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# Action to Awareness: Surfacing Dysconscious Racism through Focused Professional Development

Dorry Altman

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ACTION TO AWARENESS: SURFACING DYSCONSCIOUS RACISM THROUGH  
FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Duquesne University

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Dorry Altman

August 2018

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Dorry Altman

2018

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FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Approved May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

# ACTION TO AWARENESS: SURFACING DYSCONSCIOUS RACISM THROUGH FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By

Dorry Altman

August 2018

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Anne-Marie Fitzgerald

Utilizing critical race theory (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) and King's (1991) theory of dysconscious racism, this dissertation aims to explore the beliefs and actions of teachers operating within an inherently racist society. Teachers struggle with many disadvantages from inadequate funding to lacking support structures. Yet these teachers continue to work hard to support their students. One external disadvantage these teachers may face and not even be aware of is dysconscious racism. Through a qualitative pilot study of journals and discussions of two middle school English Language Arts teachers, this research intends to explore how intentional classroom changes to encourage and support diversity affect both the students and the teachers.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Ronald and Nancy Altman. They have spent most of their lives caring for others from their own children to foster children to members of the community. Their living example of kindness and compassion has inspired me in my career as a teacher and as I pursued my further education. I know they will continue to inspire me as I continue to grow in both my field and my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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In addition to my committee, I would also like to thank my cohort. We spent several years together ‘pruning and blooming’, and I know that I am a better person both personally and professionally for having the opportunity to work with them.

I would also like to thank my family: my son who survived my bad moods and writing frenzies, my parents who spent countless hours entertaining my son so I could work, my sisters who offered support and encouragement when I felt like I couldn’t continue, and my nieces and nephews who believed in me even when I didn’t.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In spite of “low pay and prestige, inadequate resources, isolating work, subordinate status, and limited career opportunities” all in addition to an atmosphere of increasing scrutiny and judgment, new teachers are receiving their certifications every day (Johnson & Birkland, 2003, p. 2). A teacher’s job is not an easy one, but it is not without its benefits. We are privileged every day to guide the increasingly diverse youth of our country as they learn and grow. According to The Children’s Defense Fund’s 2014 State of America’s Children, “By 2019, the majority of all children nationwide are expected to be children of color” (p. 4). It is paramount that as educators, we are learning and growing our awareness and acceptance of diversity alongside our students and our country (Howard, 2006). This dissertation in practice encourages this learning and growth in matters of diversity through focused action research and reflection by in-service teachers.

Our teachers, who are overwhelmingly dedicated and well-meaning, have been too long without the necessary tools to teach in our increasingly diverse country (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This dissertation in practice explains this issue in both the macro and a micro contexts, explores the scholarly literature surrounding Critical Race Theory (CRT), White privilege, dysconscious racism, teacher beliefs, teacher expectations, stereotype threat, racial identity development, and professional development, and then analyzes action research implemented by in-service teachers to address the issue in the local context.

### **Learning From Our Past and Present**

Part of understanding and moving beyond where we are today comes from studying and learning from our past. Education and race have a long and turbulent history in the United States. From slavery to segregation to desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement, there is a

long history of oppression, inequity, and adherence to the status quo (Zinn, 2003). Laws and court cases have brought about major structural changes, but they have only made a small dent in the larger issue of racism in education (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This is because our social system is one of White privilege, which is, as McIntosh (1998) explained, the positive (should be for all) and negative (unearned advantages) entitlements that Whites have by virtue of their skin color.

Because of this systemic racism and White privilege, just abolishing slavery and passing laws for equality did not end the prejudice and racism in the country, just as simply attending professional development in areas of diversity awareness and culturally responsible teaching will not end the racial inequities in the schools (Lowen, 2007); however, this exploratory study shows that by helping teachers to explore their biases through purposeful action research, steps toward awareness can be made. White teachers need to first look inward and find the strength and courage to confront and transform our own beliefs before we can work productively with the issues of race and bias in the classroom (Howard, 2006). This is valid and important because the majority of our teaching force is White, while our student body, in fact, our world, is increasingly more diverse. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011-2012, 81.9% of our teaching force was White, while only 6.8% was Black. However, according to The Children's Defense Fund's 2014 State of America's Children, in 2012 the majority of children under the age of 2 were children of color and "By 2019, the majority of all children nationwide are expected to be children of color" (p. 4). Combined with this data, Howard's ideas not only speak to a need for awareness and acknowledgement, but also a need for informed action.

According to McIntosh (1998), one such action that can be taken is to focus on awareness of White privilege, the systemic advantages bestowed on Whites simply due to their skin color, as a way of changing the system. Helms (1992, 1995), on the other hand, developed a White racial identity model, which looked at the process of racial identity development including, but not limited to, awareness at several levels. In her updated White Racial Identity Model, Helms (1995) uses her statuses of White racial development (contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy) to help explain the reactions people have when dealing with racialized situations. It is important to note that statuses may overlap, are dynamic not static, and are not “mutually exclusive or ‘pure’ constructs” (p. 183). This knowledge of the status behind the schemata, or reactions, people have in racialized situations can then be used to help identify areas for personal and professional development.

