DOES DIVERSITY TRAINING MATTER? AN INTERPRETIVE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS EXAMINING TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF

A DIVERSITY AND EQUITY TRAINING

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By

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ABSTRACT

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In the United States, racial or ethnic minorities make up more than half of the

nation's children under age 15; and within 10 years, no racial or ethnic group will

constitute a true majority (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Students of Color benefit when

their teachers are racially representative, yet decreasing numbers of Teachers of Color are

trained, hired, employed, and retained in districts all over the United States. Within the

last decade, K-12 institutions are increasing their efforts to improve interactional

diversity between staff and students by offering diversity training to teachers and staff

members. The primary purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to

examine teacher perceptions of one diversity, equity, and inclusion presented over two

years within a school. The data for this study was collected within in-depth, semi-

structured individual interviews, surveys, and memos. The interviews consisted of

thirteen questions with nine educators from a non-unionized charter school– a school

with a 98% Black student population. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and

both were coded and examined for patterns and contradictions. Ultimately, three main

themes emerged from the data: (1) Diversity efforts are enhanced by providing small groups with a focus on multi-perspectival and intersectional lenses from which teachers can glean knowledge; (2) safe spaces which offer the opportunity for an expansion of cultural knowledge are inherent to improving diversity efforts in schools; and (3) classroom strategies tied to student perspectives, data analysis, and curriculum must be implemented within the trainings.

Dedicated to the memory of Amy Deer Smith

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Molefi Asante, one of the leading figures in the field of African American studies, wrote, "Racism in education cannot be overcome by the expression of goodwill; it must be confronted constantly in every conscious way" (2009). Education is one of the basic human rights and yet, prior to the American Civil War, the education of Black students was prohibited in most southern states and within the northern states, the access to education for Black students was minimal. While formal education was almost nonexistent for Black students prior to the Civil War, there were a few exceptions.

In 1787, there was a group of Black parents who organized the African School in Boston to educate their children. This school later became The Abiel Smith School in 1835, but there was overcrowding and many challenges in school funding and consequent inferior educational conditions. As a result, the Black community, led by William Cooper Nell, led a movement for Equal Schools (Grover & Da Silva, 2002). Education leaders have examined issues of equality in education for over 100 years since even before *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) made "separate but equal" the cornerstone for Black Americans. After years of court cases, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) declared that Jim Crow schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Many thought that the *Brown* ruling was the beginning of implementing equality for Black men and women. The *Brown* ruling was compared to the Emancipation Proclamation in its magnitude, as Black students seemed to finally have hope for truly equitable schooling opportunities (Martin & Brooks, 2020).

Brown was a landmark decision which provided immediate relief in judgment; however, the decision did not provide equal educational access in practice. Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 illegalized employment discrimination based on sex or race in 1965, fewer than half of Black adults had completed four years of high school when compared to White adults. In 1973, Black students' access to education and opportunity was menial, at best (Anderson, 2016).

Today, race in education remains a significant factor for students in schools as many Black students are still excluded from the benefits offered to White students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2018; Cheng, 2019). In 2019-2020, the national adjusted cohort graduation rate for White public high school students was 10 percentage points higher than for Black students (NCES, 2022). Within the United States, school districts serving the highest number of Students of Color receive between 5% and 13% less funding per student than districts serving fewer than 25% Students of Color (The Education Trust, 2018). Unfortunately, within our current school systems, racial minority students still feel educational and social marginalization (Smith & Kozleski, 2005; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Sharma, Catalano, Seetzen, Minors, & Collins-Mayo, 2019).

Currently, in the United States, racial or ethnic minorities make up more than half of the nation's children under age 15; and within 10 years, no racial or ethnic group will constitute a true majority (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Students of Color benefit when their teachers are racially representative, yet decreasing numbers of Teachers of Color are trained, hired, employed, and retained in districts all over the United States (Madkins,

2011; D'Amico, Pawlewicz, Earley & McGeehan, 2017). According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy, and Program Studies Service (2016), only 16% of P-12 teachers are People of Color. The heterogenous teaching force is shrinking while our racially diverse student population is expanding. It is essential for teachers to recognize and interrupt racism within education.

Because of a smaller number of racially diverse teachers and the increasing number of racially diverse students, schools must supplement training to ensure culturally sensitive teaching practices, necessary for today's student populations (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). With an overwhelmingly White teaching force, a perpetuation of the White norms of culture and a lack of resistance to systems which perpetuate racism continues to exist in education (DiAngelo, 2018). The U.S. history of systemic racism and the current political climate compels each educator to be hyper-vigilant against discrimination occurring within schools, as inequity remains for Students of Color.

Within the last decade, K-12 institutions are increasing their efforts to improve interactional diversity between staff and students by offering diversity training to teachers and staff members. An increase in diversity efforts leads to superior organizations and improved results for all students (Milem, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2019; McGee, 2013; Sharma, Catalano, Seetzen, Minors, & Collins-Mayo, 2019). Inservice and preservice teachers must understand the dynamic of Whiteness and the power and privilege that often unjustly subordinates Students of Color while simultaneously benefitting White students (Young, 2010).

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"Students need diverse racial and ethnic experiences that will prepare them with an appreciation for the emerging global society of the twenty-first century" (Young, Dolph & Russo, 2015). Additionally, Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor wrote, "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to speak openly and candidly on the subject of race" (*Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action*, 2014). This research project will examine teacher's perceptions of diversity and equity training in schools where diversity is valued, as evidenced by school efforts to provide diversity and equity training.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

In 1892, Homer Plessy, a biracial man, bought a first-class ticket from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana and boarded the "Whites Only" car. After Plessy refused to vacate his seat, he was arrested and removed from the train at the next stop. His case was brought before the Supreme Court which argued that the segregation of train cars violated the Thirteenth Amendment and Fourteenth Amendment rights, which provided for equal treatment under the law. The Court however rejected Plessy's argument finding laws requiring racial separation are a reasonable exercise of the state's police powers for necessary for matters of "health, safety, and morals". This decision codified the concept of "separate but equal" throughout the United States, not just in the South, such as in the Boston school segregation case. Lastly, the majority rejected the notion of racial inferiority, as no legislation could overcome prejudice (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896).

Before the start of World War I, 90% of all Black men and women lived in the South. Due to a variety of factors, chiefly the ever-evolving web of Southern segregation laws, the Great Migration saw over six million Black people leave the South for industrial centers in the northern and western states in the 50 years after the Great War (Wilkerson, 2010). In 1917, Thomas Jesse Jones authored the two-volume Negro Education report issued by the U.S. Bureau of Education. The report presented evidence of the underfunded and inadequate quality of education available to Black children in the South (Jones, 1917).

Jones (1917) wrote that economic development of the South would require all students to have an adequate education which translated into non-professional jobs that would allow the Black children to become utilitarian within society. He also wrote that there was a tremendous amount of wasted coursework (because it was too advanced) given to Black students and recommended that institutions for Black students should cooperate with the White majority which controlled the funding and resources (Jones). Jones de-emphasized the push for an equal education for Black students and instead advocated for unifying the northern philanthropies that supported Black education (Johnson, 2000).

Finding the report dangerous, W.E.B. DuBois used his role as editor of the NAACP's official publication, *The Crisis*, to push back against the Jones report (DuBois, 1921). While DuBois agreed that the education quality available to Black children was deplorable, he argued that Black students were not being given the same opportunities as White students for an academic education. He demanded schools that would educate the

Black students so that they would have work opportunities outside of vocational

professions. He argued for equal education without compromise for Black students and

wanted Black Americans to refuse a second-rate education (Dubois, 1921; Johnson,

2000).

In the 1950's, U.S. public schools were still segregated. In the 1950 case of

Sweatt v. Painter, the Supreme Court ruled that the 'separate' law school at Texas State

University for Negroes (now Texas Southern University) was inferior to that of the

University of Texas at Austin in the size and quality of faculty, law library resources and

mentorship from graduates admitted to the Texas State Bar (*Sweatt v. Painter*, 1950).

Further the Court established that there is an inherent benefit in education from an

interplay of ideas and an exchange of views between students of diverse backgrounds

(*Sweatt v. Painter*, 1950). The Court's decision in Sweatt would serve as a platform from

which the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) would come just four

years later.

In 1951, Oliver Brown and a group of parents attempted to enroll their Black

children in the Topeka, Kansas public schools. Each student was denied admission and

redirected to the local segregated school. From there, the NAACP would take their

lawsuit against the Topeka Board of Education to the Supreme Court contending that

segregation violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The

Supreme Court consolidated an additional four of the school-segregation cases for

review.

The Court unanimously found that the racial segregation of children in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, stating that "separate education is inherently unequal." Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote, "In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, as a right which must be made available to all on equal terms" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954).

While *Brown v. Board of Education* is widely thought of as *the* catalyst for racial equality, the decision has inadvertently led to some of the racial disparity in education still evident today (Singleton, 2015). In 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower was forced to send troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to protect the nine African American students attempting to attend Little Rock Central High School. In 1973, the primarily Hispanic and Black parents from San Antonio were taxed on their property at a rate of .70 cents compared to the neighboring White parents' tax rate of .31 cents per $100. The wealthier district still had $525 more dollars per student to spend than the poorer school district (*San Antonio Independent School District (ISD) v. Rodriguez*, 1973). The idea that the *Brown* decision would eradicate systemic racism in education was short sighted (Martin & Brooks, 2020).

In *Rodriguez* a group of parents brought forward a lawsuit to prove that Texas' public education finance system unequally funded school districts, a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment (1973). The District Court ruled against the parents as the government could not control the disparity between the wealthy and poor districts and

declared that the equal protection clause did not mean equal opportunity (*San Antonio ISD v. Rodriguez*, 1973). Nearly a century after the ruling in *Plessy*, the judicial system continued to hold that Black students did not deserve the same education as White students.

In the years immediately following the *Brown* decision, approximately 28,000 Black educators and principals permanently lost their jobs (Young, Dolph, & Russo, 2015; Milner, 2004; King, 1993). In addition, darker skinned Black teachers were demoted, and lost influence in the educational decisions of Black students (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Milner & Howard, 2004). The *Brown* ruling had a uniquely detrimental effect on the plight of Black teachers, students, and communities. Local schools closed in many instances resulting in decades of negative community impact, and the loss of so many Black teachers had a direct effect on the curriculum (and eventual outcomes) for Black students (Irvine & Irvine,1983; Singleton, 2015; Tillman, 2004; Siddle-Walker, 1996).

The *Brown* ruling inspired an increase in membership within the NAACP, particularly in the South. That bump in membership meant a larger contingent of voices to be heard. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960's forced the federal government to respond to the growing unrest regarding concerns about racial equality, voting rights, and freedom of speech within the country's Black communities, and got the attention of their respective representative politicians. The movement also gave rise to the study of race relations and the implementation of diversity training within the United States Military, one of the first institutions to implement diversity training (Frederickson, 1997).

The last two decades have seen the introduction of diversity training for teachers within K-12 institutions (Smith & Kozleski, 2005). Today, diversity and equity education has further expanded to bias training, microaggression training, and antiracist White deconstructionism (Kendi, 2019). Diversity training of any kind is education that coaches and promotes dialogue and understanding among practitioners with the goal of eliminating inequity and bias (Arao & Clemens, 2013).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the U.S. Department of Education, "31 percent of Black students were enrolled in schools in which less than a quarter of the students were Black" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Unfortunately, the needs of these students are overlooked because many decisions regarding curriculum and policy are often determined by White, middle-class norms (Chambers & McCready, 2011; Fitzgerald, 2009; Cribb & Gewirtz, 2003). The result finds Black students in educational settings continuing to experience educational and social disenfranchisement and racism (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020; Hope, Velez, Keels & Durkee, 2018).

The consequences of these injustices have far-reaching implications for the Students of Color. For example, comparative to White students, Black students are not in orchestras at the same rate; admitted to honors courses and national honor societies at a lower rate; offered higher level courses in math and science at a lower rate; and less likely to take college preparatory courses (Singleton, 2015; Smith & Kozleski, 2005). Further, Gifted and Talented Education, and advanced placement (AP) courses are

dominated by White and Asian students, with Black students being three times less likely

to take AP/International Baccalaureate (IB) Math than White students (Singleton, 2015).

In 2015, Black students had the lowest ACT scores of any other racial group (Kendi,

2019). According to the 10th annual AP report to the nation, Black students in the

graduating class of 2013 were the most underrepresented group in AP classrooms and

this statistic has remained the same over the last decade (College Board, 2014).

The Association for Psychological Science found that Black students were more

likely to be labeled as troublemakers and are more often treated harshly in the classrooms

than their White peers (Okonufua & Eberhardt, 2015). Expulsion and suspension rates are

higher among Black students than any other racial group (Cheng, 2019). Black students

are suspended and expelled at three times the rate of White students (U.S. Department of

Education, 2015). Students of Color may experience verbal, behavioral, or environmental

behaviors that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults (Sue

et al., 2007).

There is cumulative damage to the self-respect and dignity of those who

encounter racial indignities in school settings where curricular placement decisions are

made without consideration of the impact on Black students (O'Dowd, 2018; Sue et al.,

2007; Carter, 2007; Young, Anderson & Steward, 2015). Black students who are isolated

within their school settings experience diminished health and increased safety risks

(Ethier et al., 2018; Cleveland et al., 2015). Messages of exclusion in schools lead to

increased mental and physical health concerns for Students of Color (Jackson, 2000; Sue,

2010). Black students may turn to violence or even suicide when they feel ostracized

within their daily school environment and racism negatively impacts the well-being of students (Brown et al., 2019; Kimbrough, 1996; Carter, 2007; Priest, Paradies, Trennery, Truong, Karlsen & Kelly, 2013).

It is also important to note that many previous research studies around Black students have focused on a deficit model instead of focusing on successful Students of Color and what can be learned from these students. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that the behaviors and motivations of Black students have focused on their deficiencies and inability to persist. There has recently been a paradigm shift within higher education (and soon hopefully mirrored within K-12 education) that recognizes that deficit-minded approaches to Students of Color have limitations (Taylor, 2021).

Education and research each play a vital role in achieving both social and educational equality for marginalized students (Ready, 2010; Taylor, 2021). Teachers have increasing responsibilities to demonstrate cultural expertise in an expanding cultural landscape by being able to efficiently recognize and eradicate discrimination. Klopfenstein found that Black students are more likely to take advanced courses when teachers receive additional cultural training (Klopfenstein, 2004). Students need teachers to be advocates (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Carvalho & Sabbath, 2017).

Despite teacher knowledge of the importance of teaching to a diverse demographic of students, many teachers still maintain a homogenous approach to their classrooms (Lewis, 2000). If teachers are sensitive and aware of the damage that can be caused through a lack of consideration of racism, the stereotypes and oppressive norms around race can be mitigated (O'Dowd, 2018). Regardless of student race or ethnic

group, efforts to reduce exposure to racism within school settings will improve academic outcomes and benefit student psychological wellness (Astell-Burt, 2012). Educational leaders need to inclusively overcome issues related to race, power, and privilege so students can develop their social-emotional and academic potential (Guttman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002).

The American Psychological Association (APA) has described diversity education as one of the five major learning goals for undergraduate education (2017). Diversity training focuses on mitigating prejudice, reducing discrimination, and enhancing the ability of participants to interact with diverse individuals for positive intergroup interactions (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2012). Combs found that diversity training can enhance diversity self-efficacy and the efforts can be helpful when organizations seek to eliminate an environment of discrimination and prejudice (Combs, 2002).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research study aims to understand teachers' experience of diversity and equity education programs within schools. The purpose of the study is to examine teachers' perceptions of diversity and equity training efforts within school districts with the intent to facilitate dialogue with teachers who experience the training and who directly interact with the students (Mitra, 2003). When students believe their teachers value them and their individual contributions, the students will be successful (Mitra, 2003; McGee, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2018).

When diversity initiatives are prioritized in academic settings, Students of Color show increased academic achievement and social-emotional wellness (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Milem, 1997). Intentional fostering of a positive racial climate in schools is critical for positive outcomes (Antonio, 2001; Chang, 1999; Milem, 2003).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 79% of teachers identify as White while only 7% of teachers identify as Black (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The number of Black teachers has decreased in the last two decades, and less than a quarter of pre-service teachers in licensure programs are Students of Color (2020). Teachers of Color are overwhelmingly employed in urban communities and schools serving student populations with high proportions of Students of Color (Ingersoll & May 2011). Schools with 90% or more Students of Color have more Teachers of Color, and schools with less than 10% Students of Color have fewer than 2% of teachers who are Persons of Color (Brey et al., 2019). While teacher homogeneity is increasing, data indicates that 2014 was the last year that White students were the majority in public schools (Singleton, 2015). Black students will comprise 15% of all public-school students in 2024 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The U.S. Census predicts that in 2044, over 50% of the population will be Persons of Color.

This study sought to investigate the responses of in-service teachers who have participated in diversity training offered within their jobs. I was interested in knowing the teachers' feelings and perceptions of diversity and equity training within their schools. Since racial and equity training should influence students within a school setting, I wished to investigate if the teachers who have the most direct relationships with the

students, perceive the diversity efforts to be helpful, hurtful, or otherwise. The districts which understand their responsibility to equitably educate all students will be interested in this research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since districts are investing money and time into racial and equity training for their staff, I am interested in examining teachers' perceptions of racial and equity training. Teachers are the primary conduits between students. This study aims to inform school leaders how they can better meet the needs of teachers who are responsible for eliminating minority marginalization in the classroom and hallways of the schools.

The central question that the study will address is:

> What are participating teachers' perceptions and experiences of formal diversity and equity trainings offered at a public charter school in a midwestern state between 2019 and 2021?

The sub-questions are:

- How do teachers feel diversity and equity training affects their own efficacy in relation to anti-racism efforts?

- How do teachers think diversity and equity trainings mitigate racial marginalization in schools?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of diversity and equity education is to diminish the marginalization of diverse students (Carvalho-Grevious & Ford Sabbath, 2017). Many Black students are

resistant to asking for help from teachers because they are afraid of the repercussions when they seek support (Hamer & Lang, 2015). Black students are more apt to cover up their issues in school settings rather than ask for assistance (Masuda, Anderson, & Edmonds, 2012). The goal of diversity education in school systems is to improve educators' awareness of racism so students do not have to cover up their concerns. The hope is that teachers will be able to identify and eliminate systemic racism and bias within the educational system so Black students no longer suffer in schools.

When Black students are in primarily White settings, they often must combat stereotypes and racism. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to discover the perception that schoolteachers have of diversity education with the intention to diminish the effect of racism on Black students within school settings. The researcher's intention is to support teachers in meeting the academic, social, and emotional growth needs of all students within schools. The audience for this research will be school districts which are investing time and resources aimed at programs offering diversity education and those teachers receiving the diversity education. This study will also be useful for policy and research audiences. It will be helpful for schools interested in implementing professional development for teachers to understand teachers' opinions, thoughts, and perceptions of training around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthermore, researchers interested in how schools might best impact their staff as they work toward increased cultural capacity and knowledge will be interested in this project. Lastly, this project will be of interest for school districts investing in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion specific hiring.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- "Antiracism" will be defined as one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea (Kendi, 2019).

- "Black" will be defined as a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (as defined by U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

- "Diversity Initiatives" will be defined as any training focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, reduction of microaggressions, bias training, or White deconstructionist training.

- "Efficacy" will be defined as the level of confidence teachers have in their ability to take actions which will produce equitable outcomes for diverse students (Bandura, 1997, Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

- "Equity" will be defined as the structural and systemic approach to offering fair educational opportunities to all students (University of Dayton Action Plan to Becoming an Antiracist University for the Common Good, 2020).

- "Institutional Racism" will be the power to create subtle informal or direct barriers that exist in organizations or environments that prevent members from reaching their potential within the framework of a system (Bielby, 1987; Singleton, 2011).

- "Minority" will be recognized as a term that no longer accurately reflects the demographic trends within the United States.

- "Persons of Color" include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023).

- "Race" will be defined as a socially constructed characterization of individuals based on skin, color, or culture (Singleton, 2011). "While the biological basis of the concept of race is meaningless, the social reality of race is very real and affects people greatly" (Ifekwunigwe, Wagner, Yu, Harrell, Bamshad, & Royal, 2015).

