysis. The participants were purposely chosen because they are African American students that attend a predominantly white middle school. Before the start of the study, all participants were informed of the processes and intended use of the data gathered from the survey instrument and lessons. The participants were allowed to terminate participation at any time to ensure that the data collection sessions involved only those willing to participate and were prepared to offer data freely (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). No identifying information was collected during the survey, and participant identity was concealed using a pseudonym of the researcher's construction.

Transferability was maintained by ensuring the research methods were well documented, using thick rich descriptions from data gathering and analysis procedures (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This study used rich details of the school and the support

group to focus on the lived experiences of African American students that attend a predominantly white middle school. This study's findings contribute to the knowledge of how an after-school support group for African American students increases their cultural self-awareness.

CHAPTER TWO: RESULTS OF RESEARCH

Results of Research from Chapter One Study Proposal

The following sections show and describe the information gathered through the transformative mixed methods framework. A transformative framework includes a person's worldview and implicit value assumptions (Sweetman et al., 2010). Qualitative data was collected via six monthly group meetings. Each meeting lasted an hour. Quantitative data was collected through a paper and pencil survey administered during the initial and final meeting of the support group. The results of this participatory action research (PAR) and transformative mixed methods study aimed to better understand if the educational experience of African American students can be improved by providing a support group to increase their cultural awareness. PAR is a design in action research aimed at improving the quality of people's organization, community, and family lives by incorporating an emancipatory aim of enhancing and empowering individuals and organizations in educational settings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Quantitative Results

This section will describe the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R)(Scheier & Carver, 2013) survey results. This instrument was given at the initial and final meeting of the support group. The results of the survey sought to determine if the lessons and discussions of the support groups increased the participant's level of self-awareness. Ethnic identity development or self-awareness for minoritized people can significantly impact African American students' transition to high school. The participants in this study

were in middle school, and during middle school, many students begin exploring their identity by considering who they are and what makes them unique individuals (Vernon, 1993). This task is particularly complicated for adolescents of racial or ethnic minority groups, given the complex and confusing messages they receive about their identity (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Increasing self-awareness is essential to the overall development of African American youth because it is associated with the psychological adjustment of adolescents, including the development of their positive self-image and sense of belonging (Phinney, 1989).

Demographics

The researcher marketed the group to all African American students at WCMS. Convenience sampling was employed when selecting the participants for this study. The participants were selected based on availability and willingness to take part. The participants in this study were 8th-grade students at WCMS. The support group met on the first Thursday of each month from January 2022 to June 2022. A total of three female African American students participated in the group. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' confidentiality.

Table 1

Demographics

	Emily	Nancy	Anna
Age	13	12	13
Race	AA	AA	AA
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Grade	8	8	8

Descriptive Statistics for Self-Consciousness

For this study, the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R) was administered at the initial and last meeting. The Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R) measures social anxiety. The theory behind the scale was presented by George Mead (1934) and further implemented as the theory of objective self-awareness by Duval and Wicklund (1972). It defines self-consciousness as the activity of becoming the object of one's thoughts and claims to measure three constructs related to self-consciousness. The scale is broken into three subscales: public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness, and social anxiety. Private Self-Consciousness is related to the inward direction of one's thoughts. In contrast, Public Self-Consciousness is associated with the outward direction of one's thoughts or the ideas and beliefs one has about the impact of their presence on other people. The third subscale is called Social Anxiety and is considered an enfoldment of the Public Self-Consciousness subscale. The authors defined this construct as a

consequence that could emerge from some further reflection on one's public self-consciousness (DeSilveira et al., 2015).

Participants responded to questions, such as "I often daydream about myself," "I'm usually aware of my appearance," and "I get embarrassed easily," presented as Likert scales, with options ranging from "not like me at all" to "a lot like me." Responses were coded for comparison along a scale from one to four. The initial surveys indicated that most group members scored relatively high on the Private Self-consciousness subscale with a mean of 17. The Public Self-consciousness Subscale and Social Anxiety Subscale had a mean of 12. The final surveys indicated a drop in mean scores. The Private Self-consciousness subscale with a mean of 16.67. The Public Self-consciousness Subscale and Social Anxiety Subscale had a mean of 11.33. Tables two through seven on the following pages contain these statistics. See tables two through seven.