When we explore the research around these issues of equity and opportunity in the brick and mortar classroom, we see that they are well documented. Studies dating back to 1973 (Rubovits & Maehr, 1973) have found discrepancies in the treatment of Black and White students, with Black students being given less attention, and Black gifted students receiving the least attention, ignored more, praised less, and criticized more (p. 217). More recently, Casteel (2001) found similarly that White female teachers praised White students more than African American students. White students also initiated more contact with the teacher and were provided more clues than the African American students when facing difficult questions. African American students also received a far smaller amount of the process questions specifically directed to them by name (Casteel, 2001). It is also worth noting that according to a 2015 study, Black students are more likely to receive more and harsher punishments for second offenses in the educational setting than White students (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

Teachers are raised and educated in this system that allows for these blatant differences in treatment of students, this system that implicitly encourages maintaining the status quo of White privilege; therefore, when teachers are finally confronted with this reality as they begin teaching in diverse schools it can be quite a shock and sometimes feel like a personal attack. This research plan attempts to alleviate that shock and possible resistance by first offering a chance for the teachers to implement meaningful change to acknowledge and incorporate diversity and then allowing reflection on that change.

### **The Local Context: Keystone Cyber Charter School (KCCS)**

How do these opportunities transfer into the ever-growing online K-12 learning environment? According to a 2011 report by Evergreen Education Group, all 50 states, and the District of Columbia offered some form of online and/or blended learning opportunities for students as of late 2011. My current teaching position is with the middle school of one of these online learning environments. Keystone Cyber Charter School (KCCS) (pseudonym) is a statewide, public, charter, cyber school. According to the 2013-2014 Pennsylvania School Performance Profile from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, in an October 2013 student snapshot KCCS had a student population of 9,490 in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade with 70% of students identified as economically disadvantaged and 23% receiving special education services. The student population at the time of the snapshot self-identified as 59% White, 28% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 5% other (including multi-racial, Asian, Native American, and Native Hawaiian). Our diverse student body demographics, however, are not mirrored by the demographics of our teaching staff, which is predominantly White and female, as is the trend country wide (US Department Of Education, 2013).

## **Theoretical Framework: Dysconscious Racism**

Joyce King (1991) describes a “dysconscious racism,” or “a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges” (p. 135). King (1991) describes dysconsciousness as an “uncritical habit of mind” that accepts the prevailing system of White dominance without questioning, reflecting, or acknowledging the possibility of alternatives (p. 135). For example, King and Ladson-Billings (1990) asked college students in a Social Foundations class to review data regarding the life chances of Black and White children and then answer the question “How did our society get to be this way?” King (1991) performed the same study with different groups of students. The results of both studies were similar. Students responded in one of three categories explaining racial inequality as (a) a result of slavery, (b) denial or lack of equal opportunity for Blacks, or (c) part of a framework in which privilege and racism are normalized (King, 1991). According to King (1991), “the majority of students in both years explained racial inequality in limited ways – as a historically inevitable consequence of slavery or as a result of prejudice and discrimination – without recognizing the structural inequity built into the social order” (p. 138). This is indicative of pre-student teachers’ concepts of students of color. Both Category I and II responses ignore the system of White privilege that restricts the ‘equal opportunity’ of Blacks. Category I dismisses the economic advantages of slavery for Whites, while Category II sees the situation as more one of equal opportunity and not equal access. As King (1991) states, “In effect, by failing to connect a more just opportunity system for Blacks with fewer White-skin advantages for Whites, these explanations, in actuality, defend the racial status quo” (p. 139). This is the very definition of dysconscious racism – following, without question, the racial status quo.

Dysconscious negative perceptions of students of color can lead to something that Steele and Aronson (1995) defined as stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is “the threat that others’ judgments or their own actions will negatively stereotype them in the domain” (Steele, 1997, p. 613). The domain is the setting in which the person finds himself. Steele’s studies found that when African Americans feel stereotype threat in the academic domain/setting, it significantly affects their standardized test performance in a negative way.

This dissertation in practice seeks to examine teacher racial awareness, dysconscious racism, and teacher ability to act responsibly on that awareness. This exploratory study, through action research, explores how fostering awareness through purposeful professional learning including instituting incremental, purposeful changes might lead to an increase in teacher awareness of both the system in which they are operating and their own personal biases. An increase in awareness of personal and systemic bias should foster positive changes in the classroom environment.

### **The Action Research Plan**

This action research plan answers the research question: How does engaging in consciousness raising professional development affect the diversity awareness of the participating teachers? The process for the action research plan is outlined in the following paragraphs.