- "Racism" will be defined as expressions of discrimination based on race which intersect with class and culture and geography that creates false hierarchies of human value (Kendi, 2019). Most definitions of racism account for the historic

and contemporary impact of power, oppression, and privilege which normalizes White supremacy (U.D. Office of Diversity and Inclusion).

- "Students of Color" include those who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023).

- "White" will be defined as a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

- "White Privilege" will be defined as the educational, social, and unknowing benefits that are associated with Whiteness. "As unconscious, habits of White privilege do not merely go unnoticed. They actively thwart the process of conscious reflection on them, which allows them to seem nonexistent even as they continue to function" (Sullivan, 2006).

- "Whiteness" will be defined as the dimensions of race that serve to elevate White people over People of Color (DiAngelo, 2018).

ASSUMPTIONS

I am a White woman. Throughout my entire career, I have taught with few minority teachers. I have been employed in an urban district where many students were Black, and I have been employed in rural and suburban school districts where most students were White. Within my first position, at an urban school, it never crossed my mind that my students needed more from me than what I was giving. I felt my empathy for the students and passion for my subject matter was enough to be able to connect with the students and thus be an excellent teacher. I (naively) believed that teachers inherently understood and empathized with all students based on their job choice.

At that time in my career, I did not consider my own race and the implications of my Whiteness when I thought about my ability to impact my students' positively or negatively within their educational experience. In reflection, I am aware that the lack of

diversity in my childhood experiences extended through my public K-12 rural school experience and into my undergraduate educational experience. My undergraduate educational experience and first teaching experience confronted me with my own privilege for the first time.

I increasingly began to question the experience of my Students of Color, and the impact of my own racial identity, when I moved from my first teaching job within an urban district to the neighboring rural school. A local city high school merger caused numerous students from my urban middle school to transfer to the rural high school in which I taught due to the rural high school's closer proximity to their homes than the new urban high school. In the rural school, every teacher was White. In fact, every staff member was White. One day, I witnessed students being reprimanded for behavior that was considered typical in my previous job, inspiring me to consider whether my own cultural and racial positionality, and that of my colleagues, was influencing the "rules" of our school. As expected, these same expectations were leading to behavioral consequences within the framework of the rural school system.

As I began to hear the personal narratives of my Black students, I realized that my students were experiencing bias, overt racism, and microaggressions daily. I would sit in staff meetings and look at my colleagues and wonder if they had any idea that our Black students felt isolated. I wondered if I knew how much racism they contended with daily. Simultaneously, my two children, whose biological father is Black, were encountering their own race-related experiences.

In elementary school, when my children were tested for gifted services, I was told that a parent or guardian would need to be present. I had to kindly explain that I was the parent. When my son was in third grade, he came home from school and sprinkled baby powder all over his body, and when I asked him why he had doused himself with baby powder, he replied he wanted to be "White." When I questioned him, he explained that a student in his class had called him "dirty" while standing in the lunch line while a teacher was present. Though he was in first grade, he continues to recall this story with pain in his eyes over 15 years later. Just recently, I had the opportunity to visit an art exhibit in Austin, Texas of graphic artist, Chantal Lesley, and her series of photographs in which she slowly covers her face in powder. She said, "When I was left alone to play, I would cover myself in baby powder to mimic white skin." She goes on to say, "Although the importance of diversity is much more accepted than ever before, this work is a reminder that it still is not enough" (Chantal Lesley).

My daughter's favorite high school teacher repeatedly asked if she had brushed her hair before school. She has beautiful curly hair which she attempted to straighten all through high school. After high school, she authored an essay about the social and emotional implications of curly hair for Girls of Color and the liberation that emerged for her when she quit "controlling" her hair. The implications on her self-esteem by a teacher attempting humor were devastating. My son was told daily that he looked identical to President Obama. While many intended for this to be a compliment, he became aware that their frame of reference was limited. Though my children's intelligence and beauty

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were evident to me daily, I increasingly found those making comment to me of the same at best suspicious and at worst racist.

Though both of my children were straight A students with extracurricular involvement and community service, neither was selected for their high school's National Honor Society. The process of merit was determined by a small group of teachers who informally sat around and openly discussed the students to determine their eligibility without any blind selection leaving much room for bias and discrimination. I found, upon further examination, that no Child of Color was ever admitted to their high school's National Honor Society, and in response that admittance process has since changed.

In an additional example, a popular and well-loved Black student of mine was the subject of a drawing produced by a White student in their art class. The art teacher upon review of the work had not noticed the piece consisted of a poorly drawn face with overly exaggerated lips. Humiliated, my student showed me the drawing but begged me not to confront the student artist as to avoid any further confrontation and embarrassment. Despite this, the art teacher went on to allow the drawing to be presented as an art project.

One professional development day, we had a set of speakers come for a diversity training seminar. The White administrators said that test scores needed to increase as the "influx of city kids had lowered our state report card." Staff members did not engage in the training, and afterwards within miscellaneous conversations, jokes were made among the teachers about the training. Except for a few, most of these teachers were truly compassionate and wonderful educators. When confronted with the overt evidence of

racism, most teachers would have been horrified, but the more insidious and less obvious racism occurring within the schools was less evident to them. There were no spaces set aside for difficult conversations within the systemic framework.

These very personal experiences have affected my own perspective and desire for expanding racial educational competency. As the mainstream educational awareness and expectations of the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training within school districts has increased over the last decade and more dramatically in the last year, I often sat in these training sessions, observed the body language of primarily White teachers, and afterwards listened to their conversations. I wondered if there might be a disconnect between goals of diversity trainings and outcomes associated with diversity trainings as experienced by the Students of Color. As more districts hire diversity, equity, and inclusion leaders, and as districts invest more monetary resources in diversity training, I want to know how staff members who are participating in diversity and equity efforts perceive these experiences. I hope that the results from this study will be used to increase the benefits of schools' diversity efforts for the ultimate benefit of all students.

CONCLUSION

Research indicates that African Americans experience racism daily (Constantine, 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2007). Students of Color experience daily invalidations and slights that are at times inadvertently perpetrated by their teachers (Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016), leading to an increase in serious psychological distress and multiple mental health issues (Chae et al., 2011; Kreiger et al., 2010).

Racism is harmful to both psychological and physical well-being of minorities (Carter et al., 2020; Franklin et al., 2006). Discrimination and marginalization of minorities is not just a problem in school systems. The outcomes of the constant racism and marginalization directly leads to an increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, and premature death (Wilkerson, 2020).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and equity education attempts to foster healthy relationships between the youth and adults by educating the participants to examine racial constructs. The University of Dayton defines diversity as "the presence, recognition and engagement of people of social, political and organization identities from the wide range of human experiences, and the complex ways these identities intersect and are expressed." Equity is defined as "a process of modifying structures and practices that have intentionally or unintentionally advantaged or disadvantaged groups of people; it is a process that responds to unjust structural outcomes to create laws, policies, practices and traditions that support just outcomes for all" (University of Dayton Strategic Plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, 2020).

Attempts by schools to increase diversity awareness will improve the psychological and educational well-being of all students within that school (Levine-Rasky, 2000; Milem, 2003). Despite this, many traditional pre-service teacher education preparations have not included a systematic and in-depth approach to diversity. As a result, many schools now incorporate stand-alone diversity trainings into their professional development for their in-service staff members (Watson-Vandiver & Wiggan, 2018; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Alviar-Martin & Ho, 2011; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010). The following literature review has been undertaken by the researcher

for the purpose of giving background on diversity and equity training in schools. The

topic of interest within this research project is examining teachers' perceptions of

diversity and equity training. I will fill the gap in the research between school districts'

commitment to diversity and equity education for their staff members and student

outcomes by examining the teacher perspectives of school diversity training efforts. This

research will help guide diversity and equity initiatives within school districts. As

districts become more diverse and more aware of the need for an inclusive education for

all students, this research will help guide them as they consider the professional

development within the buildings.

SEARCH DESCRIPTION

I conducted the review of the literature while focusing on varying types of racial

diversity training in educational settings using data-based searches through PsychINFO,

Psychological Abstracts, Dissertation Abstracts International, and the Education

Resource Information Center (ERIC). I used multiple search terms including "training

effectiveness," "discrimination," "diversity training," "anti-racism," "diversity

interventions," "diversity workshops," "multicultural training," "bias,"

"microaggression," "racism," "diversity education training," "diversity programs," and

"history of racism." I crossed the terms to get more articles that might be relevant to this

dissertation. I also manually examined the reference sections of past studies to find

articles referenced. Over the last few years, there have been an increasing number of

books written about racial equity, so I also read literature and texts about antiracism, racial equity, and critical race theory.

HISTORY OF DIVERSITY AND EQUITY TRAINING

Diversity training first began during the late 1960s as a reactionary response to the racial tensions and race riots following the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 (Levchak, 2018; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Schick, 2000). The United States Army began mandating a Racial Awareness Program in 1971 designed to improve race relations and to counteract segregation and inequality in the Armed Forces (Dobak, 2011; Katz, 1978). The pioneers in diversity training efforts soon became interested in how schools could address the needs of historically oppressed races and other marginalized minority groups ((Banks, 1981; Vaughn, 2007).

During the 1970s and 1980s, schools began to recognize the importance of examining the systems pertaining to the education of various racial and other minority groups (Banks, 1988). Colleges began to offer courses in cultural diversity to educate students during the 1980s. At that time, about half of the Black students in the U.S. attended integrated schools (Young, Dolph, & Russo, 2015). Universities offered multicultural education which was defined as the process for educational institutions to reform their processes to meet the needs of varied students from diverse backgrounds (Banks, 1981).

Dr. Roosevelt Thomas Jr., a practitioner in the field of diversity training, founded the American Institute for Managing Diversity in 1984 when he realized that there was

scant academic research regarding diversity. He questioned how diversity training can be transformative for practitioners so they can effectively contribute to the education of a diverse group of learners. Dr. Thomas Jr. discovered the importance of diversity training focused on mindset transformation through strategic initiatives for educators and administrators and he believed that companies should require diversity training for every employee (Johnson, 2008).

RATIONALE FOR DIVERSITY AND EQUITY TRAINING

Diversity training is about skill building and the application of these skills. Diversity education seeks to make difficult cultural concepts operational through focused and facilitated positive interactions between diverse people (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012). Diversity education aims to develop strategies, techniques, and curriculum that extend anti-racist practices by challenging the way one views their world (Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity, 2017). Diversity education attempts to make teachers more self-aware and culturally responsive to diversity (Alviar-Martin & Ho, 2010; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010).

Diversity education embraces dialogue that examines various forms of oppression, including gender, race, and ethnicity, and examines how schools favor White, middle-class students (Watson-Vandiver & Wiggan, 2018; Ferber, 2012). Without understanding the implications of race, teachers become contributors to racial inequality (Petts, 2020). Teachers need training to facilitate student success by ensuring that Students of Color are protected from discrimination (Bensimon, 2007). Teachers have the

most time with students, and they can make students feel valued and inspired or they can unknowingly justify racialized practices (Bensimon, 2007).

TYPES OF DIVERSITY AND EQUITY EDUCATION

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The concept of multiculturalism was proposed by Horace Kallen and may be defined as the process of establishing equal educational and learning opportunities by denying racism (Alismail, 2016). As defined by the American Psychology Association (2017) multiculturalism is the process of engaging in a fuller understanding of diversity in education and research to consciously be aware of the highly diverse individualism of experiences and identities. Multicultural education had its inception in the civil rights movement of the 1960's during a time of increasing struggle for political power and freedom for People of Color. Perpetuated and strengthened by women's group advocacy, schools began to consider their content and curriculum in relation to race and ethnicity (Banks, 1989).

Multicultural education sought to establish the reality of establishing equitable educational opportunities for all students. James Banks, a multicultural educational scholar, defined multiculturalism as "a philosophical position" that considers that the multi-varied characteristics of a pluralistic society should be reflected in all the institutionalized structures of educational institutions. Within educational systems, there should be consideration of staff diversity, norms for the schools, the values, and the

curriculum so the diverse student body feels valued (Banks, 1981; Alismail, 2016).

Multicultural education aims to change teaching and learning approaches so that students

from various diverse backgrounds will have equal opportunities within their educational

experience (Banks and Banks, 2007).

MICROAGGRESSION TRAINING

The term racial microaggressions was first used by Harvard psychiatrist Dr.

Chester M. Pierce in 1970 (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Willsand,1977). Pierce

argued that those who recognized microaggressions should challenge and respond to

racism. More recently, more research on microaggressions and cultural studies is from

the work of Derald Sue, a professor of counseling psychology at Columbia University,

and his colleagues. Racial microaggressions are everyday verbal, behavioral, or

environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights

and insults toward People of Color (O'Dowd, 2018; Sue et al., 2009). Any marginalized

group with lesser privilege and power than others may experience the bias and harm that

arises from microaggressions (Young, Anderson. & Stewart, 2015; Sue, 2010).

Sue and colleagues identified three different major classes of microaggressions

which occur including micro assaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations Sue et al.,

2007). Micro assaults are intentional acts of racism. The perpetrators may be completely

conscious acts of negation toward others (Sue et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2016; O'Dowd,

2018). Microinsults are insensitive messages associated with the identity of a person or

an oppressed group. The microinsults are often unintentional or unconscious and

stereotypical. Microinvalidations are often unconscious communications which have the distinctive quality of undermining the feelings or reality of a person (O'Dowd, 2018; Smith et al., 2016; Keels et al., 2017).

Microaggressions can include assumptions that a Person of Color is not a ''true'' American: assumptions of lesser intelligence, color blindness, assumptions of criminality or dangerousness, denial of individual racism, promotion of the myth of meritocracy, pathologizing one's cultural background and communication, second-class citizen status, environmental messages of being unwelcome or devalued, invisibility and/or hyper invisibility, and objectification and exoticization (Sue et al., 2007; Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014; Keels et al., 2017). Microaggressions rely on oppression, stereotypes, and lack of awareness (Kanter, Williams, Kuczynski, Manbeck, Debreaux, & Rosen, 2017; O'Dowd, 2018). Foundational to the construct of microaggressions is the experienced reality of those who deal with any type of bias.

Students who experience microaggressions may have increased physical and psychological health issues (Chae et al., 2011). Microaggression training can diminish the daily microaggressions experienced by Students of Color which causes cumulative damage to their self-respect and dignity (Keels et al., 2017; Carter, 2007; Constantine, 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2007; O'Dowd, 2018). Microaggressions invalidate the experiential reality of those who experience slights solely because of their group membership. Microaggression training can help teachers recognize threatening and intimidating messages through microaggressions when they occur (Sue, 2017).

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CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory was first termed in the mid-1970s and emerged from the work of legal scholars and feminist scholars. The movement attempted to formulate discourse centered on the issue of race, power, and racism (Crenshaw, 2002). The importance of dialogue and vocabulary is essential within the work of Critical Race Theory as defined by Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Critical race theory is scholarship and discourse on race and racism to eliminate racism and racial stereotypes from society, including laws, social policy, and organizational cultures (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

There are five main tenets of Critical Race Theory: 1) The notion that racism is ordinary and the perpetuation of color-blindness; 2) the interest convergence or the ability of Whites to dole out power for their own benefit; 3) the idea of race as a social construct and demonstrated in housing programs or unfair school funding; 4) the dichotomy of multiple stories which includes storytelling and counter-story telling for the purpose of changing the long-held narratives that have been perpetuated by Whites; and 5) the notion that Whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) (Bell, 1980; Delgado, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Institutional oppression in schools, economics, and history are all considered within Critical Race Theory to challenge the dominant belief of knowledge (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

ANTIRACISM

Professor Ibram X. Kendi, author and American historian, defined an "antiracist" as one who acts or expresses an antiracist policy or idea (2019). Antiracism diversity training embraces dialogue that examines various forms of oppression, including race, ethnicity, gender, and examines how schools favor White, middle-class students (Watson-Vandiver & Wiggan, 2018; Ferber 2012). Teachers who are antiracist take time to reflect on culture, linguistics, and socioeconomics and they strive to be antiracist policy makers (Alviar-Martin & Ho, 2010). Antiracism requires a commitment to conscientious examination of racism.

Antiracism requires one to have consciousness about systemic racism and the structures which are in place to continue or perpetuate racist policies and procedures. Antiracism is the belief that one either perpetuates existing systems of racism or one constantly strives to dismantle continued racism (Kendi, 2019). Antiracist education seeks to challenge these relations of inequality by educating people to identify "the norms, patterns, traditions, structures, and institutions that keep racism and White supremacy in place" (DiAngelo, 2018). The movement from racism to antiracism is one of constant evolution with an imperative understanding of the racism that has been perpetuated within society based on inaccurate notions of biology, culture, behavior, and color (Kendi, 2019).

SELF-EFFICACY

Professor Siddik Bakir conducted a quantitative investigation of 249 prospective teachers' attitudes of their self-efficacy in relation to multiculturalism utilizing a "Multicultural Efficacy Scale" (2020). Self-efficacy is a belief in one's ability to organize and change an outcome (Bandura, 1997). Bakir's research aimed to examine the experiences, efficacy, and attitudes toward multiculturalism of preservice teachers at a state university. Using quantitative descriptive statistics, the researcher examined the multicultural experiences of multiple groups and their perspectives on multicultural instruction. Bakir found a correlation between the multicultural experiences of preservice teachers and their self-efficacy attitudes. The students who had more exposure to preservice and in-service training had higher self-efficacy in relation to multiculturalism in the classroom. The research indicates that more preservice training can increase the ability of educators to effectively teach a diverse student group.

Professors Megan Tschannen-Moran, Anita Wollfolk-Hoy, and Wayne K. Hoy found that teachers engaging in experiential learning combined with meaningful conversations were more likely to have enhanced views of their ability to make a difference within their schools. Self-efficacy beliefs can change through intentional reflective examination of pre-existing biases and beliefs (Tschannen-Moran, Wollfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 2001). Teacher self-efficacy is a cognitive process that requires a dissection

of a teacher's level of confidence in their abilities to help students achieve educational goals. Teachers with a strong self-efficacy are more willing to take risks in their classrooms and they are more open to different ideas that better meet the needs of their students (Tschannen-Moran, Wollfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 2001). Positive self-efficacy has been causally related to student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran, Wollfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 2001).

DIVERSITY AND EQUITY UNDERGRADUATE PREPAREDNESS

Researchers Jacob Bennet, Melissa K. Driver, and Stanley C. Trent (2019) conducted a literature review examining preservice teachers' perceptions of White privilege in teacher education programs through the lens of critical race theory. Twenty-six peer-reviewed, qualitative, and quantitative studies were included in the literature review. Bennet, Driver, and Trent found that 84.6% of the research included in the review did not address systemic racism and the need for teacher educators to realize the inequities that students face because of systemic racism. The literature review indicated that many White, preservice teachers could not understand the connection between systemic racism and race-based privilege. Many undergraduate teacher programs included only one multiculturalism course or one single day offering to address issues of diversity.

Much of the research within the Bennet, Driver, and Trent (2019) literature review reported that White teachers had little to no preparation within their degree programs. There were programs that offered no guidance on how to teach racially diverse

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students. A sizable percentage of the research included in the literature review examined participants' perceptions of racism. The researchers found that identity development necessary to understand the systemic inequities that occur in education was lacking among the participants. The outcomes of the literature review indicate that even when universities expend resources attempting to prepare their preservice teachers for jobs, the preservice teachers are unprepared. The literature review concluded that preservice teacher education programs should offer a reflective space for future teacher educators to consider the implications of race and their own perpetuation of systemic inequities (Bennet et al., 2019).