Table 2*Private Self-consciousness subscale (initial)*

	Emily	Nancy	Anna
I never take a hard look at myself	2	1	0
I know the way my mind works when			
I work through a problem	3	2	3
I generally pay attention to my inner feelings	1	3	0
I'm always trying to figure myself out	3	3	3
I sometimes step back (in my mind) to examine			
myself from a distance	3	3	NA
I'm constantly thinking about my reasons for			
doing things	2	2	3
I often daydream about myself	0	0	0
I think about myself a lot	3	3	2
I'm quick to notice changes in my mood	3	3	0
Total	20	20	11

Table 3*Public Self-consciousness subscale (initial)*

	Emily	Nancy	Anna
I care a lot about how I present myself to others	2	3	3
I'm concerned about what other people think of me	3	1	3
I usually worry about making a good impression	0	1	1
I'm self-conscious about the way I look	3	0	2
I'm concerned about my style of doing things	2	1	2
I'm usually aware of my appearance	1	2	3
Before I leave my house, I check how I look	1	1	3
Total	12	9	17

Table 4*Social Anxiety Subscale (initial)*

	Emily	Nancy	Anna
I get embarrassed very easily	2	2	2
It's easy for me to talk to strangers	2	1	3
I feel nervous when I speak in front of a group	2	3	3
It's hard for me to work when someone is watching me	2	3	1
It takes me time to get over shyness in new situations	3	3	1
Large groups makes me nervous	1	3	1
Total	12	15	11

Table 5*Private Self-consciousness subscale (final)*

	Emily	Nancy	Anna
I never take a hard look at myself	1	1	3
I know the way my mind works when I work through a problem	0	3	1
I generally pay attention to my inner feelings	1	3	0
I'm always trying to figure myself out	1	3	3
I sometimes step back (in my mind) to examine myself from a distance	3	2	1
I'm constantly thinking about my reasons for doing things	2	3	0
I often daydream about myself	3	2	3
I think about myself a lot	3	0	2
I'm quick to notice changes in my mood	0	3	3
Total	14	20	16

Table 6*Public Self-consciousness subscale (final)*

	Emily	Nancy	Anna
I care a lot about how I present myself to others	2	1	2
I'm concerned about what other people think of me	3	2	1
I usually worry about making a good impression	0	2	3
I'm self-conscious about the way I look	3	0	2
I'm concerned about my style of doing things	1	3	1
I'm usually aware of my appearance	1	0	3
Before I leave my house, I check how I look	0	1	3
Total	10	9	15

Table 7*Social Anxiety Subscale (final)*

	Emily	Nancy	Anna
I get embarrassed very easily	3	3	1
It's easy for me to talk to strangers	1	2	3
I feel nervous when I speak in front of a group	1	1	3
It's hard for me to work when someone is watching me	3	0	1
It takes me time to get over shyness in new situations	2	2	1
Large groups make me nervous	3	1	3
Total	13	9	12

When comparing the initial and final surveys, score differences did not exceed the margin of error, showing a minimal change in all three subscales. The results of the surveys did not show any significant changes in the participants' level of self-awareness. Therefore, according to survey results, the participant's level of self-awareness did not increase. Using a larger sample size and extending the time between the initial and final survey could likely yield different results.

The Cronbach's alpha for private self-consciousness was .75, for public self-consciousness, it was .84, and for social anxiety .79. These alphas compared favorably to

those of the original scale. The test-retest correlation for the private subscale was .76, the public subscale .74, and the social anxiety subscale .77. These suggest that the scale possesses reasonable stability over time (Midss, 2022); therefore, the results of the survey were not due to any faults in the instrument's design.

When determining sample size in relation to the research method, Cohen et al. (2000) suggest research using a relational survey design should not have a sample size of less than 30. Although a sample size between 30 and 500 at a 5% confidence level is generally sufficient for many researchers (DELICE, 2010), the decision on the size should reflect the quality of the sample in this wide interval (Thomson, 2011). The researcher's target sample size for this study was 10-15 participants based on the African American population of WCMS. African Americans accounted for 9.5% of WCMS's overall population. The targeted 10-15 participants would have accounted for 9-13% of the African American population. The sample size for this study only accounted for 2.5% of the African American population at WCMS. Three participants are not an appropriate sample size that will generate sufficient data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Qualitative Results

For this study, a support group was created for African American students at WCMS. The group met after school on the first Thursday of each month. The researcher facilitated the group with the school psychologist. At the meetings, lessons were taught, and participants were allowed to share their thoughts. In addition to the meetings, the researcher met with the participants separately throughout the month. The researcher notes were coded based on themes of empowerment and action. See table 8 for meeting topics.

Table 8

African American Student Support group meeting schedule

Meeting 1	1. Introduction 2. SCS-R administered 3. Tour school to identify African American teachers and staff
Meeting 2	1. Presentation of African American historically significant figure 2. Lesson on how to respond to Black History month discussion
Meeting 3	1. No meeting because of spring break 2. A participant makes a video about the harmful effects of stereotypes to show to peers
Meeting 4	1. Lesson on self-image
Meeting 5	1. Lesson on Identifying stress and ways to relieve it
Meeting 6	1. SCS-R administered 2. End-of-year celebration

Empowerment

Meetings one, two, and four fell under the theme of empowerment. The researcher provided participants with information that educates and empowers them to combat racism encountered at school. During meeting one, the facilitators and group

members introduced themselves, the group's purpose was shared, expectations were established, and the initial survey was administered. Finally, students were introduced to African American staff and teachers working within WCMS. Anna said, “Dang! I didn’t know there were that many of us (African Americans),” She shared that she would have asked for help last year when she was called a racial slur. The school has 4 African American teachers (one male, three females), 5 African American teaching assistants (three males, two females), and one African American administrative assistant (female).