Professional development sessions for all teachers take place throughout the school year, especially in response to curricular changes. As the school serves a varied population of students, whole school diversity training has also been offered. At present, the English Department, which is more loosely organized, usually holds professional development sessions as requested by the teachers. In the fall of 2016, as a member of the English Department, I

requested permission from the lead principal to organize and implement a voluntary professional development session for the department focused on exploring teachers' beliefs about diverse students. This training would be part of usual teacher practice and therefore considered exempt from Institutional Review Board protocols. 14 of the 21 teachers in the middle school English department of KCCS volunteered to respond to two surveys entitled The Personal Beliefs About Diversity Scale and the Professional Beliefs About Diversity Scale (Pohan and Aguilar, 2001) as a discussion starter in preparation for a half hour professional learning experience. It is important to note that the Pohan and Aguilar (2001) Diversity Scales results were not compiled; the survey questions were used as a discussion tool.

In the professional learning experience that followed, the 14 English teachers who volunteered to respond to the surveys worked together to brainstorm ways that they could implement small changes in their day to day teaching and communicating habits that could have significant and lasting impacts on their students' success. Volunteers were asked to commit to implementing at least one of the suggested changes for a period of three weeks in their classrooms. Volunteers then agreed to meet with me in a culminating discussion to review how it went and what impacts were noted from the change, both personally and professionally.

Four of the initial 14 volunteers agreed to participate in the action research portion to completion, though only 2 followed the process through until the end. One participant agreed to participate, but shortly thereafter decided she would not have the time to complete it. Another participant agreed, but dropped out right before the culminating meeting as she had not completed the changes or journaling. Data were collected in the following ways. Following the change and journaling through it, the volunteers participated in a group interview with me, as well as submitted their weekly journals describing the changes they made, what they learned

from them, and how the changes affected their students. Interview data were analyzed qualitatively through the lenses of Helms' White Racial Identity theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT) and described in detail. Helms' White Racial Identity theory was used to determine which level of awareness each participant was exhibiting, while Critical Race Theory was used to evaluate statements and reactions to situations. The primary tenet of CRT that is used in this research is that racism is endemic/systemic to highlight the pervasive nature of racism and help alleviate some of the potential backlash of seeing racism as individual.

**Generative impacts.** Upon completion of the dissertation in practice, data from the initial staff meeting and follow up focus group were compiled and presented to school administration for further consideration for professional development in the areas of cultural diversity awareness and responsible action. According to Desimone (2011), effective professional development is at least 20 hours and spread over a semester. Given the time restraints of this exploratory study, a semester long professional development process was not possible. Suggestions to extend the work would be for teachers to take the process to their grade level Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that are already in place. In this way the learning could continue and grow, and the school could use the professional development infrastructure that is already in place. Use of the PLC could also allow for what Desimone (2011) calls collective participation, building an interactive learning community.

This exploratory study addresses deep rooted, systemic issues that will take serious personal reflection, acknowledgment, and growth to overcome. Racism and White privilege are problems within the system that can only be approached by working with people who live in that system and consciously or unconsciously perpetuate the biases. Through action research and personal reflection, the two participating teachers were asked to acknowledge and reflect on this

system. Analysis of findings in this small, exploratory study described in this document demonstrate that one participant seemed to show a burgeoning awareness of both systemic racism and her place as a White teacher within that system. The other participant began the journey to awareness, but her reflections showed limited awareness of racial consciousness. Throughout the rest of this dissertation in practice we will synthesize the literature surrounding the issues of race in education, describe the action research process, analyze the gathered data, and report conclusions from the analysis.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Dysconscious racism (King, 1991) can affect teachers' expectations for and attitudes toward African American students, which in turn can lead to stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). I am proposing that through effective professional development (Desimone, 2011) to aid teachers in becoming aware of dysconscious racism and helping them implement small, achievable action plans, the above cycle can be halted at the early stages before students are negatively affected. In order to preface this action research, I review the literature surrounding Critical Race Theory, White privilege, dysconscious racism, teacher expectations, stereotype threat, racial identity development, and professional development.