INTERGROUP DIALOGIC INTERACTIONS

Education professors, Ximena Zúñiga, Biren Nagda and Todd D. Sevig found that while many universities focused on structural or curricular shifts to increase student diversity, these efforts do not benefit the overall campus environment as much as dialogical intergroup interactions (2002). The intergroup relations movement began around mid-century drawing upon the work of Paulo Freire who focused on critical thinking and reflective participation (1993). Zúñiga, Nagda and Sevig began to develop a qualitative intergroup dialogue model on the campus of the University of Michigan in the early 1990s. Intergroup dialogues are facilitated conversational encounters which provide a place for participants to have authentic, honest, and difficult conversations. There are a core set of practice principles which facilitate intergroup dialogue, and which cultivate engagement among participants seeking to understand differences and for improving

relations between varied groups (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). There are four developmental stages within the design framework which help the participants to identify and highlight diverse experiences and perspectives: forming and building relationships, exploring differences and commonalities, exploring difficult topics, and alliance building. Meaningful conversations typically take place between people with a history of social-identity differences. These dialogical exchanges can enhance diversity efforts in such a way that individuals will be able to make a commitment to inclusivity and socially just relationships between people with varying backgrounds and perspectives (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

Similarly, social justice professors, Craig Alimo, Robert Kelly, and Christine Clark conducted a qualitative case study exploring the outcomes of eight undergraduate education students participating in a social justice education initiative called the Intergroup Dialogue Program (2002). The goal was for people from different idea groups to have facilitated and sustained dialogue opportunities for the ultimate outcome of increased diversity appreciation. The researchers were interested in seeking to understand participants' responses to find whether the Intergroup Dialogue Program influenced participants' behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs when they experienced race-based interactions. This study stemmed from a national project directed by Dr. Sylvia Hurtado seeking to "understand how students learn from a variety of social justice education-oriented initiatives" (2002). The Office of Human Relations at the University of Maryland facilitated the Intergroup Dialogue Program. Through semi-structured interviews and transcription analyses, the researchers were able to identify themes which

included cognitive and affective outcomes. As a result of their conversations, participants realized that they were less accepting than they had originally thought. The participants also indicated a higher comfort level with those racially different than themselves. The researchers indicated that White people usually are not required to consider alternative perspectives. Diversity training and initiatives that focus on cross-group dialogue offer positive and purposeful outcomes in the quest for racial equity (Alimo et al., 2002).

PRACTITIONER TEACHER RESEARCH

TOOLS FOR INCREASING AWARENESS

Sarah Pearce examines racism on teaching and learning in collaboration with schools seeking to examine how racism is addressed in schools. Pearce studied teachers' responses to using the concept of racial microaggressions as the tool for talking about racism (2019). The aim of the research was to find ways to discuss racism and race equality during teacher training courses that address the needs of a diverse group of teachers. The researcher, a White university professor, found beginning teachers resist conversations about racism within their professional lives. The researcher was interested in finding ways to give teachers the conceptual tools to identify racism and to combat systemic inequality (Pearce, 2019).

Using longitudinal, qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis, Pearce examined how the teaching of racial microaggressions address teachers' understanding of the nature of racism. The primary data within this study was gathered in semi-structured

90-minute interviews (Pearce, 2019). The interviews focused on participants'

perspectives on race within their schools after they took a humanities course focused on

race. Pearce found that while participants recognized overt types of racism, most of them

were not able to recognize and challenge microaggressions and covert racism. The

participants were also uncomfortable addressing racism because they were afraid of the

repercussions from the perpetrators.

Within the research, Pearce found teachers avoided racial issues because they

preferred to pretend that the issues did not exist rather than address them. The researcher

found that diversity trainings focused on conversations that identify microaggressions and

trainings that offer support for challenging these microaggressions is necessary for

teachers to become attuned to racism around them. Pearce found that diversity trainings

that specify the many forms of racism, both overt and covert, can help teachers to become

more assertive in their resistance to racism (Pearce).

Also focusing on the recognition of bias and microaggressions, Jordan G. Starck,

social psychologist and policy advisor, and his colleagues used Project Implicit data and

the American National Election Study 2008 Time Series Study to quantitatively examine

explicit and implicit racial bias responses of teachers (2020). The Race Implicit

Association test, created by Kaiyuan Xu et al. in 2014, reliably measures the implicit bias

of the respondents on the Project Implicit Association Test ((Xu et al., 2014). A team of

scientists at Harvard University created Project Implicit to measure and understand

attitudes, stereotypes, and other hidden biases that influence perception, judgment, and

action. American National Election Study (2008) is a targeted large-scale survey of implicit and explicit bias measures of racial bias.

Starck et al. were interested in studying whether there were lower levels of bias among teachers since schools are "democratizing institutions" (2020). Implicit biases are the hidden, and often unconscious, responses to others. Explicit biases are often more obvious. This study measured the attitudes and affective reaction of individuals when confronted with varying pictures within the original two studies. Explicit bias was measured using respondents' self-reported measures of warmth toward Black and White people (Starck et al., 2020).

Utilizing linear regression to analyze the Project Implicit data, Starck et al. found that teachers have similar implicit and explicit bias in comparison with nonteachers. There were no significantly lower levels of implicit bias between teachers in comparison to other occupations. The researchers found that interventions that encourage teacher reflection on how their decisions affect student outcomes might be beneficial. Within the study, the researchers recognized the importance of training and supporting teachers so they can equitably serve diverse populations (Starck et al., 2020).

CULTURAL INADEQUACY

Derald Wing Sue et al. found that professors felt inadequately prepared to successfully ally themselves with marginalized students (2009). The researchers conducted a qualitative study of professors' perceptions of conversations relating to race that occurred within the professor's classrooms. Participants in the study described

feeling incompetent, defensive, and uncertain as they navigated difficult conversations. They felt guilt that their Whiteness deterred their abilities to show their alliance with the Students of Color (Sue et al.). The professors within this study were also concerned about the reactions of their students because of promotion and tenure review which involved student evaluations. The professors felt inadequate even though they realized their scope of influence on marginalized students (Sue et al.).

Professors Theresa Alviar-Martin and Ho Li-Ching also found that in-service teachers are reluctant to discuss race (2011). They studied the experiences of six in-service secondary teachers enrolled in graduate courses at a teacher institution in Singapore. The researchers collected qualitative data through completed surveys and extensive interviews with the participants in relation to their positionality and perceptions of understanding diversity and multicultural education. Additionally, the participants responded to three written and current affairs scenarios (Alviar-Martin & Ho, 2011).

Alviar et al. found that participants did not understand identity intersectionality. They specifically did not understand the impact of race. The teachers recognized the lack of equity for their students, but they accepted the status quo. The teachers who did recognize that Students of Color were not receiving an equitable education had personal histories that increased their awareness. Even with those teachers, there was reluctance on the part of the teachers to create conflict by speaking out against discriminatory behavior. The researchers found that the high stakes testing was a contributor to teachers' reluctance to speak out against the systems around them. The results of the study conclude that teachers need to be educated on how to not only recognize racism, but they

also need to understand how to become agents of social justice for their students (Alviar et al.).

DIVERSITY AND EQUITY TRAINING OUTCOMES

Researchers Johan Pierre Joubert and Nico Martins at University of South Africa (2013) studied staff responsiveness to diversity initiatives. They quantitatively collected Likert scale data from a survey and from interviews with over 400 employees. Three hundred and thirty-two of the employees attended a workshop and 95 of the employees did not attend the diversity initiative workshop. The researchers used SPSS and factor analysis to study the impact of diversity capacity building workshops and the outcomes of the participants regarding their diversity perceptions surrounding the diversity initiatives within the workplace (Joubert & Martins, 2013).

When these data were analyzed, the study found that workshop attendees were significantly more positive (Joubert & Martins, 2013). They also found that staff members within the university increased their communication about issues of diversity after attending the workshop. Those who attended the workshop believed that they were more adept at responding to issues of multiculturalism and several types of diversity. Joubert and Martins concluded that staff members who attended diversity related workshops were more skilled at developing competencies to effectively deal with transformative initiatives. They found that workshops were beneficial in sensitizing the professional staff to varied perspectives (Joubert & Martins).

Katerina Bezrukova et al. conducted an extensive review of 40 years of diversity training (Bezurokova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016). These faculty researchers defined diversity training as instructional programs designed to facilitate positive intergroup interactions for enhancing the ability of people to interact with diverse others (Bezrukova et al., 2016). Bezrukova et al. drew from a broad sample of multi-disciplinary research articles and studies focused on diversity training conducted on adults and narrowed their meta-analysis to 260 samples. They used diversity models to examine the role of context in effective diversity training programs outcomes using computation and analysis of effect size for each study. Fourteen of the studies involved trainees who were educators (Bezruokova et al., 2016).

The results indicated that in many studies, diversity training was presented within organizations so organizations could cover their legal and compliance obligations. Standalone diversity and equity trainings in organizations were not effective. Voluntary trainings were also not as effective as diversity and equity trainings that were mandatory within the organizations and schools. The researchers found that mandatory training had better behavioral learning outcomes than training that was voluntary (Bezruokova et al., 2016).

Diversity trainings that utilized an integrated approach to diversity were more effective than those presented only once. The researchers also found that trainings that were embedded within the institution and where there was more commitment, which included multiple instructional methods such as lectures, group activities, and discussions, perpetuated more positive reactions among the trainees. These positive

reactions were reflected in increased diversity skills from the trainees (Bezruokova et al., 2016). The researchers found that while integrated training is consistently associated with positive training outcomes, many diversity trainings do not follow best practices (Bezruokova et al., 2016).

Diversity trainings require efforts and initiatives that complement the training, which become embedded in organizations. Trainees in diversity education are most impacted when training programs increase both diversity awareness and skills. Bezrukova et al. concluded that organizations that support diversity training by offering an intense, immersive experience focused on skill building and awareness produce the most statistically significant results (Bezruokova et al., 2016).

Organizations have been citing the "business case" for diversity since the 1980s, but it is often difficult to obtain the benefits of diversity (Kalinoski et al., 2013). Zachary T. Kalinoski et al. found that more research is needed which considers the trainees' perspectives prior to their diversity training when considering the effects of diversity training on affective-based outcomes. They found that trainees with an inclination to be allies might influence attitude changes in others participating in the research. Kalinoski et al. found that further research is needed in identifying the multiple and potentially interacting roles of stereotypes, bias, and explicit processes in diversity training effects and the nature and measurement of attitudes in relationship to diversity education (Kalinoski et al., 2013).

CONCLUSION

Diversity and equity work expanded in the last 20 years as institutions of higher education and K-12 schools put more emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within their mission statements and strategic plans. The United States Department of Education also recognized that diversity in schools and communities can be a powerful lever leading to positive outcomes in schools. As a result, the Department of Education has increased efforts to support diversity and inclusivity in schools. Even with well-intentioned plans in place, researchers noted the difficulty in obtaining the benefits for participants of diversity education (Roberston, Kulik & Tan, 2013). Diversity education efforts have been more thoroughly examined on college campuses, but the research is fragmented regarding how K-12 teachers respond to diversity training efforts (Gay, 2015).

There is also a lack of scholarly and practical attention toward understanding how practitioners' knowledge, experiences, and education affect students' educational experiences (Bensimon, 2007). The training in pre-service programs attempts to prepare teachers with personal awareness and pragmatic skills, but often teachers go into the field of education without a true commitment to educational equity (Gorski, 2009). As a result, most public schools do not offer a culturally responsive pedagogy, nor do they examine their systems through the lens of racism (Watson-Vadiver & Wiggan, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994, Singleton, 2015; Petts, 2020).

Systematic diversity training can reduce teacher bias (Wilson, 2013; Starck et al., 2020). Student school experiences can also improve through systemic efforts to diminish

racism and inequality (Ancis et al, 2000; Smith et al., 2016). The systemic efforts, however, must be intentional and embedded. As school districts become more committed in their approach to diversity efforts through dialogue, training, and diversity and equity initiatives, the most significant contributors to implementation of diversity and equity awareness will be school district staff members. Teachers should be egalitarian and skilled at reducing inequity for all students; however, educational inequality persists. This research examining teachers' perceptions of diversity initiatives will offer a more holistic understanding of school systemic efforts.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of this qualitative study was to better understand how teachers think about the diversity and equity training they received within their jobs. Qualitative research assists in making sense of the observed world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Within this research, the goal was to examine experiences or phenomena to build a cohesive truth from multiple perspectives. Qualitative research is a way of thinking, and it gives understanding to the human experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research focuses on meaning and is "an interactive process influenced by the identity, history, and complexity of the people in the research" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

A researcher must understand that the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of a chosen paradigm will inform every part of a study. Epistemology is the study, theory, and justification of knowledge, and ontology, in qualitative social research, is concerned with social reality (Morgan, 2016). Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2005) define paradigm as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator-not only in choice of method-but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways. In the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* chapter "Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences," Denzin and Lincoln identify five primary research paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, participatory/cooperative, and constructivism (2005).

The paradigm for this research was constructivist. I looked at the way teachers perceive diversity and equity training with a focus on how that training informs their interactions with Students of Color. I believe that there are multiple ways in which teachers will perceive the diversity and equity training based on their individual histories. In addition, within this study, I included my experiences that have contributed to my interest in this research.

Constructivists acknowledge that they enter a field of inquiry with their own notions and histories which become part of the research scrutiny, and they are aware of the effect that they have on the data and findings. I, as the researcher, was a participant and co-constructor of others' history and experiences, and the aim was to co-create meaningful reality with the participants through our interactions. Transaction regarding experiential reality, between both the researcher and the participants, is necessary to the construction of meaning (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Jean Piaget was the first philosopher to use the term "constructivist epistemology." It offers an understanding of knowledge construction for individuals which is constructed based on the experiences and interaction with ideas, opinions, and activities from their lives. The foundation of constructivist theory goes back to the 18th century philosopher Giambattista Vico (Ultanir, 2012). "Previously existing knowledge is understood to be a map of what can be done in light of one's experience instead of an indication of what existed" (2012). Bredo (2000) said about constructivism: ''Knowledge is made rather than found.''

Constructivism is a philosophical paradigm based on relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology. Realism holds that all people perceive the world to be the same. Alternatively, constructivists find their relativist understanding of knowledge through transactional and hermeneutic, dialectical methodology. The constructivist believes that realities exist differently for individuals and that individuals construct their understanding through interactions, experiences, and perceptions. Constructivists also consider data to be a co-constructed entity (Birks & Mills, 2011). Constructivists construct their thinking because of various experiences (Bredo, 1997). Constructivism is based on the notion that truth about what is reality is relative to experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

While epistemology provides the theoretical framework, methodology determines how the researcher thinks about a study, how they make decisions about a study, and how they consider positionality as they engage with participants and then with the data generated from the interactions (Mills & Birks, 2014; Silverman, 2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a more recent methodology situated in constructivist qualitative research (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The aim of IPA is to explore how participants perceive events within their social or life world through detailed examination of viewpoints of the participants as they consider their place in the social world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). IPA is a process concerned with the concept of experience as constructed between the researcher and the participant using hermeneutical discussion to refine individual constructions (Smith & Osborne, 2007; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012). Interpretive phenomenological analysis combines researcher empathy with critical

questions for in-depth conversations between the researcher and participant to construct meaning (Packer & Addison, 1989; Smith & Osborne, 2007; Birks & Mills, 2011).

Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre are the leading philosophers who influenced phenomenological research (Smith et al., 2012). According to a history outlined by Smith et al., Husserl suggested an approach called reduction which is to detachedly put the experiences of individuals into smaller sections of what is perceived, remembered, judged, thought, and valued while focusing on the consciousness of an experience. He was concerned with the process of reflection on perception and experience without preconceived ideas about the meaning. Husserl was interested in the meaning of being. Heidegger was interested in the shared and overlapping experiences that we encounter and how these encounters are always perspectival. They are multi-faceted depending on the varying perspectives of individuals. Merleau-Ponty focused on the problems of perception and embodiment. He believed that each person has an experience that only belongs to them, and that perception of others comes from our own embodied experience; an experience separated from the assumptions of the realist or the idealist. Sartre believed that experiences are contingent upon our relationship with or the absence of those around us. He was interested in the reality beyond the phenomenon. All four philosophers were interested in attempting to understand the phenomenon of experiences (Smith et al.).

Constructivist research depends on the researcher's ability to interpret participants' accounts of their experiences which requires multifaceted and rigorous inquiry. I hoped to explore the viewpoint of teachers who have participated in diversity

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and equity training to find issues of importance for the teachers that can inform the school's anti-racism efforts. The focus of my study was the examination of the understanding of teachers regarding diversity and equity efforts within their school. Through a detailed analysis of the interviews with the teachers, I hoped to understand teachers' experiences and perceptions after they participated in diversity and equity training.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central question that the study addressed is:

> What are participating teachers' perceptions and experiences of formal diversity and equity trainings offered at a public charter school in a midwestern state between 2019 and 2021?

The sub-questions are:

- How do teachers feel diversity and equity training affects their own efficacy in relation to anti-racism efforts?

- How do teachers think diversity and equity trainings mitigate minority marginalization in schools?

SITE

The project site was an open-enrollment, site-based, public community school in the Midwest of the United States. Fordham Charter (pseudonym) was founded in 2003 and serves students in K-12th grade. The school is a public school of choice and is state and federally funded. All seats at the school are filled on a first come-first-serve basis. The percent of economically disadvantaged students is almost 75% and the percent of

minority students is 95% according to the demographic information provided by the state. The community school maintains a close association with several colleges. The students who attend the school begin taking college classes during their sophomore year in high school to earn college credit and high school credit when they meet stringent criteria. Students are given a set of benchmarks unique to this school which the students are required to complete before they graduate. The benchmarks focus on writing, applying for college, and preparation for post high school life.

Fordham enrolls 1300 students attending K-12 and has 160 educators and staff members. The school is in a community where 75% of the students are living at or below the poverty rate. When students are accepted into this community school, the students are given a fee waiver for the entire tuition amount, so attendance is free. All students within the larger city school system are eligible to apply for acceptance. The mission of the school is to prepare 100% of their students for college. Of the students who apply to college, 100% are accepted, according to the school report. The students who attend the school are 81% first generation college students. More than 35% of the students earn a full tuition scholarship to college (masked source to protect identity of school).

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were teachers from the high school and middle school who participated in diversity and equity training. Teachers were purposefully sampled based on their grade level appointments and by their participation in two years of Equity Fellows. Equity Fellows is a diversity and equity training which attempts to foster healthy

relationships between youth and adults by educating the participants to examine racial constructs.

For this research, the training was offered in the 2019-2021 school years by Equity Fellows with a grant by StriveTogether, a national nonprofit funded by the Ballmer Group which works to improve educational opportunities for every child. The mission of Equity Fellows is to achieve substantial equitable systems change with an equity action plan by educating Equity Fellows participants over a course of three years in schools. Equity Fellows receive professional development twice a month for three years and a stipend.

The participants in the first year of the cohort participated in guided discussions of racial theory, read books on race and the history of racism, and completed an autoethnographic reflection. An autoethnography is a form of qualitative research using self-reflection and writing to explore personal experience with the purpose of connecting one's own story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. Equity Fellows provided enough structures to support emergent and localized work from the participants who are working in diverse settings.

The self-reflection of the first year examined how racial identity is tethered to the work within each individual school environment which included an examination of varying forms of data within the overall school environment and more specifically, within the classroom teaching and learning spaces. Participants were asked to consider the implications and reasons for the gap between White children and their peers, males and females, students with exceptionalities, and students with a different home language,

and the participants were asked to examine why these gaps continue to persist. The participants were presented with the disparities between Students of Color and their White peers and asked to consider the implications and reasons for the disparities. The goal was to examine student data. The Equity Fellows were encouraged to ask questions which appropriately considered the role of equity within that examination of student and school data. The process was led by leaders who intentionally affirmed the participants.

During the second year of training, Equity Fellows were encouraged to become emergent leaders within their own environments by learning to problematize, own, and tackle issues of equity while examining data. Participants learned to monitor achievement and suspension data organized by race and gender. The participants were encouraged to begin offering other staff members opportunities and ideas which promote a culturally responsive teaching style. Emphasis was placed on interdialogic exchanges between trainers and participants.

For this research, the participants who participated in the year one and two training of the cohort were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is appropriate in IPA by offering a process through which a researcher selects who can offer insight into the research topic based on their shared experiences and varied perceptions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). "By making the groups as uniform as possible according to obvious social factors or other theoretical factors relevant to the study, one can then examine in detail psychological variability within the group, by analyzing the pattern of convergence and divergence which arises" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). I was interested in providing a rich, detailed account of the participants' perceptions and

experiences. IPA allows for multiple individuals who experience similar events to tell their stories without any judgment to find common meaning within an experience (Creswell, 2015).