During the second meeting, each participant and facilitator presented historically significant figures of their choosing to the group. Their presentations included the reason the person was chosen and a list of their accomplishments. Emily asked, “Why don’t we talk about this stuff in History class?” Anna said, “Yeah, I like hearing about our people (African Americans). We should share these (presentations) on the announcements.” All participants wanted to have African American history included in the curriculum. For the remainder of the meeting, the researcher and participants discussed strategies for participating in conversations about race in class because WCMS was observing Black History Month. Nancy said, “I’m only going to talk when I want to share. They better not ask me a lot of questions.” The researcher reminded the participants that they were not spokespeople for their race and had the right not to speak. The researcher encouraged the participants to share their experiences with their peers when they felt comfortable.

During meeting 4, participants engaged in a self-image activity. Each participant was given six pictures of women’s faces. The participants had to choose which image represented a strong person. And write down their answer in the space provided next to the image. The school psychologist facilitated a discussion once everyone shared their

choice. Most of the participants choose an African American woman with an Afro haircut. Each person had a different reason to justify their choice. However, everyone's justification included "a look of confidence and determination." During the discussion, most participants desired to be confident when needed. They shared that they were not confident sometimes at home or school, but they felt more confident when online.

Action

Meetings three, five, and six fell under the action theme. These meetings show how participants used the information taught by the researcher to introduce opportunities for change and acceptance.

There was no formal meeting during the third month because of spring break. However, one of the participants (Nancy) wanted to share an announcement regarding racial stereotypes. After participating in a classroom conversation during Black History Month, she wanted to create a public service announcement for the school's news broadcast. The news broadcast is a live broadcast available to all students and staff within WCMS Tuesday-Friday mornings from 8:18-8:25. Nancy asked the researcher to help her create an announcement. The researcher convinced Nancy to create a video to show during the morning news show because she did not like speaking in front of people. The approving authority (the teacher sponsoring the news show) decided that Nancy's video was better suited for WCMS's advisory lessons. Advisory activities at WCMS foster relationships and a stronger sense of belonging and community among students and staff. These activities occur during the first 20 minutes of the first class each day. Nancy's video was added to the school's advisory calendar and taught during the month.

The public service announcement included discussion questions and a suggested writing activity that Nancy created.

The fifth meeting occurred at the end of the school year. The school psychologist prepared a lesson on identifying stress and provided strategies for relieving stress. The participants shared their sources of stress. Most of them reported that school was very stressful. They were at the end of the year, and the expectations and assignments were overwhelming. The participants were nervous and excited about going to high school next year. The participants agreed that high school seemed scary and that they had not “even thought about ways to make things better.”

In the final meeting, the facilitator provided food and drinks. The participants shared their favorite songs and hugged each other during dismissal. They asked if the high school had an African American support group and if the middle and high school support groups could work together next year. Emily said, “This was so fun.” Anna agreed and asked, “Do they (the high school) have a lot of black teachers? I hope so.”

Summary

It is paramount that schools, particularly secondary schools, create school environments that give African American students the best opportunities possible and that are not placed in environments in which only the resilient can be successful (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The African American support group provided social-emotional education and support (empowerment) for students at WCMS. Participants found ways to express their feelings regarding issues within the African American community by creating content for WCMS’s advisory curriculum (action). They learned how to identify stress and could identify allies throughout the school. The group provided

opportunities and space to express themselves freely without judgment. According to the SCS-R results, the participants' social anxiety levels lowered slightly, which increased their overall social consciousness however, there were no significant differences in statistical analysis.

Action Plan

Adolescence is one of the first times individuals begin to think about how their identity may affect their lives. During adolescence, people are more self-conscious about their changing identities than at any other stage in their lives (Butler, 2008). African American students in middle school need help to develop a positive self-identity by giving them an opportunity to 1) realize they are not alone, 2) express feelings regarding race-related stressors and how to reduce them, 3) learn and acquire a broader perspective about African American culture and, 4) gain hope and pride in being African American (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). This study aimed to determine how to support African-American middle school students in a predominately white school district.

Table 9

Outline Action Plan

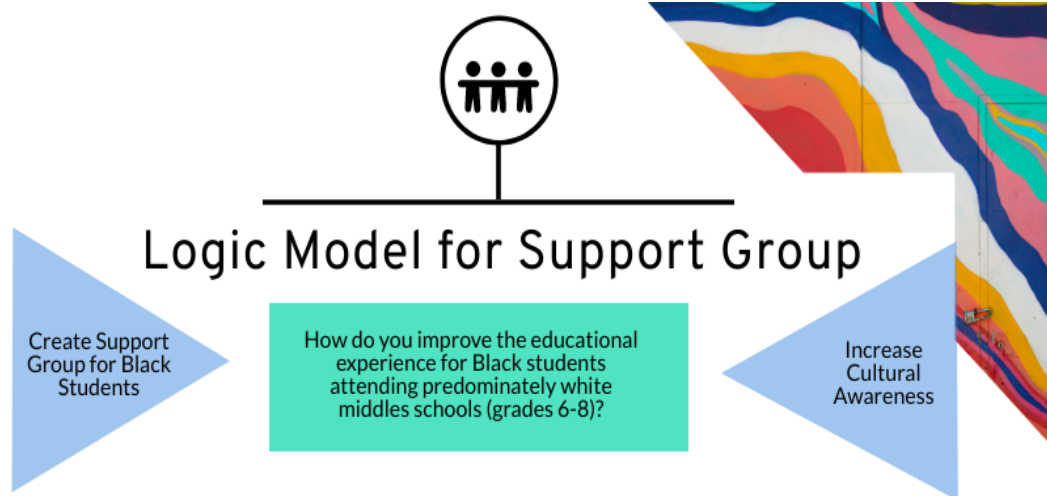
Objectives and outcomes (what)	Tasks (how)	Person(s) (who)	Time (When)	Location (where)	Resources
Objective: Support AA middle students in predominantly white school districts	a. Create and maintain African American student support group	Administrators Teachers Parents Students	January 2023	Water Curve Middle School	Teacher Created curriculum District approved training material
Outcomes: Improve the educational experience for AA Students enrolled in predominantly white schools districts	b. Provide professional learning on cultural responsiveness for school staff				

WCCMS's equality mission states that it is committed to decreasing disparities, increasing opportunities, and participation outcomes for rigorous learning, dismantling barriers and interrupting the status quo for the development of more robust equitable practices. A diverse, inclusive, equitable, and socially just teaching and learning community is a priority at WCMS. The objective outlined in Table 1 is based on WCMS's mission statement. This plan focuses on the educational experience of African American students enrolled at WCMS by providing support for this group of students. The support is provided through 2 separate tasks.

The first task will be to create and maintain an African American student support group. A support group offers a safe place where members can get practical information and support. The advice from other members is usually constructive and helpful. The group will teach coping strategies for school stress and introduce historically significant African American figures. These goals should increase members' cultural awareness and confidence within the classroom. The goals and objectives for the support group are outlined in the logic model.

The logic model proposes a cyclical long-term progression for a support group. This study did not reach any medium or long-term outcomes, possibly due to the low meeting frequency. This model provides broad goals for creating and sustaining a support group. The cycle begins with establishing a group. When establishing a group, the leader needs to determine when the group will meet, how often the group will meet, and where the group will meet. The short-term goals could be to recruit members and allow the group to run based on the leader's format (teaching lessons or discussion based). The medium-term goals suggest maintaining the group by meeting regularly, which could

increase confidence in the classroom and cultural awareness. The long-term goal for the group could be for the participants to improve their academic performance. The short-term goals lead to the medium-term goals, which lead to the long-term goals. This group occurred as an afterschool club, and school has a natural break in the summer; therefore, the group leader will need to start the group again each school year to allow new participants to join.



The second task is to provide professional learning on cultural responsiveness for school staff. Cultural responsiveness training is designed to help school staff become culturally competent (Samuels, 2018). Cultural competency is awareness of one's cultural identity and views about differences and the ability to learn and build on students' and their families' varying cultural and community norms (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Through professional development, school staff can develop fundamental knowledge and skills related to equitable family engagement, including how to effectively: model and advocate for valuing diversity; self-assess and demonstrate awareness of one's own identity and culture within the broader school and community context; promote culturally competent teaching and family engagement practices, including distinguishing between behavioral challenges and cultural differences; encourage and teach students communication and conflict resolution skills related to cultural differences; understand and utilize appropriate and effective family engagement strategies (Nuri-Robbins et al., 2007).

The plan will be implemented in January 2023 until data indicates goals and objectives are achieved. The facilitator will create the resources for the support group, and the district will provide the training materials for professional development.

Justification

This section justifies the action plan suggestions since the statistical data from this study was not definitive. Many studies included college students but the participants in this research project are middle school students. Educational performance during middle school is foundational to the high school programs into which students are streamed or placed and is also critical to later academic, occupational, and social achievements

(James, 2019). In addition to having typical challenges in middle school, African American students that attend predominantly white schools (PWIs) have unique needs and concerns (Jones, 2021). They require spaces where they can be their authentic selves without white people's judgment and insecurity muzzling that expression (Blackwell, 2020). After conducting the research, two requirements became apparent. African American students benefit from lessons and discussions facilitated in the support group and would benefit from having the same opportunities within the classroom. Valuing and protecting spaces for people of color is not just a kind thing that white people can do to help them feel better; supporting these spaces is crucial to the resistance of oppression (Blackwell, 2020). Therefore teachers need more training to promote and facilitate culturally sensitive discussions within the classroom (Chiu et al., 2017).