The teachers were identified from a list provided by the Deputy Superintendent of the school. The nine teachers selected to participate were staff members who participated in the Equity Fellows training. While there were both teachers and administrators who participated in the training, for this research, I focused on teachers because the teachers were asked to share their training information with the rest of the staff members. "IPA studies are conducted on relatively small sample sizes, and the aim is to find a reasonably homogeneous sample, so that, within the sample, we can examine convergence and divergence in some detail" (Smith et al., 2009). The race and gender of the participants were varied. For this research, an email was sent to all participants in the Equity Fellows inviting them to respond.

ETHICS

Before collecting the data, I was given approval through the University of Dayton Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is charged with the responsibility of reviewing the research before it is conducted when the research involves human participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I was also given permission to conduct research of Equity Fellows from the Deputy Superintendent of the school. The teachers' names were provided, and the teachers were given permission to be interviewed for this research project.

The teachers were given an invitation to participate in the research and given a document explaining the purpose of the study. The invitation included the researcher's name and contact information with an explanation that their participation was voluntary. They were assured that if, at any point, participants wished to rescind their participation, their data would not be included in the final research. Data was collected through interviews and a survey. The only people in the interview space were the teachers who had experienced the training and me. Confidentiality was assured to all participants.

Ethical issues were addressed using the University of Dayton IRB study information sheet which explained the study. This protected the confidentiality of the participants because it did not contain a signature. I also protected the confidentiality of interview data on a password embedded computer. The participants were told that they would be interviewed and surveyed regarding their perspectives of diversity and equity training within their schools. They were assured that their names would be omitted for the sake of confidentiality, and the transcript data was only seen by the research team.

I explained my interest in this subject. Transaction regarding social realities between both the researcher and the research is necessary to the construction of meaning and truth. Interpretive phenomenological analysis requires that the researcher acknowledge that they enter a field of inquiry with their own notions and histories which become part of the research study. They must be aware of the effect that they have on the data and findings (Hopf, 2004). The researcher is a passionate participant and facilitator as others share their history and experiences and the aim is to co-create meaning with the subjects. "The underlying qualities required of the IPA researcher are open-mindedness;

flexibility; patience; empathy; and the willingness to enter into, and respond to, the participant's world" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012).

DATA COLLECTION

SHORT SURVEY.

I conducted several stages of data collection. Interpretative phenomenological analysis researchers attempt to examine experiences or phenomena to build a cohesive perspective with the participants. The first stage of data collection was a brief survey with two reflective prompts. The exploration of each participant's views from varied perspectives can offer multifaceted accounts of the shared phenomenon which offer enhanced and rich detail (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2012).

The short survey was created in a Google form which was sent to the participants after they signed the informed consent form agreeing to participate in the study. The participants were asked to spend 15 minutes or less answering the survey questions. The reflective prompts were modified from resources presented by The National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) as part of their mission to teach social justice. NNSTOY is an organization of teachers seeking to support practices and policies that support learning for all students. The organization has compiled a substantial collection of equity resources for educators. The resources are compiled to spark more meaningful discussions among educators about racial equity in schools. Participants were told that the questions included within the short survey within this research were intended to

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provide a springboard for more focused discussion within the interviews regarding racial diversity and equity training. They were assured that their responses would be confidential and protected.

The two reflective prompts were:

• How can self-reflection inform student equity in schools?

• How can we engage with our colleagues to offer an equitable learning experience for our students?

Within the equity training, staff member participants were also asked to share their feedback with the Equity Fellows leaders and that anonymous feedback was shared with me as part of this research.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis researchers attempt to examine experiences or phenomena to build a cohesive perspective with the participants. The second stage of data collection were the interviews. Interpretative phenomenological analysis interviews are conversations with a purpose where the interviewer permits the researcher time to be flexible and responsive (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Creswell, 2007). The successful interview will produce rich detailed descriptions of participant's thoughts, which requires well-timed and sensitive questioning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I conducted interviews with teacher participants and these interviews were fully analyzed. An additional interview was conducted with an Equity Fellows administrator for the

purpose of providing supplementary contextual information regarding the diversity and equity training.

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview facilitates empathy, and it tends to provide a more complete description of the psychological and social world of the participant (Smith & Osborne, 2007). A semi-structured interview will move from being generic to more specific accounts of recollections and feelings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). The interviews began with an attempt by me to establish a comfortable space for the participant. The interviews all began with informal greetings, and I shared a bit of my own history with the participants.

Open-ended questions were chosen to provide insight into the participant's experience with the diversity and equity training. The first two questions were about the teacher's background and experience. "The most important thing in this opening phase is to help the participant get used to talking" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012). The next questions were about the teacher's feelings and perspective regarding diversity and equity training. Within this stage, the ordering of questions is less important than the ability to probe participants' interests or concerns (Smith & Osborne, 2007). The interview questions became more unstructured depending on the responses of the participant (Flowers, 2008). The participants' responses to the survey questions were also considered within the interviews.

The questions were presented to the participants from a politically neutral space to allow the participants the space to explore their perceptions and experiences without

judgment. I wished to hear the authentic perspectives of Equity Fellows participants, and I was aware that there may be responses which do not align with my own positionality regarding the importance of equity efforts within schools. Creswell says the interview should be courteous, and the researcher should be a good listener (2007). By using a semi-structured interview, I was able to establish rapport with the participants, and I was able to move into unknown directions when they said something interesting. The interviews were guided with opportunities for conversation that was unstructured which allowed me to glean more information from the participants. The interviews lasted between an hour and a half to two hours. The interviews were conducted over Zoom and the participants were given the option to meet face-to-face. The interviews were recorded upon consent of the participants. The interviews took place in a quiet location, and I was the only researcher in the Zoom space as well as in the room where I conducted the interviews.

The only persons in the interview were the researcher and the individual participants. When engaging in research, researchers must think about their impact on the data (Mills & Birks, 2014). The researcher will then integrate the data to draw interpretations (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As an active participant in the interview process, I tried to inductively gain knowledge about teachers' perceptions of diversity and equity trainings in which they had participated as members of Equity Fellows.

REFLEXIVE JOURNAL.

Reflexive journaling was used to contextualize the interview data. The entries included my reflections of the process and interactions that I had with the teachers during the interviews. Researchers should include raw data in their memos, and then look at the meaning or hermeneutics of the reflections (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher should keep the participant's voice preserved in an authentic way (Mills, Bonner, Francis, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). Through recording, transcription, and multiple listening and readings of the participants' words, the interviewer considered the participant's perspectives. This was done by honoring their backgrounds, experiences in childhood, college, and adulthood and understanding that each participant had a view of education, students, and the world that was informed by their own past. Through memos, I was able to reflect on how their knowledge reflects their unique and individual memory and knowledge. Memos are an important way to track the data collection for accuracy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Memos are also an important way to check for bias (Creswell, 2007).

DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS.

The administrator, the Equity Fellows trainer, and the teacher participants were asked to share any program documents related to the training. This data was useful in providing additional context and additional information regarding the participants participation within the training. I believe this study has tremendous potential to offer a contextualized case-study view of how a program works in each context. The trainer shared all the documents related to Equity Fellows with me and I was able to not only

ascertain the intent of the study from the interviews with the administrator and trainer, but I was also able to see what the Equity Fellows participants had experienced within the training documents and slides. The trainer also shared the participant surveys with me. The multiple documents added to the scope and depth of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

TRANSCRIPTION.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure that no words between the researcher and the participants were lost or omitted. Participants must consent to being recorded, and the recordings will be stored in a safe place to protect the data. "IPA requires a semantic record of the interview: that means a transcript showing all the words that are spoken by everyone present" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). The transcribed interviews were the main data source analyzed via coding and subsequent steps outlined by Smith et al. as part of IPA.

ANALYSIS.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis methods are iterative and inductive. The goal within IPA is to learn about the participants beliefs, and meaning is central (Smith & Osborne, 2007). Researchers should understand that there will be a lot of interplay between the experiences presented by participants. The researcher will construct common and divergent themes through data analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). Analysis

within IPA will initially be focused on large ideas and then intermediate development of emergent themes. Later stages in interpretive phenomenological analysis will generate more focused recurrent themes.

CODING.

Initial analysis included reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, the survey information, the program related documents and the memos. Repeated readings allowed the researcher to engage with the data. It is important to read the interviews several times and avoid the temptation to speed-read through the interviews (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). As I read the interviews, I wrote down my initial thoughts and comments on paper. I also listened to the interviews for additional processing. Again, I wrote down my insights. This stage was freely textual (Smith & Osborne, 2007). I read and reread the transcripts of the interviews with the intent to better understand the words of the participants. Repeated ideas and concepts became apparent in the transcripts, and these were coded (Mills & Birks, 2014). I examined the data and looked for teachers' descriptions of their experiences with diversity and equity trainings. The additional administrator interview and program documents were also examined.

The second stage of coding was more focused than initial coding. Within intermediate coding, I combined some of my initial codes into relevant themes and looked for data that could be grouped into larger segments for analysis. This stage involved producing a coherent table of themes for each individual. When the transcripts

and program documents were analyzed for themes, the researcher then compared themes between the participants.

The final stage of analysis was to explain the emergent themes and to translate those themes into a narrative of the teachers' experiences with diversity and equity trainings. Through the analysis of short survey responses, interview transcriptions, program documents, and reflexive journal entries, I found themes that translated the participant's words into something both meaningful and potentially impactful (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The analysis of the participants' words and the emergent themes may lead to words into an analysis that can be connected to the extant literature (Smith & Osborne, 2007).

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Validity under a constructivist paradigm is oriented toward authenticity and trustworthiness. One oft-cited set of criteria for validity and soundness in qualitative research is Guba and Lincoln's (1985) trustworthiness framework, encompassing credibility, confirmability, dependability, transferability, and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). To support authenticity in their findings, the researcher must invest in detailed examination of participant perspectives and concurrent data collection and analysis for transactional knowledge.

The value in interpretive phenomenological analysis depends on the researcher's ability to interpret the participants' experiences and this requires multifaceted and rigorous empathetic and critical inquiry (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). There are

preferred ways to conduct the research and specific methods to collect and analyze empirical materials, but the researcher needs to enter the world of the participants and to do this, the data analysis process should be filled with rich detail for the process to be appropriately nuanced and creative.

REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity is imperative within the research process. My memos and reflexive research journal helped me decide how to move forward with the research process. The memos included the participants' language and basic details such as what the teachers conveyed within their tone during the interviews. Reflexivity was part of the process I also used to consider my own positionality within the research.

"Memos are the written records of the researcher's thinking, both conscious and preconscious realizations as the research and the researcher grow" (Glaser, 1998). Within qualitative constructivist research, the researcher also is a learner and must understand the significant role that they play within the research process (Ültanır, 2012). Cresswell and Miller (2000) described the role of the researcher in the research as disconfirming evidence examined from participants with extended time in a field and confirming the findings with rich and thick description (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Memos aid in the reflexive process and provide an audit trail of the activities conducted within the research (Mills & Birks, 2014). In the process of understanding the perceptions of the teachers, I considered my own assumptions regarding teachers and diversity and equity training.

TRIANGULATION

Qualitative researchers ensure triangulation when they provide multiple voices giving rich detail related to a topic (Silverman, 1993). Triangulation involves using multiple data sources in a research project to gain understanding (Creswell, 2015; Denzin, 1978). Triangulation was obtained within this study using multiple data collection methods at different points in time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The data collection included individual teacher interviews, administrator interview, short surveys, contextual documents, and researcher memos. The participants were given the opportunity to check the interview data for accuracy through member checking. I used these multiple touchpoints to understand the perceptions of teachers regarding diversity and equity training.

CONCLUSION

Interpretative phenomenologists do not assume that theory emerges from data; rather, they believe researchers co-construct meaning about the way in which people understand their own position within the world (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012). In this study, the researcher examined teacher's perceptions of diversity and equity trainings to support anti-racism efforts within schools. The education of Students of Color is dependent upon educators striving to teach with an anti-racism lens.

As student diversity increases and teacher diversity remains stagnant, it becomes essential for the predominantly White teaching force to provide a well-rounded and challenging education that reflects culturally proficient practices and meaning making

and is responsive to the issues that Students of Color face as we enter the third decade of the 21st century. This research study could provide insight into how districts might support teachers' growth in these areas, providing moral support, and increased professional training services.

Starck et al (2020) found that systematic education and training of racial bias and diversity can reduce teacher bias. Diversity and equity training can enhance the understanding of the participants through a focus on relationship building with the aim of demystifying learning for a diverse student body (Banks, 2004; Alismail, 2016; Banks, 2007; Bakir, 2020). Multicultural education focuses on social equality and multicultural perspectives that equip teachers to think about the power and privileges of the dominant culture (Alviar-Martin & Ho, 2010).

The study of experience is an interpretative and reflexive process between the researcher and participants. Interpretive phenomenological analysts acknowledge that they enter a field of inquiry with their own notions and history which become part of the research scrutiny (Singleton, 2015). The aim of the researcher was to co-construct meaning alongside the research participants. Teachers should believe that they are responsible for ensuring equity within the school (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This interpretive phenomenological analysis will contribute to the body of empirical research by examining how teachers really perceive diversity and equity trainings within schools.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Within this research, I held the goal of intimately understanding the Equity

Fellows training program, as well as learning how to improve the content and

effectiveness of the discussions within professional development focused on racial equity

in education. These data give critical insight into the state of the program and where it

falls short. For the phenomenological study, the willing participants who responded to the

survey and engaged in an interview gave their authentic opinions and experiences related

to diversity or racism within their schools.

Chapter Four describes the findings of the study, demographic information, and

results of the data analyses. This chapter begins with an introduction to the nine teachers

who participated in this study followed by a description of Equity Fellows based on an

interview with an Equity Fellows administrator and one of the teacher facilitators.

Following the description of the diversity training, three emergent themes are discussed

in detail, using data gathered within the semi-structured interviews and reflexive journal

to support the justification for each theme. A summary of the main themes concludes this

chapter.

The interviews that I conducted for this research were conducted virtually via

video conferencing in the spring and summer of 2021. The interviews consisted of

thirteen questions with nine educators from a non-unionized charter school in Ohio – a

school with a 98% Black student population. The interview questions were designed to

create a comfortable space for the subjects, learn about them and their experiences, understand their opinions on the current Equity Fellows, and synthesize new methods that can be used to help improve the program as well as students' lives and educational outcomes. A total of nine Equity Fellows participants were interviewed including two White males, three White females, and four Black females. All participants participated in a mandatory Equity Fellows professional development within their common district and one of the participants was a teacher facilitator/trainer. Separate from the interviews, I also met with one of the Equity Fellows founders for further background information about Equity Fellows.

INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

Each of these educators taught in either middle or high school, and all were expected by their administration to incorporate conversations about social justice, equity, and inclusion in their classrooms. The interviewees had been teaching for at least three years and some had been teaching over 20 years. Each teacher chose the teaching profession because of someone in their own lives who had impacted their interest in the profession. The participants' responses about why they went into teaching were centered on student outcomes and a recognition that teachers can make a difference within a child's life. The teachers who participated within this study chose the profession from a place of goodness, compassion, and a commitment to perpetuate inclusivity and equality within their schools and communities. It is worthy of mention that each participant felt

that they had chosen the teaching profession because of their dedication to the tenets of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Table 1 shows participants' pseudonyms along with a summary of their social identities and experiences.

Table 1: Participant pseudonyms and their social identities, subject taught, and years in building.

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Subject Taught	Years in Building
Laine	White	Female	American Government	18
Jaron	White	Male	English Language Arts	5+
Anna	Black	Female	Social Studies	10+
Linda	White	Female	Mathematics	5
Sara	Black	Female	English Language Arts	-
Tina	Black	Female	Electives	10+
Jayla	Black	Female	Spanish	12
Loren	White	Male	English Language Arts	3
Mindy	White	Female	English Language Arts	17

Laine enjoyed her own American government class because of her teacher who inspired her to want to know more about the subject matter. This one teacher and the experience within her class propelled Laine to pursue a degree in political science. She knew from the time she was a student that she would one day teach other students the way she was taught, and she has taught for eighteen years in the same building. Jaron chose a career in education because he saw teaching as an opportunity to give young people the toolkit, they need to become change makers in their communities.

Similarly, Anna wanted her students to feel that they had the skills to be successful and she knew one of the ways she could help her students was to let them see a successful Black teacher in the classroom. Anna said, "kids must know that they have somebody in the space who can say, "I see you, hear you, and so yeah, I think representation in multiple ways I guess is the best way to talk about why I became a teacher" (Anna). When Anna was in elementary school, most of her teachers were Black and this changed when she got to middle school. She said her Black teachers really inspired her to pursue teaching. As Anna said, "I work in her job now and I became a teacher to make sure that there were people like her around when she left who were good teachers" (Anna).

Linda also was inspired by her teachers. She had numerous educators who invested in her well-being and education. During undergraduate, she met a woman who advised her to teach kids why they need to learn rather than enforcing rules upon them. you don't just tell kids what to do, you need to teach them why. In graduate school, she was influenced by a woman who first made her consider cultural competence within a gender studies class. "She made me like really realize like this stuff isn't just way out there. This is relevant here" (Linda). Of her three influential teachers, the one with the most profound impact had taught her how to interact with her students. "He really took time to like to build a relationship with me like he even …. he was good at like teaching people how to teach but I think the biggest thing was just like, he checked in on me" (Linda). Linda knew the positive outcomes from a teacher who genuinely cared.

Sara's experience in school was different than Linda's. Early in our conversation, Sara reflected on how, as a middle-school student, she only wanted someone to believe in her, and seeing someone who looked like her and believed in her was extremely impactful. She went to school as a child in a school where 93% of the students within the school were Black and all the teachers were White. Sara said, it "made being a student really hard with all black kids learning from people who didn't look like us, who didn't have our own experiences, and who didn't even try to ask." She hated school growing up because she did not feel valued. She explained how difficult it was to learn from teachers who did not racially reflect the student population. One of the significant memories for her was the narrow focus on Martin Luther King during Black history month.

> "I think, out of my teachers there was probably a third-grade teacher, and she did try to empower the Black kids, but the way she did it was super cheesy. She picked the pop culture friendly, yeah, the friendly, you know, Black leader. She didn't go with any of the rebels or any of the lesser-known people who were rarely talked about like Black women. But I guess she was doing what she thought that she could" (Sara).

When she encountered a Black substitute teacher in the 7th grade, Sara said the teacher "looked like me" and loved helping kids (Sara). She was reflective on the importance of representation among teachers in the classroom to connect with all students. Sara went on to explain how she was a first-generation college graduate because she finally encountered a teacher who from day one told the students that they were going

to achieve their goals. "She challenged us to believe in ourselves more than we did at the point that we met her, and she showcased our possibility" (Sara).

Tina switched careers because she felt a calling to the classroom. Tina worked in social work until one day when she was presenting in a classroom where she witnessed a teacher who talked about their students in a way that segregated them and compartmentalized them -- not knowing anything about where they came from or why they might be the way they are. "I was so appalled by the way she treated the kids" (Tina). After months of reflection, Tina quit her job in social work to go back to school to obtain her teaching certification. She now is in the classroom and ultimately, she summed up her approach by saying that she tries to acknowledge their lived experiences and help them to recognize that they do not have to be defined by their current situations. She encourages her students to embrace their identities and their strengths. Numerous participants went into teaching because they wanted to bring compassion and cultural competency to diverse classrooms.

Jayla always knew she loved being around children from the time she helped in Sunday school. She initially chose college counseling as her college major but she changed her mind with the guidance of a mentor and switched her major so she would be licensed to teach K-12 Spanish. Loren, who has been teaching for three years, chose the profession because of frustration with inequity within the neighborhood where he grew up. He encountered a teacher who told him every day that he would be successful and having that positive affirmation from someone who acted as a teacher and "father figure" changed his career and life trajectory. He grew up in the community and he saw the

difficulty that his peers had as they navigated the systemic cycles of racism. "My friends had teachers who didn't care about them, and the community that doesn't support them, and eventually it builds to this point where they can't if they make it to the high school that's as far as they're going to make it. They end up back in the same house with their parents working the same jobs which starts a cycle that just continues and continues. Anyway, I recognize and in my mind that, like the earliest way that I can help my community was by being in a school system in my community. And by doing that I could help kids, recognize, and start breaking cycles" (Loren).

Mindy has been teaching for 17 years and she became a teacher because of how "it really shapes your perception of the world in a positive way when you inspire young people to become better versions of themselves" (Mindy). The teachers all had chosen the profession because they believed they made a difference within the lives of young adults. Within the interviews, the participants all demonstrated compassion for students and a commitment to inclusive teaching practices.

EQUITY FELLOWS: CONTEXT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Equity Fellows is a program which was developed to assist school endeavors in negotiating the complexities of education with a focus on closing the gap for Students of Color. The Ballmer funded program is an emergent program focused on challenging teachers' roles within education. Program trainers, who are teachers or administrators, are compelled by their own interests in understanding racial equity and are empowered by the facilitation and affirmation of students, teachers, and community. Equity Fellows

trainers work with teachers to identify practices and policies that harm Students of Color through the examination of data. The teams intentionally focus on cultivating trust between staff members so they can consider their own biases and engage intentionally with their peers through conversations about what must change to improve student learning.

The training provides participants with opportunities to interact with individuals with varying viewpoints and provides spaces for those who participate in the Equity Fellows program to learn about injustice and racism through conversations with one another. The steps within Equity Fellows are reflective individual readings leading to varied topics for teacher inquiry using multiple discourse methods including dyads, small groups, and large group sessions. Equity Fellows founders hope that participants will feel equipped to promote culturally responsive school practices (http://www.learntoearndayton.org, 2022).

Within the chosen site for this study, Equity Fellows training happened monthly for two years and transpired as primarily group sessions that were 2 to 2.5 hours in length. Some of these sessions were conducted virtually via Zoom due to education moving online during the COVID-19 pandemic response in the 2020-2021 school year. The meetings were usually held on Monday afternoons after the school day had ended. Jaron acknowledged that the time of day (Monday at 3:45 pm) might be a deterrent to complete engagement. This was echoed by Anna when she said, "I think that teachers are interested in learning, but we must do it differently. We want the training, but not at

the end of the day on a Monday when my kids have just driven me crazy and you want me to stay at work and talk about something uncomfortable" (Anna).

Incumbent upon participation in Equity Fellows was a school administrator's commitment to offer multiple years of training within the schools. The administrator assigned four staff members to participate in Equity Fellows as facilitators of the training and one of these facilitators participated in this study and added contextual detail about the training. The facilitator, who had some level of understanding about the struggle for equity, prepared for the large group training sessions with the teachers by exploring his thoughts and feelings around issues of equity with the other facilitators prior to presenting to the entire group. Equity Fellows participants were offered multiple forms of discourse opportunity including the large group seminar setting, breakout sessions for more intimate conversations, and journaling for moments of reflection. The facilitator said the purpose of the journaling component was to offer a scaffolded space for participants to explore thoughts and their feelings around the discussions as an alternative to participation in the large group conversations.

When asked about the school in which they were teaching, in general, the teachers felt favorable and indicated an overall positive school environment. Because of the student demographics within the school, many commented that the teachers who chose to work within the school were already culturally astute and acutely aware of the issues confronting Students of Color. The teacher participants noted that the administrators made a genuine effort to focus on varying and critical thinking perspectives through the

Equity Fellows training. Moreso, all participants said that teachers want diversity, equity, and inclusion training.

Within the interviews, there were three primary themes that emerged and remained relevant as a part of the convergent perceptions and experiences of the participants who had been trained to become Equity Fellows. The first theme focused on the participants' feelings about the training, the second focused on the participants' most preferred method of training discourse, and the third theme concentrated on the participants' desire for personal practitioner methods within the training. Additional conclusions of the research found that teachers' efficacy was improved within the training and the focus on disciplinary practices and curriculum, in fact, mitigated marginalization through enhanced anti-racism efforts within the classroom.

FIRST THEME: IDENTITY EXPLORATION WITHIN SMALL GROUPS

While Equity Fellows trainings included small group scenarios and reflective journaling, most of the trainings were conducted in a larger group seminar. Participants preferred the small group interactions that offered them the space to first establish a trusting space in which to examine their own feelings about equity within a deliberately created setting. This directly links to the first theme found within the interviews: *Identity exploration within small groups*.

Many referred to the lack of trust within the larger seminar setting which was often based on assumptions. Loren described how his experiences as a White male are not always assumed to be like those of a Black male growing up in the inner city, but he

had experiences that he could share which were extremely painful so assumptions for him were not hurtful. "My dad was killed by a police officer. How do you even tell people that? That's like super personal stuff" (Loren). He went on to explain that getting staff to establish deep connections has been very beneficial within the settings where they share their journal excerpts where the staff wrote about themselves. Mindy recalled an emotionally profound session where participants shared their journal entries with one another. "We have had people crying over zoom sharing what they wrote about themselves" (Mindy). This moment offered insight into the unifying power of conversations between people willing to be vulnerable within the small groups.

Journaling and a focus on one's own identity is an essential component of the Equity Fellows curriculum. The participants said one of the most helpful moments within the practice of journaling was the opportunity to consider their own intersectionality, their backgrounds, and how their own experiences informed their views prior to finding their small group partners. When the participants truly reflected, journaled about their experiences, and then shared, they said small group discussions facilitated the teachers' ability to build trust among one another.

Once that trust was established, teachers indicated that they were more comfortable when someone else said something that didn't seem right, asking for clarity and saying, "Hey, that doesn't seem right. What did you mean by that?" (Mindy). As that trust was cemented between participants, then they were able to learn something and walk away or give an alternative perspective.

The staff found being honest and helping to build relationships with each other to be helpful because they could then transfer what they learned from one another on to the students within their classrooms. They were immediately able to make a change which enabled them to increase connection with their students because, ultimately, the small group meeting helped build trust and respect between the adults. When people feel vulnerable enough to discuss their biases, they open themselves to changing their approach within the classroom.

Jayla said that within small group discussions, they recognized that understanding the challenges of being Black was different than understanding gender issues and issues around being raised Muslim, socioeconomic differences, or many other demographics. Within small group discussions, this teacher has developed a relationship with a fellow teacher in the building who is more comfortable understanding and championing LGBQT+ teens. These teachers now rely on one another for their students confronting varying challenges and they have worked together to become allies for marginalized students within the building. "In smaller groups, people can be heard without judgment, yet they don't feel like they can be as transparent and honest in large group settings" (Mindy).

Small groups are the solution to slowly integrating everyone into a comfortable mental and physical state. People do not feel social anxiety to the same extent when with a few friends and acquaintances, especially when they have experiences in common, and they can start by trying to form their own diverse groups and discuss their diverse array

of talking points. While not perfect, small groups are the safest option in easing people into talking about their own experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives.

The challenge that was echoed alongside other teachers who were interviewed is that the voices in the large group conversations often lack diversity and they were too singularly dimensioned. Numerous participants stated that Equity Fellows currently only focuses on issues of race, which they agreed is important, but leaves behind too many other necessary subjects. This phenomenon makes the teachers feel frustrated that they and only a few other vocal others are willing to talk in the meeting. Although the group is constantly talking about situations among Persons of Color, the Black teachers in the room comprise many of the speakers. People who are affected by racism likely are more educated on the topic and have important commentary to make that helps in keeping the conversations going, but the responsibility to educate should not rely entirely on them.

Participants agreed that much of the responsibility of educating everyone on racism had fallen exclusively to Black teachers. Moreso, they felt that a wider variety of people who feel comfortable speaking up within the equity discussions will lead to more diverse experiences being examined. For example, once the smaller groups are established as an open space for every person and every problem, a queer, White person, who may have previously been unsure if speaking up was appropriate to the setting, would have the opportunity to share their experience. Suddenly, any LGBTQ+ teachers present would have confirmation that they can come to the present faculty with any questions and issues or speak up themselves and potentially meet friends and allies. People like Tina, who understand living as a Black person, but not as a Queer or Muslim

person, will benefit greatly from the opening of the discussion. Sara echoed similar concerns and she articulated some of her frustrations.

"I don't feel that I'm more equitable or I don't feel like I have any more equity and diversity skills …honestly, like we don't know how to face the conversation and we don't know how to control them. We don't know how to start them, it's all like we'll just try. It might be easier for me to just try than for my White colleagues who don't feel comfortable talking about the content. It would be better if they told us how to teach kids about equity and diversity" (Sara).

Again, it was apparent that there were few, if any, teachers who felt equipped to handle the difficult discussions with students because there is no way to understand the experience of every person with their wide array of backgrounds. Small groups do allow for more leveraging of the conversations because participants are more open in sharing their vulnerabilities around a more diverse array of discussion topics.

Participants widely expressed the view that the entirety of the topics discussed needs to be expanded. With more matters available, more people will have proper input to give on subjects they understand so they can spread their knowledge among each other. Equity Fellow's seemed to fall short in creating open discussion of inclusive topics leading to the criticism from Laine that the training is not inclusive of other aspects of diversity and inequity – not just race, and that which is exclusive to the Black experience. But discussing said experience is still important and has had a positive impact as opposed to no meetings at all. "In discussions we only talk about race and only Black and Brown people but no other Persons of Color" (Jayla). The participants indicated that for there to

be true inclusion, there is a need to explore all injustices and not that of only one social group or race–black, white, young, and old alike. Focusing entirely on one topic deters from the exploration of another. "We are not being inclusive within the conversation of inclusivity by singularly focusing on two or three talking points" (Laine).

Mindy has taught critical race theory and critical feminist theory for around six or seven years, but she felt that within the Equity Fellows discussions that there was not enough expansion into discussions around disability. "I teach critical race theory and critical feminist theory and think they are important-- but I feel like we are singularly focused on those topics, so then we in turn by and large marginalize other groups remaining silent about them" (Mindy). Teachers understood the importance of focusing on Black students, but they also recognized that they were focusing so much on the one subgroup at the expense of other students within their own rooms. "I would hate to be a Hispanic kid sitting in even my own classroom. I would feel so, like, well, I don't know, overlooked" (Mindy). This cognizance that there were many other students to consider demonstrated that teachers recognized the complexity implications of intersectionality within the discussions of equity and inclusion.

No one can know everything about how all the many diverse types of people think or feel. The teachers articulated that the most important component of Equity Fellows was relationship building. They felt that establishing trust was crucial for fostering meaningful engagement with one another as they negotiated the complexities of each other. "People change based on how they feel, not on what they know. You can't change a mentality with a way that is dogmatic -- you must change it with heart" (Anna).

"It's been good to have dialogue with staff members about stuff that people are usually afraid to talk about. So, I think that's been one positive aspect of it and then you get to see others point of view. When we're having these conversations, it brings up a lot of things that sometimes you wouldn't think about for me personally." (Sara) When someone has a bias or view that comes up, it is important that the foundation of respect and trust is established, and small groups seem to lend themselves to developing authentic relationships through intra-dialogic exchanges focused on expanding viewpoints. "You pay attention a little bit more like hey, you don't know what you might find out, because you could be doing something that's pretty offensive to them, and you have no idea" (Tina).

Small groups make people comfortable and more open to understanding and acknowledging each other's perspectives because there are more opportunities for restorative connections and conversations. The participants talked of pivotal moments of clarity experienced within the small group discussions with high levels of engagements from the teacher participants. Small groups seem to have more of the "aha moments" (Sara). They recognized that the small groups were beneficial for expanding their cognition around difficult and potentially emotional topics. In one example, Mindy noted that small groups offer spaces of security for participants who are discussing very complex topics.

> "It's complicated. The whole thing is complicated. And I think that no one would argue that if you choose teaching as a profession, you're already somebody who is innately geared toward being compassionate and caring about others. And I think

that when somebody comes in and says we don't care because we're not doing x, y, and z, it's just disenfranchising for people who care deeply, but it's also making teachers comfortable to be like, yes, we do want to evolve and grow. But in safe spaces" (Mindy).

A foundation of trust is inherent to making teachers comfortable enough to address their own biases.

Participants preferred for the uncomfortable discussions to occur with an assortment of self-made groups of two or three friends. "People are more secure talking in dyads when you are with someone who is not going to go and run and tell someone what you said five seconds later" (Mindy). Allowing teachers to pick their dyads and small groups by themselves in the beginning would then solve the largest impediment to the concerns about creating safe places in which teachers could engage. At least to start, the groups should not be enforced so that teachers can go where they are most comfortable. But to ensure everyone still gets a chance to talk with different people, teachers should be encouraged to choose a different group at the next meeting or organize groups by certain issues that need to be addressed. One way is to find a partner and share something about yourself with one another with a debrief opportunity within a larger setting.

Varying up group meetings and topics as well as having small gatherings where everyone gets a chance to talk is vital to not only making sure everyone has a chance to be heard, but also for creating a space in which people feel comfortable enough to talk. The sessions which intentionally focused on creating opportunities for teachers to find

shared experience were beneficial for the participants as they confronted many problems they had faced. As a result, the questions, and difficulties they were facing within the classroom could come to light and potentially be resolved through the shared input from one another.

Equity Fellows training intentionally offers many instructional methods for delivery including dyads, lectures, large groups, and discussion topics. The participants preferred the small group training focused on self-reflection, journaling, and sharing of experience. While small group discussions should begin with self-reflection, small group conversations should also be held in a way that allows the speakers and listeners to explore what they do not know as well, otherwise they will not accomplish what is hoped.

The teachers were simultaneously resentful when they felt that their own life experiences, cultural awareness, and their individuality was disregarded within mandated training. These feelings of insecurity can be a common part of the learning journey for individuals who might be accustomed to material and narratives that center their lived experiences, or the lived experience of people like them. Laine shared that she has cared about issues of equity for almost two decades however within one of the sessions focused on how to be an anti-racist, she felt that she was being attacked because she did not choose to live in a Black neighborhood. She explained, "If I'm financially able to live in a really good school district, that doesn't take away anything that I do when I'm at work, and I'm serving my mostly Black students" (Laine). Mindy talked about the day George Floyd was killed and she spoke about her devastation. She said that in the meeting

following the death, she felt like she was being pandered to within the discussion. "I know that I am compassionate and constantly trying to better my own perspectives but within the meetings when I am told to better my own perspective, it is counterintuitive to what I am doing" (Mindy). Participants perceived the large group settings to be more punitive.

Equity Fellows includes time for individual reflection and reading, journaling, dyads, small groups, and large group discussions. When the large group meetings were too challenging or upsetting, they made the previously willing participants resistant to trying again. Teachers felt that the most beneficial group training were the ones where participants could present their experiences, political views, alternative perspectives, and feelings within a committed space of understanding. "Some people were pretty heated, but after having that conversation, different people bought some of the teachers' different perspectives, I think" (Mindy). Teachers wished to be able to explain their perspectives before being judged by those with varying views. When given the time to engage with one another, the participants were able to listen and to expand their understanding of one another.

Within small groups, the fear of punitive response is diminished and within a space where varying voices are celebrated, the participants connected with one another. "I mean that's what it's all about is having conversations between each other" (Linda). The participants felt that there was increased meaningful dialogue within small groups which offered more effectiveness and inclusion. "We were able to sit back and say yeah that makes perfect sense in smaller groups" (Sara).

Small groups seemed to offer more intimate moments of recognition and understanding and having a space where teachers can speak freely offers teachers space in which to expand their cultural capital. As teachers become more and more comfortable with the experience, larger groups can form and could eventually build up to larger discussions in which everyone feels more comfortable sharing what they have learned from one another with all participants.

THEME 2: COMPLICATIONS WITH SAFE SPACE

Participants framed the effectiveness of the equity discussion around the internalization of feelings they had while participating in the Equity Fellows experience. The second theme I found through the interviews was that several participants felt that the construction of a *safe space* was a prerequisite to open discussions and for mutual learning surrounding equity. While Equity Fellows administrators have purposefully designed a training focused on offering collaborative spaces for inquiry, all participants in this study described experiences and perceptions did not reflect this open, collaborative intention. Nearly every participant in the interviews distinguished clear areas in which the training sessions lacked a sense of open, collaborative learning.

Participants felt that the Equity Fellows training was often judgmental and sometimes hostile. Linda is a high school math teacher in her fifth year of teaching and has been participating in the Equity Fellows professional development series for two years. "I fully feel that I should not say something unless it aligns with what's been put

out and it defeats the purpose for me because I'm a huge supporter in the way that we grow is based on hearing things that we don't agree with or understand so.

that makes me strive to consider this other perspective and see how that makes sense" (Linda).

Early in our conversation, Linda's perspective began to echo that of some of the other teachers I interviewed including Mindy. "There is an underlying pressure to say what everyone else wants to hear. That's not quite how growth happens -- you don't intimidate people into growth -- people must grow at their own rate -- you can't make a tree grow faster than it can in a year -- too much fertilizer and it will burn" (Mindy).

Participants agreed that conversations within the training were challenging, and several believed that significant progress would not likely occur, unless some changes were made in the training delivery that allowed for a collective "safe space" to share experiences with a reduced fear of retaliation or condemnation for honestly working through their potential insensitivity and ignorance. The Black teachers and White teachers had different reasons for needing a safe space. Many of the Black participants felt that within the sessions focused on racism that their own lives were being unnecessarily opened for critique and many of the White participants felt that they could not be vulnerable to ask questions. All participants agreed that they needed the conversations to be spaces where they could acknowledge their individual needs to explore their varying degrees of cultural adaptability and knowledge.

Some interviewees believed that teachers were afraid to speak up when their current views did not align with what they believed was being "forced." Tina felt that in

group conversations, when an opinion differed from the facilitator's or from some of the dominant voices in the conversations, those who were presenting a different perspective felt attacked, which shut down productive conversation and caused arguments or post meeting complaints. Several participants, including Anna, talked of how the large group meetings were often followed by hallway chatter that was not productive for the overall building culture. "Sometimes I feel like I hear the teacher whispers after the meeting with how they feel. That was a waste of time. That could have been an email" (Anna). Anna felt frustrated when teachers did not speak up in the group sessions and when they instead disparaged the sessions outside of the group setting. There were other participants, like Anna, who joined the Equity Fellows with positive intentions who noticed that there were times that teachers were not buying into the discussions.

Comments from several participants reflected the perception that Equity Fellows sessions did not encourage free expression, and many critique this dynamic as a problem in the execution of the program. Sara said that many people will be unwilling to change their minds if they feel as though their viewpoint is being attacked. "Rather than creating a space in which teachers are vulnerable with one another, teachers and participants ended up feeling as if they just needed to get through some quick talking points and be done" (Sara).

While the participants understood that some topics put forward within the training were essential, they also indicated that they could sense when the facilitator had strong opinions on a topic which created an environment where the recipients of the information were less open to sharing an alternative opinion or perspective. "That's not a meeting,

that's a lecture" (Laine). Participants felt that kind and considerate openness was critically important so all participants could have conversations about uncomfortable topics within a compassionate space.

This does not happen when some participants are unwilling to see positions other than their own, which they believe is often the case in the Equity Fellows conversations. People were apprehensive to discuss their own biases because they were afraid of the reaction or afraid of a punitive response. Anna acknowledged that Equity Fellows is "marketed as a safe place" but she said people are being judged and she said the trusting relationships are "not actually happening" (Anna). "They weren't really conversations, they were more like, "let's talk about the way you should think" (Loren).

Participants wanted a space where they could confront one another with intention and consideration. Teachers should feel safe enough to question when "something doesn't sound right or seem right" (Laine). Jayla indicated that Equity Fellows was a time to talk with other staff members about "uncomfortable topics" regarding race and our own biases. Understanding bias is important but Tina said that the training should make teachers able to go to one another to say, "Are you a safe place where you can be open to understanding something that I need to run by you? Can you help me?"

The intent of Equity Fellows is to engage teachers, so they ask questions when they need assistance with complicated issues (Equity Fellows Administrator). However, within this training, there was a level of resistance to being vulnerable enough to ask questions because many of the participants felt they would immediately be told they were wrong for their views. "- it's kinda a forced situation to say what people want you to say.

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Forced conversations that are a means to an end which need to happen organically -- they aren't giving people space to grow" (Jayla).