African American Students Benefit from Support Groups

Providing support groups for African American students is very beneficial. A support group was created for African American males and facilitated by African American males in England to provide a culturally relevant space where Black male students could safely discuss issues and dilemmas they faced in college and broader society. The support group was created to provide culturally relevant support and to challenge persistent issues of educational and societal disadvantage encountered by many African American males in the UK. This group met twice a month and was designed to enable African American males to meet with other 'similarly situated people... talk through their everyday life' (Morrison, 2008) and, supported by Black male tutors, to co-create situated responses to the challenges of being a member of a minority ethnic community studying in at the university. The group members were supported in

navigating their course through the university and developing academic or employment options in a culturally safe environment where they could take risks and not be judged through unhelpful stereotypes. The research participants universally agreed that they benefited from attending the group as it allowed them to discuss issues relevant to African American male students in a culturally safe environment (Peart, 2017). Our study did not focus on employment or academic success. Our primary focus was on the social-emotional development of African American middle school students. Our support group and the all-male college support group members reported benefitting from participating. The lessons and discussions contribute to the empowerment component to change.

African American students seek out support from their peers. Most research on African American student engagement shows that they receive support from their peers, particularly their Black peers (Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017). African American students report that peers who share common outlooks, goals, and/or experiences are important because they can understand and relate to them. However, they explained that they could better develop supportive relationships with their same-race/ethnic peers of African descent (Black, African, African American, etc.). Therefore, a support group for African American students can create a safe space to discuss issues and maintain supportive relationships with peers and staff.

Teachers need multicultural training

Student populations are becoming increasingly more diverse (Evans et al., 2021). Research confirms that the cultural differences between teachers and students can also perpetuate education inequity and hinder the academic progress and achievement of students from diverse backgrounds at any academic level (Lappin & White-Clark, 2007).

The expectation that teachers facilitate racial equity in their classrooms, absent training to address their own biases, may be impossible, especially if teachers' racial biases mirror those of the American population (Starck et al., 2020). Many educators and policymakers contend that incorporating multiculturalism into teacher education will promote educational equity and, in turn, positively impact the educational experiences of students from diverse backgrounds (Kea, Trent, & Davis, 2002).

Teachers' mindsets toward diversity and inclusion and their expectation of their students can affect the effectiveness of their teaching. Vavrus (2002) suggests that teachers engage in self-reflection exercises to understand their role better and increase their ability to infuse diversity issues in the classroom and throughout the curriculum. Teacher preparation programs and school districts should train teachers to appropriately and culturally teach all students at every academic level. Multicultural education has considerable advantages/aims (Levinson 2009): preserve cultural diversity and minority group culture; foster children's critical thinking and development of autonomy by exposing them to alternative opinions, beliefs, values, and perspectives; promote social values like mutual respect, civic cooperation, open-mindedness, tolerance; promote social justice and equity; aims to assure equity of chances and opportunities in education even for the students coming from the most disadvantaged groups; aims to eliminate social injustice; increase the self-esteem of non-mainstream students; promote authentic learning by teaching in a culturally congruent manner; enable students to integrate themselves and to succeed professionally in a harmonious and multicultural environment.

The empowerment-action-change cycle can operate better in a multicultural educational environment. In this study, African American students were coached and

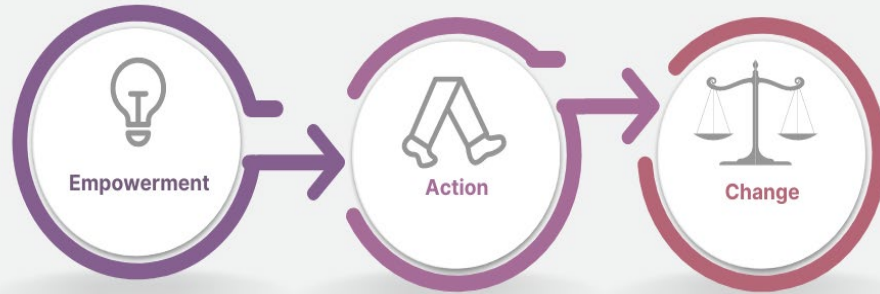
supported through the empowerment-action-change cycle while participating in the support group. The action phase was implemented in the educational setting outside of the group setting. If the educational environment was more conducive to cultural needs, African American students could progress through the cycle and see results. Teachers are responsible for creating multicultural educational environments; therefore, they need adequate skills to integrate the students' different cultures into classroom experiences (Alismail, 2016). Teachers need to have multicultural training in teacher preparation programs and in-service training.