Loren took notice of how some teachers refused to take an interest in the subjects of diversity and equity at all. "I think there are people that come to the conversation but are not present for the conversations" (Loren). Tina acknowledged that she is often quiet within the discussions. "You're not going to force me into having a conversation I don't want to have. I don't have a responsibility to prove what's in my heart. Maybe you should have a conversation with just me -- I know what I'm about and I don't need to say it aloud" (Tina). This resistance to the conversations around race might have been informed by the fact that these discussions were uncomfortable, and it was simpler to forego participation than to address racial disparity with one another.

This became a recurrent topic. Some teachers indicated that they didn't participate because they are young, because they are White, because they are Black, or because they are scared and because they don't feel safe in the large group setting. Anna said the response among the trainers was that the teachers expect their students to participate in class regardless of students' fears, so the Equity Fellows participants need to expect the same of each other.

Anna also spoke to the dissatisfaction among teachers within the trainings. In their interview, they described how the whispers of discontent about the training were among all teachers. The data indicated that regardless of race, the training sessions made the participants shut down at a certain point. Anna said that a few White participants' voices often dominate the conversation within the meetings while many others stay quiet

and conversely, several participants noted that the Black teachers were often the ones who participated the most in the large group discussions.

Anna started tracking the data on how much White teachers spoke versus how much Black teachers spoke during the Equity Fellows meetings. She found that Black teachers were speaking 40 percent more than White teachers in the meetings, and the same three White individuals were speaking; furthermore, the vocal White participants were younger or were those who either married another race or felt closer to another race. Anna's goal by joining was to ensure everyone felt comfortable effectively communicating because they found the meetings ineffective if only a few people talked while the others were silent.

It was interesting to find that the White teachers were more likely to shut down and refuse to speak while the Black teachers felt that they had to do much of the explaining of the Black experience. "It's ridiculous to me that this is an equity and race training and only two White people talk, and there are 14 White people in the meeting; how is it that we talk double the amount of you? This is supposed to be something we learn together" (Anna). The large group meetings were often dominated by only a few voices and many participants found it frustrating.

For some participants, the training was even triggering. The Black teachers said they felt like the sessions made them feel like they had to put all their trauma on display, and they believe the meetings should not feel like show and tell. "Constantly talking about the Black experience makes me feel, "wow, am I that effed up? Are my experiences worse than I remember them?" (Anna).

According to Mindy, in one of the meetings, a Black teacher spoke up and told the trainer they were feeling forced to put their own feelings out in a group setting as a means to an end. Mindy said the room erupted and "people responded more aggressively toward her" and they told her that the conversations were essential. Mindy said the tension was palpable and, in her opinion, the Black teacher was the only one courageous enough to "read the room" and to understand that true "buy-in" is more than just "listening because one is forced and yet, you are forcing us to have these conversations which make for forced participation" (Mindy).

Regardless of race, culture, gender, not all experiences are the same and consequently, there were participants who resisted the notion that their life experiences, as it relates to race, could be encapsulated within one or two group seminars. Linda acknowledged the positive intent within the large group seminars but found that teachers shut down when they felt that sharing their experiences was a mandated activity. Participants were reluctant to share their experiences which disabled their ability to build trust with another. "Am I wrong because I don't feel this way because I've had this experience" -- you don't have to go into that experience every single week if you don't choose to. You may not want to constantly talk about it -- whether you are a POC, a rape victim, a Muslim…" (Tina). They felt that placing everyone's potential prejudices out in the open is not the solution for this scenario can spread further harm or trauma for Persons of Color by further perpetuating racial inequality.

Alternatively, participants wanted the trainer to carefully and compassionately consider the balance necessary for creating a safe space for participants who experience

racism and those who might not have considered the implications of their own race or identity. "Create a space to talk about this. It makes them uncomfortable to talk about something they know nothing about. Let's talk about what it is like to wake up White…. Let me tell you what it is like to wake up Black and walk in the grocery store and they are looking at me crazy… a lot of teachers aren't ready to make themselves vulnerable" (Jayla).

Mindy grew up in a Catholic school and for her, the conversations were reminiscent of her upbringing where the topics were presented as a place for dialogue but "they were really places where they told us how we should think" (Mindy). She explained that even when she agreed with the topics presented, there is a resistance to hearing other perspectives within the discussions. She would have liked to have more spaces where alternative thoughts were exposed and probed.

One example of this was in one of the sessions where they were talking about how to recognize grief in students, and they recommended that teachers provide a space outside of the classroom where the discussions around grief can happen organically and naturally. Mindy said, "It keeps me accountable for making sure I think about my decisions and my conversations by always considering more than just myself." In this scenario, the Equity Fellows discussions led to a consideration of students' perspectives and helped the teacher to be more considerate within her work. This would indicate that when the discussions are considerate, teachers might be more willing to open to others instead of shutting down.

The goal of Equity Fellows is not only to help teachers become aware of the problems surrounding inequity, but to create a space where teachers can ask questions and hear each other's perspectives which ultimately benefits students. An ideal training environment is a safe place where you "peel back the layers" and "I don't think anyone is comfortable enough to deliver criticism or corrective behavior to colleagues without people taking offense. We aren't open to understanding. We just pass judgment" (Tina).

Several of the training sessions have resulted in perceived arguments between the trainer and the trainees. When conflict has occurred in large groups, teacher participants with disparate views have felt ostracized by other groups or the staff as a result. Sara has witnessed poor meetings that left teachers with a distaste for Equity Fellows afterward, and feeling closed off from peers and teachers is the opposite of what is meant to be accomplished.

The participants also shared the possibility that someone might be afraid to speak out because they will be bullied outside of the meetings later when the leaders and teachers are not present. They felt that the staff became more ostracized because of the equity discussions because often the teachers would end up having "hallway conversations" rather than openly sharing their opinions or thoughts within the large group setting even if that meant confronting the sometimes-palpable tension within the room by speaking up. Linda spoke to the fact that some may think she is disgruntled but "nobody is really outspoken to say I don't like doing this because they don't know what the response might be from the other participants in the room even though we all feel the same way" (Linda).

The participants offered solutions which would mitigate the negative feelings which can transpire in large group settings and teacher participants. They were vulnerable as they offered solutions that might get people to feel more comfortable speaking and inquiring within a training. For example, Equity Fellows might incorporate a structure where a question is asked, the facilitator answers first, and then calls on someone who then calls on another. This, in their mind, would be preferred and more inclusive than asking an open-ended question and expecting or waiting for the same people to all responds. They also cautioned against enforced participation for enforcing that everyone speak up will also create stressful situations.

Within seminar settings, for participants to feel comfortable speaking up, they must be willing to become vulnerable with one another, yet people will still feel nervous or scared to speak up about a problem they may not relate to as they do not want to say anything "wrong." Because not all of the teachers in the sessions participated in the equity discussions, participants became less apt to address their own biases, therefore lessening the potential for transformative and deep discussions.

When participants felt comfortable discussing their experiences and their biases, there was the potential for deepening their understanding, but that required individual commitment. Tina acknowledged this within her interview. "How can we have conversations in a space that makes people comfortable in a space that's open to understanding where people are coming from. If you can't have the conversation in a way that allows you to explore what you don't know or have honest conversation, it's not as effective as it could be" (Tina). When the participants were vulnerable, they were better

able to share their own perspectives and more willing to listen to another's view. For the participants to feel comfortable acknowledging their biases, they did not want to perceive the potential for collegial retribution or judgment.

One of the solutions they offered to remediate this potential was to avoid making the meetings confrontational through a consistent focus on learning and growth through the lens of compassion and with a recognition that teachers are like their students. "We have to be more compassionate to each other-teacher and students-when we start talking" (Laine). They, too, have diverse and individual outlooks that require consideration. Diversity training is not only a place where the teachers learn and grow, but where students benefit as well.

When safe spaces are created, as a result, teachers with questions surrounding issues of bigotry, bias, and discrimination, will have a space with colleagues to hear about honest experiences and can learn about the problems without feeling peer related antagonism. "If someone has a view or an idea or a bias that comes up in the meeting, we need to be careful with that because I think when people actually feel comfortable discussing their biases, then they'll feel comfortable growing in that moment but if they don't feel comfortable discussing their biases, then they are just going to sit back and be disengaged" (Jayla). The goal is when disagreements arise, then the teachers who have been previously trained in racial equity will assist in setting things right (Equity Fellow Administrator). "There is no way that any one of us can know everything about how all the people who are diverse think or feel around us. It's about developing relationships." (Loren).

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While the world would be a much better place if everyone was considerate and respectful of each other's race, gender, sexuality, culture, socioeconomic backgrounds, and overall experience, that is unfortunately not often the case. Because of past experiences of racism, homophobia, or xenophobia, etc., many people will understandably feel uncomfortable being thrust into a circle of people whose beliefs are unknown to them. To ensure that people do not become embroiled within their own viewpoints and shut out the possibility of growth, Equity Fellows "cannot feel like a group seminar where everyone is told how to feel" (Anna).

The culmination of the interviews and shortcomings of Equity Fellows makes clear the first major discovery that a safe space for discussions is a requirement. Inclusive representation within the equity discussions is important. Issues aside from racism exist, and discussions about them would benefit the participants as well, but they require a diverse cast of participants to feel comfortable speaking. White teachers who have not had the lived experience of growing up as a minority require an open discussion to reasonably understand the plight of their students by considering the implications of their own Whiteness. Unfortunately, creating a safe space in which everyone is comfortable is not as easy as it sounds.

THIRD THEME: CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

The intent of Equity Fellows is to lessen the academic gap for Students of Color. I asked the participants if they could think of a scenario in which professional development, focused on dismantling the systems of racism within the classroom, has

been beneficial to students. The teachers reiterated that while they didn't think Equity Fellows focus on dismantling racist systems was effective, they simultaneously believed the most effective professional development Equity Fellows discussions were those where the staff were given practical strategies for the classroom.

This leads to the third and final theme: *Classroom strategies*. The Equity Fellows training emphasizes the necessary examination of biases that shape how we view the world and the students and colleagues in the building. Equity Fellows is designed to have teachers examine their own biases for the impact on student outcomes is greater when teachers are left with an idea of what has gone wrong in the past and with an awareness of bias (Equity Fellows administrator). Equity Fellows has certainly brought an increased discourse surrounding biases, discrimination, and historic injustices due to race, but the participants feel that a missing component in the training is the "how to" on addressing the subject within the classroom. "I think it's a waste of time because I think it feels like we're just checking off a box; I feel like we're doing it because we've got to do it, not doing it because the work is worthwhile. I can see where it can be worthwhile, but it just seems like our equity training is just for show… we don't take it with us. I don't think we've been given a real toolbox that we can use outside of the training. So outside of these "What if" or imaginary scenarios, I don't think that we've been given real tools to use in the classroom yet" (Linda). The participants have not received specific guidance on how they should provide safe places or how they should address students' issues within their classrooms. They have not been given tools past the discussions. This discussion was prevalent throughout the interviews.

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Participants indicated that it was one thing to know that there are issues of racism in schools, but identifying the problem was all they felt they were doing at times. "If I get a question that I don't have the answer to, I need more resources. I want to be more prepared for the "What if." Who do I ask? Who do I follow up with? (Laine). Similarly, multiple participants felt frustrated with the level of discourse depth. They reiterated the need for specific, targeted information which would help inform their work within the building. "You're literally just being told, equity is an issue, and we focus on it but not how do we focus on it, truly?" (Linda).

Tina describes that, in Equity Fellows, the topics are often the obvious, highly politically charged topics around race that are making headlines and not the real things that are happening within their schools. So, in their opinion, the White teachers have the attitude that they don't want to talk about difficult topics, and the Black teachers are tired of talking about the same topics over and over. Mindy said that while there is a lot of discourse surrounding the problems of racism and inequality, discourse does not offer solutions. "I think that we know how to identify the issues, which is key, but now we need tools to move forward" (Mindy). Anna echoed these feelings. "There hasn't been any growth, like I said, we don't really leave the equity meetings with the toolkit of how to respond to real life situations" (Anna).

In the absence of specific guidance, the participants talked about how they try to be aware of historic injustices or of who the minority voice is, and then are intentional about trying to make sure all voices are heard within the classroom. They hoped that by bringing these conversations to the classrooms, they could give students tools to become

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advocates within their own communities. Many of the participants had their own experiences as children which led them to choose the teaching profession. Loren, a White teacher, knew how important approaching the issue of racism is for students.

Despite attending a primarily White, Christian school as a child, they lived in a primarily Black neighborhood. Their best friend was their Black neighbor, and they held the same interests, spent plenty of time together, and considered themselves to be similar people. But their lives went completely opposite directions. Their neighbor went from being a mirror of Loren to doing drugs, getting into trouble, and going to jail multiple times. Loren believed the difference between them lay in the fact that they always had someone in their life who said, "You can do this… You can do anything." But their neighbor did not receive that same treatment. Loren became a teacher because of their frustration at the unaddressed inequalities within school systems. Sara has made a conscious attempt at letting everyone in the classroom know that they matter and that they are cared for, which would be the foundational element of pulling in all voices in the classroom, but they do not know if this is adequate.

Unfortunately, most participants believed that Equity Fellows did not dive deeply into their individual subject matters and would leave important issues unsolved and other issues untouched. The curriculum lacks strategies for how to bring social issues of inequity into the classroom in a way that makes teachers feel confident in their abilities. Furthermore, the teachers felt that despite the intention of the training to confront difficult subjects, the highly politicized culture surrounding conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion have made them wary of making a mistake.

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"…. all over the news, people are talking about critical race theory. Meanwhile, 26 states have passed laws cutting people's voting rights. Our Pentagon has a 753-billion-dollar budget. We have three times as many empty homes in our country as we do homeless people…. but I think the goal is to distract from these social issues so I'm so frustrated" (Jaron).

While the teachers recognize that the school curriculum decisions have historically been influenced by cultural hegemony, they wrestle with the political implications of how to best diversify their own pedagogical practices.

Along similar lines, another participant talked of a recent experience attending a conference with their former and still highly regarded professor who was there to talk with teachers about incorporating DEI in schools. The professor wouldn't put the critical race theory book on the table because of potential tenure ramifications "because of the politics of it" (Loren). The participant explained that the conference was filled with mostly White women teachers who said they had a deep desire to talk about DEI. He described the scenario and explained that they came from districts where all White teachers are teaching increasing numbers of Students of Color and they said that many of their coworkers are not open to any discussions about critical race theory. There was a strong disappointment from the participant within this research as he realized that even his highly regarded and culturally literate professor was dealing with the political wrangling surrounding issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Not all the participants were uncomfortable examining their curriculum through varied lenses. When Jaron came to this high school, he began teaching critical theory

within each of their classes as he felt that it was vital to education in a secondary classroom. At the time, he taught his classes, which were 11th grade Language Arts, through the lens of critical race theory and critical feminist theory. When he became the department chair, he wanted to expand critical theory to the rest of the department, which meant that all other teachers would need to start incorporating critical theory into their curriculum. It became apparent that within the chosen curriculum, Reading Reconsidered, which included books like Lord of the Flies, there was subtle racism within the language and descriptions of the characters.

Similarly. Loren, who taught middle school English, explained that when examining his literature, it became glaring that there was "subtle racism" within the "greats, the classics" by primarily White and mostly British males and he recognized the subtle racism presented within the books. - "civilized behavior versus savage behavior. Those two terms are so loaded and there are many teachers who would not recognize that. Yeah, I think it's just so overt to me and obvious, but the reality is, a lot of teachers would not even think about the words" (Loren)

The teachers approached one of their administrators who supported their efforts of inquiry into who was writing the curriculums and they started talking about the books within Reading Reconsidered. This led to a Reading Reconsidered training with the "head honchos and I ended up talking to them after about our concerns" (Loren). When all these national protests were happening, Reading Reconsidered sent out a statement that said they recognized the curriculum needed to change and they began to offer curriculum material that was more culturally inclusive. "It's been very apparent that they

have been adding more diverse books to their list which is cool. I can teach kids to look with a lens that is able to diagnose and recognize racism within literature" (Loren). It is important to note that since these interviews, some of the curriculum publication has been halted due to internal debates over the conservative laws and curriculum choices in schools.

While some teachers feel comfortable examining and advancing curriculum within the building, this is not the case for all participants. Even though Jaron felt passionately that they wanted everyone to believe that they should examine their curriculum through the lens of critical theory and social justice, other teachers in the department were resistant. The expansion of the teaching to other classes beyond his own has not gone smoothly. While teacher participants were offered autonomy to personally use the framework of critical theory, the participants were skeptical and could not see how they could incorporate critical theory easily within their own classrooms.

Several teachers mentioned that time and resources were an impediment to examining their curriculum. While they recognized the importance of varying lenses within the curriculum, they did not feel equipped to tackle their own curriculum. Additionally, there was a recognition that it is difficult to incorporate a critical lens into every course. "I guess a lot of the 9th grade curriculum deals with making sure that students are ready for writing and there are more checking boxes when you are teaching at that level. (Mindy). Navigating the complexities of teaching content while simultaneously incorporating equity work seemed for some teachers to cause angst. Simultaneously, the teachers also saw effective and positive changes within the building

from the equity work. Ultimately, the changes that teachers experienced from the equity discussions resulted in building wide changes, in some instances.

Every participant mentioned a session in Equity Fellows where they had examined the school and national discipline trends to learn how students were disciplined by race. Even in schools with a balanced mix of students by race, Black students still get punished or suspended at a higher rate. Teachers at this charter school tried to break down the issue but struggled because of most students being Black; additionally, the teachers looked at their own suspension and detention data and tried to figure out how they could reduce punitiveness in discipline and instead find alternative forms of accountability when they can.

I was able to hear multiple perspectives on this training including the facilitator perspective. He explained at the beginning of the year, the teachers within the buildings completed a survey asking their opinions on numerous school related metrics. Two of the survey metrics were discussed within an Equity Fellows meeting. The first question presented was: Do we have a challenging curriculum at our school? There was a 95% level of agreement on the staff with that idea. The second question presented was: Do you believe students can meet my academic expectations in the building? There was only a 68% level of agreement on that question. When speaking with Jaron, he talked to these data points and then explained that the Equity Fellows training offered opportunity in which to explore the disparity. He also was aware that teachers wanted more from the training and knew that this data discussion would increase teacher capacity.

"And I was alarmed, that there was such a vast difference between those two statements which are basically the same question. And so, I had all my feelings about it, so we turned it into an Equity Fellows conversation that we did in small groups with the staff, where we were examining that data, because we were hearing from the staff that they Equity Fellows was the conversations we were having the staff felt that they were maybe a little too abstract. They were kind of like, when are we going to start putting our feet to the fire and when are we going to start talking about stuff that matters is kind of the feedback we were getting" (Jaron).

"And so, we did this where it's like okay, we said we wanted to talk about putting our feet to the fire. Here's a situation where we have an inequity that we need to examine in our own perception, there's obviously some sort of bias or something. And I think that that conversation opened a lot of teachers to re-examine the way they perceive student behavior in the classroom" (Jaron). Within the conversation, the Equity Fellows facilitator brought the survey questions, and this not only allowed teachers to explore their own biases, but it also led to a discipline discussion which every participant discussed.

After data analysis, the school decided to pursue an alternative discipline system using discipline as a last resort and using human interaction as a primary approach. As the teachers focused on a consistent "I see you" tactic with their students, some of the interviewees said that there was palpable tension in the building between those who wanted the traditional discipline vs. those who were trying the alternative approach.

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Within one of the interviews, a participant explained that one of the Equity Fellows sessions erupted with a clear divide between the White teachers and the Black teachers. "We had tried conscious discipline for the fourth quarter, and it went terribly and across the board, we were all miserable because it felt like the school was going to implode" (Loren). Numerous participants talked of the bravery of some teachers to openly confront the tension which led to an acknowledgment that students saw the discipline differently when it was doled out by a White teacher and a Black teacher. Specifically, they spoke of students who had mentioned that when a particular Black teacher gave them discipline, they saw her as a "mom figure" and when the White teacher gave them discipline, they felt "policed".

According to Loren, the Black teacher who was sharing the feelings of the students "dropped a bomb when she told the group that there are White teachers who the kids see as police officers because they watch every single move they make" (Loren). Loren went on to explain that even in his own student teaching experience, he had been asked to shadow a White teacher to observe her disciplinary approach and he had tried to adopt her very rigorous "fight for control but it made me super uptight with the kids and I realized that I was constantly negatively reinforcing and policing every single little action of the kids" (Loren).

This uncomfortable Equity Fellows discussion around discipline caused teachers to reflect on their own practices. Loren shared how within his earlier teaching experience, he had been asked to observe a woman with "good classroom management" and he had attempted to adopt her traditional and "old school" methods, but it never felt right or

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comfortable for him. After the Equity Fellows discussions, he went home for the summer, and he reflected on his classroom management. He knew that he had to honor his own intention the following year. He said, "I changed everything. When a kid acts out, I literally just ask them how I can help them and I have found that kids are still learning to verbalize their emotions but when they know that I see them, it has completely changed everything for me" (Loren).

This uncomfortable conversation perpetuated additional dialogue in the building surrounding student behavior between participants who said that they had begun discussions about ways to change their own approach. Tina said, "We need to figure out some way to correct the behavior that's happening in the building that is not isolating for the students. We must find unique ways to keep them here" (Tina). The discussions around discipline were helpful for the teachers in advancing alternative discipline while also addressing the school culture. Jaron reflected, "I don't know how concretely that's manifested as a holistic change in the teachers' philosophy of education, but I do think that there were moments in the room where they were like, teachers were like, "Oh shit, like, why did we say that, you know, and the wheels were turning" (Jaron).

Within effective diversity, equity, and inclusion training, the teachers needed to know they could talk about anything such as the discipline discussion. While the discussions were emotionally charged and combative, ultimately every participant acknowledged the discipline exchanges as one in which they perpetuated social norms disparate from ones used in past practice. These more culturally responsive disciplinary approaches were ultimately designed to bring about solutions for students. Teachers

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confronting the racial bias present in the school system and retaliating with compassion and understanding to students' individual needs also taught students that their feelings matter, an idea that transcends the subject of race.

Sara has had situations where they have given a student detention for inappropriate behavior, then spoken to the student about the situation and assigned a one-page reflection on what happened, why it happened, and how they could better handle themself in the future. In this case, the student was reflective about why they were acting out, and the participant never had a problem with the student in class again. Laine also mentioned how they have changed their approach to students who arrive tardy to class. Instead of immediately going to punish a student over not meeting a class requirement, they now pull the student aside and ask if something is going on that might keep them from being able to get to class on time. The teachers said within the hard discussions about discipline, they have learned that students first must know that coming to their teachers with their thoughts and feelings is safe to do.

Understanding student experiences and hearing the students' stories made a difference for teacher participants. Linda described her experience in the Equity Fellows training program, which has been ongoing for the past two years and for which all teachers within their district are expected to appear as one of numerous trainings in which they have participated throughout their teaching career. One that stood out to her as being more effective or enlightening than the rest was a series that was focused on cultural competency. This training, as she recalled it, focused on the student experience, and

included interviews with students who had asked to share their stories and perspectives with the teachers.

When the students' perspectives were presented to the teachers within the training, the teachers were then better able to understand the unique and individual experience of their students. The teachers were able to hear varying challenges that a student might face that impact how they show up to the classroom. Linda had a training focused on students' experiences which completely "opened her eyes". The training concentrated on the obstacles students faced through their own words. Students had been asked what they wanted teachers to know about their lives and one girl had shared that she had to help her mother, who worked third shift, get her siblings ready to go to school explaining her reason for being late and not always having her supplies. "That experience just opened my eyes a little bit more into what it takes for some of our kids just to get to school" (Linda). Understanding student experience altered the teacher's response mechanisms within the class. Once the teachers became cognizant of their students' feelings and stories, they were able to adapt their classroom practices and by doing so, teachers felt that there were higher levels of engagement from the students. They also reduced the disciplinary scenarios within the classroom by finding proactive ways to support their students.

Within these interviews, there were instances where the participants described outcomes associated with Equity Fellows which were indicative of their desire for more of the trainings. When they talked to the professional development, they appreciated the diversity, equity, and inclusion training and the associated results which led to their

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increased confidence. For example, not all participants felt that the training on how to have difficult conversations within the classroom was inadequate. In Jayla's last Equity Fellows meeting, they talked about things they could do with their advisory class to have these difficult conversations such as bringing up current events and having conversations with the students about their feelings about what is going on in the world or their life. Jayla realized how helpful sharing feelings with each other had been for the teachers, and she believed that this would also be helpful for the kids. The Equity Training had focused on statistics around police brutality and the Ma'Khia Bryant and George Floyd shootings. The conversation encouraged the teachers to provide time within their classes to listen to the young people and give them a space to process their feelings and to ask questions. Mindy said this meeting of Equity Fellows did, in fact, make a difference. By confronting bias regarding policing, that teacher felt prepared to recognize and offer compassion to the students. Within these scenarios, participants left the meeting with a real-life situation and tools to address racism and equity in the classroom and integrated skill building and activities focused on increasing awareness are essential to successful outcomes for students.

TEACHER EFFICACY AND THE MITIGATION OF MINORITY MARGINALIZATION

When asked about the effect of the training on their own confidence in their ability to mitigate marginalization within the classroom, nearly all the participants initially said that the training has not made a difference in their feelings and yet, they

acknowledged some obvious positive outcomes within the training. Sara explained how when she learned about red lining and the associated highest pockets of poverty and high lead poisoning, that was a moment where she thought, "Oh my God, I would have never even considered this and how lead poisoning was involved or how other things that you don't even think like, and how the, the, you know, average age of death is lower, and all of it associated with redlining" (Sara). Teachers were certainly considerate of more data points and facts.

Teachers described the training as ineffective for enhancing their efficacy within the classroom due to the way the trainings were facilitated, the topics discussed, and the lack of general engagement from many teachers. It is important to note that this overt negative perception of limited teacher engagement might have been perpetrated by the virtual format due to the pandemic. It was also easier for the participants to identify areas for improvement than to laud the accomplishments of the program.

It was also evident to the facilitator that some teachers were averse to the training. Jaron said that some of the teachers were ready to do the work and then others came in with at least some levels of resistance to the idea that equity conversations should be had in schools. "And so, when you're working with such disparate kind of polarized groups, you inevitably end up teaching somewhere in the middle hoping to shift the, the people that aren't in the conversation to becoming a participant in the conversation, while never enriching or helping fully empower the people that are farther along in their journey. And I think that that's kind of exactly where we have fallen in this building as well" (Jaron).

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When asked directly, do you think that Equity Fellows has made a difference in mitigating minority marginalization, many of the participants responded with ambiguity. However, throughout the interviews, the participants shared many stories which demonstrated that the concerted effort to make topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion relevant have made a difference in mitigating minority marginalization within the school. Although many participants initially indicated that participation in Equity Fellows has not ultimately changed their approach to the classroom or helped overall within the school, they went on to say that the discussions around student data brings the conversations to the forefront of consciousness and, consequently, to the classroom. For example, they said that the trainings focused on practitioner-based strategies had enhanced their teaching and interactions with students. Jayla explained that she had changed her approach toward the boys after she recognized that she had a bias. Once she realized that she was disciplining the boys differently, she began to offer circles for dialogue within her classroom. "We do a lot of circles where we bring up conversations about current events and their feelings. We give them space to talk and ask questions. Once we realized that dialogue helped us teachers, we realized that we should be also doing this with our students. It shows the students that you care what is going on in their world" (Jayla). Teachers felt that politically and culturally aware and philosophically inclined teachers helped and encouraged their students.

The participants targeted specific trainings which had been helpful within their classrooms, and it became evident that teacher efficacy was increased through the training targeting classroom strategies. Teachers also spoke to the fact that seminars on

equity have opened their minds to challenges that students face that they may not have considered if they had not been presented within the building discussions. Linda said, "We talk about race, equity, and differences when it comes to the students. I had an idea of what it was, but not the entire span of it and there were a lot of things that I didn't consider" (Linda). Loren exclaimed that often the Equity Fellows discussions have presented them with "cool experiences with pungent issues that we knew we all needed to engage with and not sweep under the rug" (Loren). Mindy said, "It keeps me accountable for making sure I think about my decisions and my conversations by always considering more than just myself." This suggests that Equity Fellows has increased the consideration of teachers as they manage the interactions with students who have varied student backgrounds and student needs of which teachers need to be aware.

The teachers also were assertive when discussing the varying challenges for the students within their classrooms. Anna feels that in talking with students in the classroom, they want to talk about all forms of diversities – gender, sexuality, class (poverty), religion, and others – and that while race is extremely important and valuable for teachers in a primarily Black school to discuss, it is important to recognize and address other inequities as well, both for the purposes of understanding the students within their school, and also in teaching students about the inequities around them that encompass more than just race. Laine discussed the importance of considering all students within the cultural conversations. She said, "students know when teachers are not being inclusive within the conversation of inclusivity" (Laine). Loren also understands that while it is difficult to understand every perspective that differs from one

another's perspectives, "we need to help the children to know that they are not alone" (Loren). This requires an increased vulnerability and trust within the teacher and student conversations.

Mindy, like many others, feels that Equity Fellows has encouraged increased capacity for combatting biases through compassionate conversations between the teachers resulting in more inclusive classrooms. "People whose heart isn't in teaching really don't stick around. Teachers want to grow and want to be better versions of themselves" (Mindy). While some may believe that she might appear disgruntled in the meetings, she understood the importance of the "discussions and conversations" (Mindy). She also acknowledged that in the earlier days of her teaching, there would have been no room for teaching critical race, critical queer, or critical gender theory. She said the teachers in this school are "ever evolving and always trying to hone their craft." Jayla said the training has allowed the teachers and students to be more open and honest when having conversations with one another. Tina recognized that the curriculum is not the only focus of the schools and feels more confident taking time within the classrooms alongside her students as they "tackle difficult topics". She said Equity Fellows has made her combat her insecurities "even when sometimes you think that school is not the place for critical conversations" (Tina).

Children and teens are some of the most impressionable groups of people, and within the training, teacher participants have increased their understanding and empathy for one another. Equity Fellows training has enhanced teacher's willingness to acknowledge their potential for missteps. "Through their perspective, it is difficult to own

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up to our mistakes, but, as teachers, we should" (Sara). Equity Fellows has enhanced the confidence of some teachers to participate in critical conversations. Anna acknowledged that sometimes students remind her that she is incorrect in her assumptions. She said, "Most kids trust their teachers, and students usually will call you out, but in my classroom, we have a relationship in which we can talk like that" (Anna). It is possible that the students feel an increased sense of support when they feel that they can be open and honest with their teachers about their feelings.

The training has also offered teachers space in which to consider the minority experiences as aligned with the research around discipline outcomes. As teacher participants have worked to understand and support each other within the Equity Fellows trainings, the teachers have offered more appropriate consequences in disciplinary scenarios, increased understanding when students are not prepared for class or tardy, and ultimately more support for their students. Teachers have also become more consciously aware of the need to examine the curriculum in some classes and they have increased their discussions about the need for an expansion of courses focused on critical race, gender, and queer theories.

The participants have also tackled difficult conversations within students around issues of racism and police brutality in real time as the students see other Students of Color killed. Collectively, the conversations have been empowering as the teachers and students have focused on the contributions of one another. Consequently, the teachers have become more well equipped to fight the inequality that creates strife for people from all walks of life.

With enough practice and understanding of the issues that plague our schools, these teacher participants have played their part in ensuring that the diverse students in attendance at the secondary schools within this study are honored. Loren said the Equity Fellows discussions, while difficult and often contentious, have "planted seeds which have culminated into a conversation that will change the entire foundation of the school" (Loren). Students see their teachers trying to consider social equity which is a start to demonstrating to the students that they are in a culturally responsive and inclusive space. Jaron feels that because of the equity training, more students and teachers are having a "Political Awakening" that is more commonly seen when students reach college.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPACT

This chapter presents a discussion of the impact, findings, conclusions, limitations, and delimitations of this study. In addition, this chapter contains implications and recommendations for future research. Since the first half of the 21st century, researchers have examined whether diversity training works in higher education and in business. Within the last few years, there has been an increased focus on diversity training efforts within K-12 educational settings. While it is evident within previous educational research and within this study that intentional diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are associated with improved teacher efficacy as it relates to cultural competency within the classroom, it is important to recognize a recent book written by Dobbin and Kalev was published which examined research around diversity efforts in corporations for it can also inform the discussions within schools.

Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev examined over thirty years of data from hundreds of companies who had offered training around diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and found that diversity training that is threatening, and/or training immediately following an internal crisis is rarely effective (2022). Within the research, they found five years after instituting required training for managers, companies saw no improvement in the proportion of White women and Black men in management, and on average, the share of Black women decreased by 9% (2022). Dobbins and Kalev found that not only do the positive effects of diversity training rarely last, but diversity training can often instigate a

backlash against compulsory diversity and inclusion education. Even further, many participants report an increased animosity toward other groups afterward (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022). The research outcomes found by Dobbin and Kalev highlight the unique challenges for school consideration as they proactively consider equity efforts and alternatively, it has been proven that equity efforts enhance teachers' understanding of multifaceted and complex students (Tschannen-Moran, Wollfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 2001; Alimo et al., 2002; Bakir, 2020).

I would advocate for school related diversity trainings to follow the Equity Fellows model presented in this study which offers multiple methods of dialogue inquiry within a multi-year embedded program while simultaneously finding ways to enhance the current model of Equity Fellows by considering the teacher experiences presented within this study. The teachers focused on widening the array of issues though expanded exploration of sexuality, gender, and intersectionality in more detail. They also believed that variation in group sizes, diversity of topics, formatting of meetings, and a focus on ensuring the comfort and safety of the participants would offer salient amendments to the program. The findings indicate the teachers' conceptualization of safe spaces as inherent to their ability to build trust with one another. Moreover, teacher efficacy was enhanced through collective inquiry into student data and related-practical classroom strategies. This would suggest that anti-racism efforts focused on eliminating minority marginalization are enhanced when schools commit to embedded diversity and inclusion efforts.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development within American schools are expanding while simultaneously, there is a push by tax-paying community members to see tangible outcomes and to define the benefits of these trainings. Since this research project began, the nation has experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, racial protests around the globe following the murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020, and the political mudslinging around Black Lives Matter, Critical Race Theory and not surprisingly, DEI work in schools. Board of Education meetings have become increasingly contentious, and many schools now allow parents and students to opt-out of curricular offerings. Teachers often must prove that their classroom materials are unbiased, and the classroom has become increasingly politicized, as the "unbiased" is too often a conscious push to eradicate the teaching and engagement that is necessary to promote equity.

Prior to 2007, according to Daniel Solarzano et al, there was only one paper regarding racial microaggressions within the largest database of psychology-related literature (Solarzano et al, 2000). Today, there are hundreds of articles on microaggressions, antiracism, bias, and increasing academic research on issues of marginalization as it relates to cultural competency, sexual orientation, gender, disability, class, and religion. For this analysis, the researcher chose to focus on issues of professional development centered on racial equity within schools. The main purpose of the study was to examine teachers' perceptions of formal diversity and equity training efforts offered at a public charter school and intended to facilitate dialogue between teachers. This research also examined how teachers feel diversity and equity training

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affects their own efficacy in relation to anti-racism efforts; and mitigates minority marginalization in schools.

Equity Fellows is an emergent program created to help school districts develop more culturally responsive, anti-racist schools. The program endeavors to negotiate the complexities of education through synergy in program management and by challenging teachers in their role as educators. Program trainers are compelled by their own interests in understanding racial equity and the primary focus is on building relationships. The training strives to be affirming of students, teachers, and community.

Equity Fellows trainers work with teachers and administrators at schools to identify practices and policies that harm Students of Color through the examination of data. The goal of Equity Fellows is to have staff consider their biases while creating trusting and intentional conversations about what might be necessary to improve student outcomes. Ultimately staff members, in turn, will be trained to become the diversity and equity leaders within each of their school buildings. The training provides participants with opportunities to interact with individuals with varying viewpoints and provides spaces for those who participate in the Equity Fellows program to learn about injustice and racism through conversations with one another.

The first step within Equity Fellows are reflections on readings focused on increasing participants' capacity to identify their own intersectionality. The training includes multiple platforms of discourse including dyads, small groups, and large group sessions. The topics are varied and include places for open-ended questions and teacher

inquiry. The hope from Equity Fellows trainers is that participants will feel empowered to promote culturally responsive school practices (http://www.learntoearndayton.org, 2022).

The study population consisted of interviews with nine Equity Fellows teacher participants of which one was a facilitator. Within this project, I also interviewed one of the Equity Fellows administrators, providing insight on the program specifics, funding, and the program's evolution within the community. That administrator talked of the goals for the program and how the program considered previous research around diversity, equity, and inclusion. The study population also included data from twelve Equity Fellows participants who only filled out a survey. The primary data was collected within in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews which lasted between 90 minutes to two hours each. The interviews began with an explanation of the research and then participants were asked questions. Each interviewee brought different perspectives and stories as they reflected on their Equity Fellows training. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and both the surveys and transcriptions were coded and examined for patterns and contradictions (Cresswell, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Ultimately, three main themes emerged from the data: (1) Diversity efforts are enhanced by providing small groups with a focus on multi-perspectival and intersectional lenses from which teachers can glean knowledge; (2) safe spaces which offer the opportunity for an expansion of cultural knowledge are inherent to improving diversity efforts in schools; and (3) classroom strategies tied to student perspectives, data analysis, and curriculum must be implemented within the trainings. It also emerged that while the participants were not able to initially indicate the ways in which their efficacy and ability

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to mitigate marginalization has been positively impacted by the Equity Fellows training, in fact, their descriptions of the classroom and school discussions consistently focused on an enhanced recognition of their role within mitigating social marginalization and for enhancing student's sense of belonging.

Equity Fellows provided small group opportunities within the framework of the training. Participants preferred this mode of discourse. Within small groups, participants were more likely to feel positive when they had the opportunity to reflect on their own identities in partnership with associates with whom they were most comfortable. Within Equity Fellows, the journaling and the reflective readings were beneficial for participants to consider how their own intersectional experiences might influence their own stereotypes, and biases. The participants had enhanced participation within the training when they conceptualized their own identities and then shared their findings with partners or small groups of people. There was an awareness of intersectionality and less of a siloed consideration among the participants within this exercise and space.

Intersectionality has its roots in Black feminist scholarship and was first termed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap (1989). Within our interviews, participants wanted to explore all injustices and not that of only one social group or race. While the interviews with the Equity Fellows administrator and the Equity Fellows teacher facilitator both included their recognition of intersectionality as an important topic within the Equity Fellows training, the participants felt that there was a singular focus on race. The participants felt that by focusing only on race within the Equity

Fellows discussions, there was an exclusion of other important marginalized groups and discerned that the zealous focus on one marginalized group created conversations around inclusion that were exclusive and one dimensional.

There is a need for teachers to analyze their own identity, pedagogy, practice, and human experiences to advance social justice. Teachers need to understand how these facets intersect before they can examine systems, structures, and power within the classrooms (Samra & Hankivsky, 2020). Bezrukova et al. (2016) found that intense and immersive opportunities for conversations within organizations offer the most value in diversity training. Intergroup dialogue is a facilitated and sustained opportunity for conversations with diverse people for the purpose of increased diversity awareness and appreciation (Zuniga et al., 2002; Alamo et al., 2002).

Zuniga, Nagda and Sevig found that intergroup dialogue focused on reflexivity was the most effective place for honest conversations among people with disparate backgrounds (2002). Within this current research project, the teacher participants echoed these same sentiments. When people have a safe space in which to examine their own identities, they are more likely to delve into the experiences of marginalized groups with compassion. Further, they may increase their capacity to see differences through an asset lens rather than a deficit lens. Within a small group space, participants are more inclined to be vulnerable and open about their previous experiences and individual identities and to recognize that each of us are multi-dimensional with a tremendous amount of capacity for connection.

The participants within this study were much more comfortable and aware of their own behaviors and beliefs when they were given the opportunity for authentic conversations around issues of equity. Discourses were increasingly candid, and they were more likely to ask their colleagues for help when they encountered difficult issues with diverse students. The research indicates that small groups are the solution to slowly integrating everyone into a safe and comfortable physical and mental state which gives them increased feelings of adequacy in addressing discriminatory behavior and elevated agency for recognizing social justice and ally potential within the school setting.