Data from this study shows two distinct components (empowerment and action) must be present to invoke change. Empowerment is becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights (Oxford Languages, 2022). Once the participants were empowered, they became committed to action based on the knowledge to effect positive social change (Ferrance, 2000). The only way to redistribute power where all people cohabitate in an equalized society is to empower minoritized people to take action, which is the Libran Theory's overall objective. Empowerment and action do not operate in isolation. Without recognizing the power within, people are not moved to action. Conversely, if people do not believe that they need to act, they will not engage in the process of learning their power. So, the support group must continue to help students realize their power and assist them in action. And the school environment must be inclusive to stimulate and cultivate the cycle of empowerment and action.

Libran Theory

Strategy for Change

The only way to redistribute power where all people cohabitate in an equalized society is to empower minoritized people to take action, which is the Libran Theory's overall objective.



CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTION

Description of Intervention

The needs of African American students are often disregarded by non-African American middle and high school counselors and administrators. Research shows that these students are more likely to be placed in classes that don't prepare them for college or a career, subject to harsher discipline, and less likely to address their mental health needs (Jones, 2021). This project began as a desire to change the evident injustice in my school district. This study aims to improve the educational experience of African American students attending a predominantly white middle school by creating an African American support group to address the lack of social and cultural educational experiences for African American middle school students in a predominately white school district.

The action research plan was grounded in the Libran Theory, which combines elements of critical race theory, Durryle Brook's (2017) critical theory of love, and the Characteristics of Marianist Universities. The Libran theory critiques the balance of power within many American systems. The theory states that a person's ability to succeed is determined by their race or culture because one race has been given preference over all other cultures. The non-preferred cultures must actively pursue or gain acceptance from the dominant culture to gain equal opportunities.

Each month, a lesson was presented, and the participants were allowed to share their thoughts or opinions regarding the topic (see Table 8). Once the participants were dismissed, the school psychologist and I met to compare notes and discuss solutions for our next meeting.

Table 10

African American Student Support group meeting schedule

Meeting 1	1. Introduction 2. SCS-R administered 3. Tour of school to identify African American teachers and staff
Meeting 2	1. Presentation of African American historically significant figure 2. Lesson on how to respond to Black History month discussion
Meeting 3	1. No meeting because of spring break 2. A participant makes a video about the harmful effects of stereotypes to show to peers
Meeting 4	1. Lesson on self-image
Meeting 5	1. Lesson on Identifying stress and ways to relieve it
Meeting 6	1. SCS-R administered 2. End-of-year celebration

The Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R) was administered at the first and last meetings. The SCS-R measures social anxiety. The scale is broken into three subscales: public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness, and social anxiety. Private self-

consciousness is a tendency to introspect and examine one's inner self and feelings.

Public self-consciousness is an awareness of the self as others view it. This kind of self-consciousness can result in self-monitoring and social anxiety (Midss, 2022).

For many Black students, survival and growth at a predominantly white university are impeded by a sense of alienation from the "mainstream" campus life, regardless of integration into campus ethnic communities (Loo & Rolison, 1986). African American students attending predominantly white middle schools experience feelings of alienation as well. The African American student support group was created to provide interventions that will address African American students' personal growth. This intervention moves forward following the example of similar programs that have successfully mitigated these negative psychological repercussions.

Analysis of Implementation

African American middle school students that attend predominantly white schools (PWIs) have unique needs and concerns. Middle school is the transitional period that positions students for life in high school, graduation, and post-high school achievements. This transitional period can be particularly sensitive for minority students, who are simultaneously navigating a critical phase of ethnic identity formation while encountering school environments that all too often undermine their social and psychological well-being and that, both directly and indirectly, call into question their abilities to succeed academically (Borman et al., 2021). After conducting the research, two needs became apparent. African American students benefit from the lessons therefore such opportunities need to be more broadly available to students. And support group discussions of this sort should be deployed both in support groups as well as more

broadly in the classroom itself. Therefore teachers need more training to facilitate culturally sensitive discussions.

Support Group Success

Providing the support group was very beneficial. The group provided African American students a safe space for personal growth and shared strategies that they have found to be effective for coping with stress and feelings of incompetence. Pamela Shipp (1983) stated that ethnically homogeneous groups allow members to function altruistically as active helpers for each other rather than simply as passive victims of mainstream discrimination.

The support group also helped African American middle school students develop their ethnic identity. Ethnic identity development can have a major impact on African American students' transition to high school. In middle school, many students begin exploring their identity by considering who they are and what makes them unique individuals (Jansen & Kiefer, 2020). Ethnic identity for minoritized students can be complicated because of the complex and confusing messages they receive about their identity (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The process of ethnic identity development is essential to the overall development of African American youth because it is associated with the psychological adjustment of adolescents, including the development of their positive self-image and sense of belonging (Phinney et al., 1997).

The group gave African American students an entry point to seek support from their peers. Most research on African American student engagement shows that they receive support from their peers, particularly their Black peers (Rollock et al., 1991). African American students report that peers who share common outlooks, goals, and/or

experiences are important because they can understand and relate to them. However, they explained that they could better develop supportive relationships with their same-race/ethnic peers of African descent (Black, African, African American, etc.). Therefore, the support group for African American students created a safe space to discuss issues and maintain supportive relationships with peers and staff.

Teachers need multicultural training

To ensure the success of African American students, classroom environments need to be more inclusive. Student populations are becoming increasingly diverse. Research confirms that the cultural differences between teachers and students can also perpetuate education inequity and hinder the academic progress and achievement of students from diverse backgrounds at any academic level (Nickens & Smedley, 2001). The expectation that teachers facilitate racial equity in their classrooms, absent training to address their own biases, may be impossible, especially if teachers' racial biases mirror those of the American population (Starck et al., 2020). Many educators and policymakers contend that incorporating multiculturalism into teacher education will promote educational equity and, in turn, positively impact the educational experiences of students from diverse backgrounds (Alismail, 2016).

Teachers' mindsets toward diversity and inclusion and their expectation of their students can affect the effectiveness of their teaching. Shandomo (2009) suggests that teachers engage in self-reflection exercises to understand their role better and increase their ability to infuse diversity issues in the classroom and throughout the curriculum. Teacher preparation programs and school districts should train teachers to appropriately and culturally teach all students at every academic level. Multicultural education has

considerable advantages/aims (Levinson 2009): preserve cultural diversity and minority group culture; foster children's critical thinking and development of autonomy by exposing them to alternative opinions, beliefs, values, and perspectives; promote social values like mutual respect, civic cooperation, open-mindedness, and tolerance; promote social justice and equity; aims to assure equity of chances and opportunities in education even for the students coming from the most disadvantaged groups; aims to eliminate social injustice; increase the self-esteem of non-mainstream students; promote authentic learning by teaching in a culturally congruent manner; enable students to integrate themselves and to succeed professionally in a harmonious and multicultural environment.

Analysis of Organizational Change & Leadership Practice

Maintaining a support group for African American students while providing multicultural training for teachers will help dismantle the current social structure at WCMS. A diverse, inclusive, equitable, and socially just teaching and learning community is a priority at WCMS. However, no formal group exists that creates a support system for African American students. African American students are less than 10% of WCMS's enrolled population. African American students need a support system that ensures the opportunity to be successful in a predominantly white middle school. The administrators and teachers are at a crossroads because the WCMS social structure has to evolve. Despite efforts from local division leadership requiring racial sensitivity training for teachers and staff, an equity audit conducted in 2019 indicated a low level of racial consciousness and racial literacy among administrators and teachers. People are unclear and fearful about participating in racial conversations, let alone responding to racially

charged incidents (Equity Collaborative, 2019). This has created an unwelcoming social structure for minoritized students. Symbolic theorists pointed out that the seeming stability of the social structure is underpinned by numerous interactions that maintain it but sometimes also transform it (Hatch, 2018). African American students benefit from the support group. However, the support group would not be necessary if administrators and teachers created inclusive environments for all students.

The support group would be emergent. As long as the need for the group persists, it should remain active. The need will be determined every three years based upon data analysis. Going forward, the group will focus on personal growth and adjusting to life within a predominantly white middle school.

Multi-cultural training would be prescriptive and emergent because many aspects of the training must be addressed to ensure competency. In-service teachers would benefit from the opportunity to engage in professional development and learning opportunities that allow them to (1) explore their beliefs, values, assumptions, dispositions, biases, and experiences related to diversity, (2) discuss controversial topics to increase their comfort level and skill set when facilitating such conversations in their own contexts, (3) learn inclusive pedagogical strategies and consider how to best incorporate these strategies into their environment, and (4) engage in dialogue on how to foster an inclusive climate and culture with students (Samuels, 2018).

Implications for Practice & Future Research

This study offers actionable recommendations for WCMS and all predominantly white middle schools and will advance the field of middle-level education. This study can be replicated at other schools using larger sample size and a longer duration of time.

Existing research focuses on the educational experiences of African American students attending predominantly white high schools or colleges. However, this study provides information regarding African American middle school students. Adolescence (middle school age) is a critical time to invest in students adopting research-based, equitable, developmentally responsive strategies that support cognitive and social-emotional development (Jansen & Kiefer, 2020). This is especially important for students exposed to poverty and other forms of adversity, as they experience greater levels of stress, which affects brain development and connectivity, often at the expense of cognitive functioning (Bonnie et al., 2019). This study could help start to open the opportunity for conversations about supporting African American students in middle school. Waiting until high school or college to provide additional support for social-emotional development can be too late because social-emotional skills have been shown to be beneficial for many important life outcomes for students (Guo et al., 2022).