Equity training should explore a wide range of perceived injustices and not that of only one social group or race. This was a universal theme among the participants – Black and White, young, and old, alike. Diversity, equity, and inclusion can't strictly pertain to race, for by doing so, one isn't allowing the exploration of other marginalized groups. There should be sharing of experiences and perspectives between all participants. The UC Berkeley Center for Equity Inclusion, and Diversity establishes diversity as the recognition of gender, race, ethnicity, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance as well as differing values, perspectives, and ideas (UC Berkeley Center for Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity). When considering this definition, it becomes apparent that each teacher will bring a myriad of perspectives and expertise to the table which may inform collective discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion within their schools.

Diversity efforts must be more than the standard combination of haphazard, siloed, single story narratives and small group dialogic exchange. While teachers prefer

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small group settings for personal introspection and thoughtful consideration of others'

opinions and intersectionality, the challenge within professional development is how to

leverage the teacher's personal insight while simultaneously examining the broad range of

bias, microaggressions, and systemic racism. An adequate self-identity and

intersectionality evaluation within the comfort of small groups does not lessen the need

for hard discussions.

Within *Preparing College Students for a Diverse Democracy*, Sylvia Hurtado

found that White people don't have to typically consider diverse perspectives (2003). The

small group dialogue should be a catalyst to help all teachers consider their own practice

as they work with students. Once teachers learn to listen and share with one another, they

will be more inclined to become allies for their students by ensuring that they do not

perpetuate systemic inequity within the classrooms. Focused conversations on identity

exploration and intersectionality require openness and understanding and this is

inseparable from the second major theme which is the need for safe space.

The data analysis showed that discussions around diversity, equity, and inclusion

require a safe place that is free from judgment for discussion and learning about racial

inequity. While the intent of Equity Fellows is to provide this space, the large group

seminar settings which were most often the discourse method used in the training did not

achieve the intended outcome. The large group settings within this training created

scenarios where many teachers often felt demoralized, angry, guilty, incompetent, and

defensive. The results indicate that diversity, equity, and including efforts would be

considerably more effective if teachers felt that they had judgment free and safe spaces

that provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions about microaggressions, bias, and other issues of marginalization with a confidence that they will be guided toward understanding without retribution or judgment from their peers.

The findings within this study aligned with previous research. Alviar-Martin and Ho (2011) found that teachers were reluctant to discuss because the teachers were worried about consequences for them in evaluation and they were uncomfortable discussing demographics within high stakes testing scenarios (2011). Pearce (2019) found that teachers were scared to confront racism because they feared the perpetrators of racism would retaliate against them. Within the current research study, the most obvious theme was the need for teachers to have a safe place in which to ask questions about difficult topics including issues facing marginalized groups. The teachers wanted to know how to recognize and address covert forms of racism without feeling judged and then ashamed that they might have not recognized a microaggression, for example. They, too, felt that when they had any divergent thoughts from the training, they were targeted by the facilitator of the training or other participants. Moreover, because they were afraid of repercussions, some teacher participants within this study ended up shutting down or engaging in "hallway discussions" with those closest to them. This also aligns with previous research conducted. Sue (2009) found that teachers were not adequately equipped to handle conversations about marginalization which made them feel guilty. The teachers within this current research were more defiant in their attitudes. They did not feel that it was necessary to engage just because someone told them to do so. The participants within this study were more likely to shut down and get quiet than to work

towards understanding alongside their colleagues. It is important to note that this unwillingness to participate could have been exacerbated by the political climate or informed by "White Fragility", the discomfort White people may experience in reaction to discussions about racism (DiAngelo, 2018).

The third theme found within the research is the need for teacher access to classroom strategies which align with student perspectives, data analysis, and curriculum. Professional development around diversity, equity, and inclusion must also examine how systemic discrimination has influenced the core curriculum offered in most American schools. Teachers should know how curricula are chosen, aligned, and implemented within their buildings. The focus should be on offering a multi-perspectival curriculum that honors the non-White contributions in the interest of balance. Students should see themselves in the selected texts; while teachers should be given support and strategies on how to teach diverse curricula confidently and effectively.

The participants within Equity Fellows examined the curriculum and felt the support of the administration as they discussed the need for varied lenses, yet they were unsure how to deliver that understanding to students. This aligns with the research done by Sarah Pearce who found that even when aware of racism or bias, teachers tend to avoid, rather than confront the issues of racism within schools (2019). The teacher participants that were often able to recognize microaggressions, racism and bias, had all chosen the teaching profession to combat inequality. Even still, teachers indicated their uncertainty in how to implement the changes necessary within their classrooms. Moreso,

the participants were clear that they needed targeted strategies and clear support from the administration to support their students.

The most influential Equity Fellows trainings for the participants were those focused on students' experiences and the sharing of building and classroom data. Specifically, the participants focused on one session where they were presented with an analysis of discipline and demographics. As a result of that training, there was a building-wide alternative discipline implementation, yet there remained isolated teachers who were acting without oversight or constraint.

It was concluded that these obdurate teachers did not have the tools to change their previous discipline practices. The academic discussions focused on politics and current events were necessary to catalyze awareness among the teachers, but the most useful antiracism professional development trainings were those that offered teachers practical strategies for use within their classrooms. Teachers' classroom practices were altered when they heard the real-life stories and perspectives of their students. With an understanding of the students' lives, they recognized that students don't come into a classroom with ill intention. Moreover, students can't always capitalize on the offerings within a classroom as they have other issues within their lives which demand their attention.

Individuals bring many dynamic experiences to professional development and consequently, diversity training is often more politically and emotionally difficult for the participants than other professional development (Paluck, 2006). Equity training requires a commitment to providing classroom strategies for teachers focused on data. There must

also be a targeted look at data which is focused on discipline, classroom interventions, curriculum access and student outcomes. Professional development should be intentionally executed to offer teachers the most benefit, so students experience equitable opportunities with targeted and successful educational outcomes.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The first limitation of this research is the small sample size. Because this research focused on one public charter school with a racially diverse teaching staff and majority Black student body, the demographics do not mirror most school districts. A second limitation is the varied life experience and race consciousness of those participating teachers. Their familiarity, demographic background and professional tenure is individually unique and cannot be replicated in other studies. Their perceptions may not be reflected in teachers within a different type of school environment or a school with fewer Black students. These teachers have elected to work in schools for disadvantaged students, suggesting a value in equity and inclusion prior to their experience with the Equity Fellows training. Additional research in varied school settings would need to be conducted to add to the findings within this study which would contribute supplemental valuable knowledge within the K-12 community.

The delimitations of this research include the study administration within the secondary education level. Due to this setting, teacher needs may require adjustment when compared to those of primary education. A second delimitation is the chosen methodology. I intended an examination of the teachers' perceptions, but this interest was

based on my own personal and professional experiences which have contributed to my first-hand comprehension and understanding of the results. Due to the pandemic, the interviews were also conducted virtually, which could have altered the findings. In contrast to the formality of in-person interviews, I believe the virtual interview setting from the comfort of home or personal office, allowed interviewees to limit distractions and focus on the accuracy and honesty of their responses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The current landscape of published research on diversity training in hiring of teachers and continued education for primary and secondary schools is limited and non-conclusive. As such, the research conducted in this study had no precedent from which to contrast, nor methodology from which to follow. Though hundreds of studies have analyzed diversity training within higher education and the corporate world, there remains limited research within K-12 schools. This research study joins an increasing focus on this area of analysis and may be important as district leaders or school administrators consider how they will offer professional development around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This study was conducted on a small-scale within one school district in the American Midwest. The limitations of the study are evident due to the small number of participants yet despite limitations, the three themes align with the research conducted within the higher education sector and corporate workplace. The study parameters need to be detailed and limitations considered to avoid overgeneralization of results. The complexity of diversity, equity, and inclusion training

demonstrated in the findings is also consistent with findings in higher education literature (Taylor, 2021; Alviar-Martin et al, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Consequently, while we have made strides toward inclusive schools which offer equitable access, the system is still lacking. Within this research, there were three emergent themes which may be beneficial to the K-12 staff members experiencing professional development targeted to enhancing knowledge around topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion within schools. This research may also be used by administrators or leaders of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within higher education or corporations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The first recommendation for a future study would be to expand to additional public-school settings, grade levels and sample size of teachers. This would ensure a stronger trustworthiness as it relates to the current research's findings. A second recommendation for future studies would be an incorporation of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts into the school setting using the recommendations found within this current study with an examination of teacher perspectives of the training efforts using interpretive phenomenological analysis. Again, this adjustment would positively affect the accuracy of the findings.

A case study which collects perspectival survey data from teachers immediately after training and which incorporates intentional safe spaces, small groups, and strategies for the classroom would be beneficial for examining teacher perceptions of the diversity, equity, and inclusion training. Another future research opportunity would be to conduct a

correlational study of students' perceptions of building-wide inclusion and professional development focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion training. Through survey analysis before and after the study, I would be interested to know if students feel an increased sense of belonging after teachers have participated in professional development around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

SUMMARY

It is incumbent upon policymakers and administrators to provide competent and comprehensive diversity training to better prepare teacher practitioners for the demographic dynamics of the American educational system of today and (more importantly) tomorrow. While diversity trainings have existed in some form for over six decades, the training has been done without reference to precedent. Further, undergraduate teaching programs have failed to prepare these future teachers with the facilities to consciously teach a diverse student body, much less push against the systemic racism that pervades our primary and secondary schools (Bennet et al, 2019; Paluck, 2006; Dobbin et al, 2022). This study highlights a charter school committed to enhancing the diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts by committing to a three-year Equity Fellows training to offer educational analysis, first-hand commentary and detailed response on the efficacy and efficiency of the program.

This study set out to explore teacher perceptions of a diversity and equity training. Within this research, it is evident that these teachers understood their direct role in the maturation of their students, and necessity of and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts,

yet held deep seeded discomfort and negativity when confronted with conversations concerning diversity. Hahn (1999) found that teachers were fearful of controversy when dealing with racial issues, despite their recognition of the intrinsic value of conversations about discrimination. As Paluck (2006) noted, "diversity training is an intergroup relations program that often triggers a heated and politically sensitive public debate." This training needs to be clear on how to become a social change agent, as emphasized by Alviar and Ho (2011), and offer direct support for how to challenge racism (Pearce, 2019). Teachers within this study did not know how to modify the status quo, they did not have time to focus on issues of equity, and/or they did not feel appropriately equipped to discuss situations within their classrooms.

Teachers inherently want to connect with their students, but so often do not know how to ally alongside their students due to the increasing confluence of internal educational pressures and outside politics. Teachers within this study (2023) understood the importance of the Equity Fellows program and yet, were still uncomfortable with the discussions and scared of punitive outcomes. This research (2023) found that teachers need targeted classroom strategies, for while they feel enhanced competence in conceptualizing the complexities of teaching to diverse students, they do not always have the tools to enhance their current classroom practices.

It is essential that teachers effectively choose and advocate for diverse and appropriate curriculum resources and teach literacy to students who do not innately understand, synthesize, and infer knowledge when they enter classrooms. With this information, teachers must then be able to advocate for those students, research most

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effective practices and identify students who have been placed erroneously in particular courses or special education. The teachers should be able to efficiently identify the gap between those students in their rooms who belong in Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), and College Credit Plus (CCP) courses. Lastly, teachers must have the comprehension skills to assess data, understand marginalization, and contribute to curricular discussions with an understanding of how the American political landscape directly impacts schools.

As importantly, teachers must take into consideration how those students not present or present, but overlooked or underappreciated, contribute to many of the deficit-based model research and discussions around marginalized student populations. Teachers need a skillset to strategically include all student perspectives within the classrooms while honoring the rich diversity of our shared humanity. Without a commitment to do so, schools will continue capitulation to ongoing systemic inequity. The discourse within trainings around diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools needs to allow space for educators to examine and disrupt a system currently causing disparate educational impact for Students of Color.

The 2020 demonstrations in the wake of the death of George Floyd were multi-racial, multi-generational and by all accounts the largest movement in the country's history. Concurrently President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13950 which among other things, prohibited federally funded organizations, contractors, and subcontractors from providing certain workplace diversity training and programs. While President Joseph Biden revoked Executive Order 13950 in January 2021, 13950 became

the blueprint for implementation on the state level, to legislate and censor public school curricula (Kimberle Crenshaw, personal communication, February 2023).

At the time of this writing, a very public controversy surrounds a newly established AP African American Studies course. Key underpinnings contained within the original course draft presented in the fall of 2022 were removed after political backlash, including texts such as Michelle Alexander's 2010 book "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness", and "problematic" topics such Black queer studies, intersectionality, and Black Lives Matter, and other essential considerations around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. School board meetings nationwide have become places where critical race theory and its merits are now openly discussed, yet few within these debates are able to clearly articulate how race neutral processes produce disparate impact on students. Therein lies the irony of critical race theory as a mode of analysis directly applicable to this moment (K. Crenshaw, personal communication, February 2023).

Teachers stress the negative career implications to admit any insecurities or lack of knowledge about the social implications of race, gender, sexual identity, religion, culture, socioeconomics, or background. The fear lies in a perception they would be considered incompetent at best and racist and bigoted at worst. When the conversations among the adults are thwarted by fear and insecurity, the students suffer. The best way to mitigate teacher anxiety is to offer supportive training which allows teachers to synthesize culturally relevant information within small groups and which offers scaffolded support directly linked to teacher practice. Training focused on strengthening

interpersonal relationships which simultaneously offers strategies connected to teaching practice is the most helpful and important within the diversity training.

When a teacher is culturally proficient and diversity is celebrated, students will feel welcome and appreciated in schools. Unfortunately, many students still do not feel valued within the classroom. It is incumbent upon us, as educators and educational institutions, to figure out how to best leverage our current knowledge and research to alter educational outcomes that currently exist in the United States for Students of Color. and this is through education of the teachers and the policy makers within school districts and within political arenas. This research project which offers a contextualized examination of Equity Fellows will enhance the other existing research around the expansion of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within districts.

The educational outcomes of students within the classrooms are dependent on teachers understanding how to make culturally cognizant and appropriate decisions for their students. While it has become increasingly difficult to navigate the politics of teaching and the increased demands of the profession, if there remain gaps in educational opportunities and outcomes for Students of Color, there will be an increased need to educate teachers in the most effective way to improve their practice for diverse students.

The goal of this research was to ultimately make a positive, progressive change in districts implementing professional development focused on the practices of teachers who are most directly impacting the education of students who are traditionally disenfranchised. This research topic is one that will continue to expand and be essential

as our human needs are ever evolving. The research and subsequent analysis of today will need revision with time, political leadership change, policy making, and so on.

The information found in this research was influenced by increased news coverage of police brutality, the fractured political climate, and a global pandemic. Within the last year, at least 14 states have passed Anti-DEI laws restricting what schools can say and do in trainings around diversity, equity, and inclusion. This makes it increasingly imperative upon educators to articulately espouse the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within the classroom.

In a 2023 lecture, Kimberle Crenshaw noted, "Any attempt to integrate and demonstrate the mosaic of experiences that create the American stories are always met with backlash. The capitulation or the failure to navigate this attack on our scholars in a sophisticated way sends a message to our more vulnerable librarians and teachers that the intentional excision of their own curricula and history is happening without support" (K. Crenshaw, personal communication, February 2023).

Teachers have increasing responsibilities to demonstrate cultural proficiency in an expanding diverse landscape by being able to recognize and eradicate discrimination. We must confront racism within education, for if nothing else, the last few years have demonstrated that when there is no longer an overt capitulation to hegemonic power within schools, there will be more insidious forces demanding that schools preserve predominantly White curriculums and systems of inequity. As student bodies are increasingly diverse and teacher demographics remain primarily White, it is incumbent upon school districts to provide appropriate and targeted professional development on

diversity, equity, and inclusion which will positively affect all students' experiences within schools. Finally, as a fundamental social structure, schools can either continue to perpetuate racial disparity and inequality, or alternatively, be a safehouse for the promotion of progressive dialogue and elimination of racism and inequality within society.

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APPENDIX A

Teacher Reflective Survey

1)How can self-reflection inform student equity in schools?

2)How can we frame the questions we ask of ourselves and our professional colleagues

that they encourage a continual equity lens?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1)   You have been identified as a teacher who has participated in Equity Fellows. Can you describe your training experience?

2)   Why did you choose to be involved in Equity Fellows?

3)   Why did you choose teaching as your profession?

4)   How do you define racism?

5)   How has Equity Fellow informed your approach to issues of diversity and equity within your classroom?

6)   How have your interactions with students from diverse backgrounds evolved within your two years of Equity Fellows training?

7)   Can you think of a scenario in which professional development focused on dismantling the systems of racism has been beneficial to students?

8)   Has the school culture changed because of the teachers' participation in Equity Fellows?

9)   What is the largest impediment to your ability to incorporate the Equity Fellows training within your daily work?

10)   How has the Equity Fellows training most benefited your ability to systematically confront systemic racism within your work, with colleagues, and with your students?

11)   Can you describe one situation where you have felt an increased confidence in your ability to initiate change which positively impacts students as it relates to diversity and equity inclusion.

12)   Can you describe one situation where you have felt a diminished confidence in your ability to initiate change which positively impacts students as it relates to diversity and equity inclusion?

13)   Have you been able to eliminate minority marginalization within your building? How?

14) Do you feel that teachers want diversity and equity training?

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval Documentation

EXEMPT (d)(2); Approved May 24, 2021

RESEARCHER: Lydia Smith Lockwood

PROJECT TITLE: Does Diversity Training Matter? An Interpretive Phenomenological

Analysis Examining Teacher Perceptions of Diversity and Equity Training.

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the subject proposal and has found this

research protocol is exempt from continuing IRB oversight as described in 45 CFR

46.104(d)(2).* Therefore, you have approval to proceed with the study.

<u>REMINDERS TO RESEARCHERS:</u>

As long as there are no changes to your methods, and you do not encounter any

adverse events during data collection, you need not apply for continuing

approval for this study.

The IRB must approve all changes to the protocol prior to their implementation,

unless such a delay would place your participants at an increased risk of harm.

In such situations, the IRB is to be informed of the changes as soon as possible.

The IRB is also to be informed immediately of any ethical issues that arise in

your study.

You must maintain all study records, including consent documents, for three years after the study closes. These records should always be stored securely on campus.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Best of luck in your research!

Best regards,

Danita Nelson

IRB Administrator

Office for Research

University of Dayton

300 College Park

Dayton, OH 45469-7758

Superintendent Letter

May 11, 2021

To Whom It May Concern at University IRB,

Lydia Smith-Lockwood has asked to conduct research with faculty members in my district who have participated in Equity Fellows training. She will be conducting a phenomenological study examining teachers' perceptions of diversity and equity trainings. I give her my support and approval to conduct the research at Dayton Early College Academy.

Sincerely,

Dr. David Taylor, Superintendent DECA Approval

APPENDIX E

Invitation to Participate in Research

Research Topic: Does Diversity Training Matter? An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis Examining Teacher Perceptions of Diversity and Equity Training.

You have been asked to participate in a research project, conducted by Lydia Smith-Lockwood from the University of Dayton, in the Department of Education.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to discover the perception that high school teachers have of diversity education with the intention to diminish the effect of racism on Black students within school settings. The researcher's intention is to support teachers in meeting the academic, social, and emotional growth needs of all students within schools. The audience for this research will be school districts who are investing time and resources aimed at programs offering diversity education and the teachers who are receiving the diversity education.

> **You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.**

• Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop participating at any time for any reason. Answering the questions will take about 90 minutes.

• You will not be compensated for your participation.

• All of the information you tell us will be confidential.

• If this is a recorded interview, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the recording, and it will be kept in a secure place.

• If this is a written or online survey, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to your responses. If you are participating in an online survey: We will not collect identifying information, but we cannot guarantee the security of the computer you use or the security of data transfer between that computer and our data collection point. We urge you to consider this carefully when responding to these questions.

• I understand that I am ONLY eligible to participate if I am over the age of 18.

Please contact the following investigators with any questions or concerns:

Student Researcher, Lydia Smith-Lockwood
smithlockwoodl1@udayton.edu
Phone Number:937-408-5971

Faculty Supervisor, Dr. Pamela Young
pyoung1@udayton.edu
Phone Number:937-229-3323

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please email IRB@udayton.edu or call (937) 229-3515.