Creating and maintaining an African American student support group was one suggested solution for addressing the lack of social-emotional support available. However, while conducting this study, a few research questions were considered.

1. Would a discussion-based support group improve the educational experience of African American students in a predominantly white middle school?
2. Which type of multicultural training for teachers (in-practice and pre-service) would best support African American middle school students in predominantly white schools?

Ongoing Support Group and Multicultural Training

The positive adjustment of African American students to life on predominantly white campuses has been related to several non-academic psychological variables (Rollock et al., 1991). Therefore, African American support groups should be ongoing. For this study, data were collected over eight months, and the sample size was small. Nevertheless, the benefits of the support group were demonstrated. However, the benefits would be more significant if allowed to continue for a more extended period because the validation of personal experience and the “safety” of numbers are primary reasons for joining groups and may help to explain the critical role social groups play for Black students (Rollock et al., 1991).

To successfully implement an African American support group, the school district must recruit potential leaders for African American support groups at the middle schools within the community. The group leader should be familiar with the unique adjustment challenges for African American students at predominantly white institutions and know African American culture and societal tension. David Rollock and his colleagues (1991) suggested that African American students may not seek psychological services until they are under tremendous stress and are most responsive to psychological interventions that provide some degree of cultural comfort.

Although not tracked, multicultural training for teachers and staff is crucial for the success of an African American support group and should be embedded in every school’s training schedule. Research conducted with pre-service teachers found students’ knowledge of diverse cultures was marginal and revealed both in-service and experienced educators often employ a pervasive deficit paradigm and blame students and their

families for lower academic achievement and perceived inadequacies (Samuels, 2018). There is a cultural disconnect between teachers and their students. Multicultural training for in-service and experienced teachers would help eliminate the disconnect. Teachers currently implementing multicultural teaching practices reported it encourages their students to feel connected, included, and valued and results in empowerment on behalf of students, helping them better understand and positively view themselves and others, thereby inspiring them to maintain cultural identity and integrity (Samuels, 2018).

Conclusion

Racial illiteracy and unconsciousness are significant challenges within WCMS. Its mission is to empower all students to make meaningful contributions to the world. Working towards cultural proficiency is one way to achieve their mission. Becoming culturally proficient can be daunting because it requires a time-consuming introspective journey that can be unforgiving but rewarding. If a school system engages in the cultural proficiency journey, it must finish the journey by incorporating its knowledge into its practice and policy making. Schools that acknowledge the diversity of their student population understand the importance of promoting cultural awareness. Teachers interested in fostering cultural awareness in their classrooms should actively demonstrate to their students that they genuinely care about their cultural, emotional, and intellectual needs (Lynch, 2014). Schools must teach all students to synthesize cultural differences into their knowledge base to facilitate students' personal and professional success in a diverse world.

Although there is much research identifying challenges for African American students at predominantly white high schools, colleges, and universities, there is a

shortage of research identifying stressors for African American middle school students in predominantly white school districts. This study provides actionable steps for addressing the needs of African American students attending predominantly white middle schools. Creating and maintaining a support group for African American students could help achieve the task. Providing a support group for African American students in middle school can help develop a positive self-identity by giving them an opportunity to 1) realize they are not alone, 2) express feelings regarding race-related stressors and how to reduce them, 3) learn and acquire a broader perspective about African American culture and, 4) gain hope and pride in being African American. The support group could help African American students identify the power they have within themselves to make their educational experience successful.

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APPENDIX A

Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R)

	Not like me at all	A little like me	Some what like me	A lot like me
I care a lot about how I present myself to others				
I get embarrassed very easily				
I never take a hard look at myself				
It's easy for me to talk to strangers				
I'm concerned about what other people think of me				
I usually worry about making a good impression				
I'm self-conscious about the way I look				
I'm concerned about my style of doing things				
I'm usually aware of my appearance				
I feel nervous when I speak in front of a group				
I know the way my mind works when I work through a problem				
It's hard for me to work when someone is watching me				
It takes me time to get over my shyness in new situations				
I generally pay attention to my inner feelings				
I'm always trying to figure myself out				
I sometimes step back (in my mind) to examine myself from a distance				
I'm constantly thinking about my reasons for doing things				
I often daydream about myself				
Large groups make me nervous				
I think about myself a lot				
Before I leave my house, I check how I look				
I'm quick to notice changes in my mood				

APPENDIX B

Self Image Activity

<p>1 She is the third weak 1st person because she looks like she about to SNAP. 😊</p>	
<p>2 This Girl because she looks like she runs things. she looks like she <u>THE BOSS</u>.</p>	
<p>3 she is the least strongest because she's old and slowly getting weaker.</p>	

4 She is the third strongest because she looks like she is running her life and doing things her way.



5 She is the second strongest because she looks like a man. She looks like she doing everything.



6 She is the second weakest because she looks like she can't handle things.