### **Systems that Cripple: Systemic Racism and White Privilege**

The history of the United States is rife with racial discord (Zinn, 2003). From slavery to emancipation to desegregation to Civil Rights, the struggle for racial equity is something that still continues today (Loewen, 2007). This societal systemic racism, racism that is according to critical race theory “deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (Tate, 1997, p. 234) also affected the history of schooling in the United States (Spring, 2011). During slavery, African Americans were denied basic human rights, including the right to an education, because without an education they were more likely to be resigned to their servitude (Spring, 2011; Zinn, 2003). With the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 and the various legal battles that ensued, including the 1896 *Plessy* decision, African Americans were given the right to equal educational opportunity, but the courts decided that it could still be separate, thereby sanctioning segregation (Spring, 2011). But as Ladson-Billings (1998) points out, “Beyond equal treatment was the need to redress past inequities” (p. 18). Finally, with the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* Supreme Court case, schools were

desegregated; however, as Bell (1980) asserts, even this seemingly positive step happened because it aligned with the needs of the White population to pacify the returning Black veterans and to show the world at large that the United States was against communism and for equality. That occurrence is an example of interest convergence, one of the tenets of critical race theory which will be addressed in the next section. Racism persists today in inequitable school funding and learning conditions (Kozal, 2012), and on a small scale through racial microaggressions such as mispronouncing and thereby devaluing student names (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012), though it is not always as explicitly exhibited as it once was (King, 1991). According to Kozol (2012) in New York City in 1987 per pupil expenditure was \$5,500, but in the more affluent suburbs it was as much as \$15,000. Murphy (1988) notes “inequitable distribution of learning resources among curricular tracks and instructional groups” (p. 149), citing how lower ability groups are often required to do less work and behavior is given more import than academics. In addition, Kohli and Solórzano (2012) found that mispronunciations of student names are “subtle daily insults that, as a form of racism, support a racial and cultural hierarchy of minority inferiority” and that “enduring these subtle experiences with racism can have a lasting impact on the self-perceptions and worldviews of a child.” These subtle, yet pervasive, examples are part of what King (1991) call dysconscious racism. In King’s (1991) study, she found that her students’ “thinking reflects internalized ideologies that both justify the racial status quo and devalue cultural diversity” (p. 134). These educational disparities are apparent, but often unintentional.

**Critical race theory (CRT).** Critical race theory (CRT) springs from the legal field. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were two of the first scholars to take the theory out of the halls of justice and apply it to the halls of learning. Ladson-Billings (1998) connects race to the

curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school funding in education, and specifically how the intellectual rights of minority children are subjugated.

Though there are some differences in the wording of the primary ideas of CRT in education, it basically centers on at least five main tenets (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004):

1. Racism is systemic and intersects with other forms of oppression and, therefore, plays a central role in education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Racism is systemic, not merely individual (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Racism is pervasive in our social system and in our educational system; it is part of our social order (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
2. The dominant narrative must be challenged - CRT also helps explain the individual's role and how structural racism affects him or her (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), oppression is often not examined by the oppressor, and in fact does not even seem like oppression to him/her. Part of CRT in education is helping educators to recognize that we are complicit in the system of White dominance that runs the education system and in fact, costs minority students opportunities for success, and we must challenge the dominant narrative (Stovall, 2006).
3. There must be an underlying commitment to social justice; CRT reflects on the need for equity and not equality (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). It requires a belief that underprivileged groups can be heard and empowered (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).
4. Lived experiences are essential to understanding the system – Narratives, storytelling, family histories, biographies, etc. are often utilized as part of CRT in education, because the voices of the marginalized are often silenced or minimalized and these methods allow them to be heard (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).
5. There must be an interdisciplinary approach – “Critical race educators also look to such frameworks as Chicano/a, African American, Asian American, Native American, and Women’s Studies in examining the educational experience of students of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, p. 3, 2001). Because racism is systemic and endemic, it permeates all aspects of our world and, therefore, must be approached through interdisciplinary study.

Critical Race theorists see racism as a systemic and not as an individual pathology (Vaught & Castagno, 2008; Young, 2011). However, Young’s (2011) research shows that current educators tend to see racism as individual, isolated acts and not as part of a larger

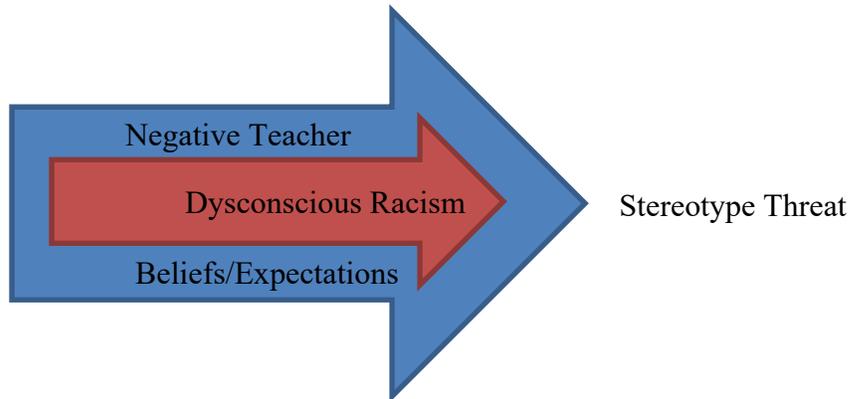
structure of racism. Remembering that racism is structural is also important when working with teachers to help explain that the inequities they are bringing to light as they explore their own racial identities are not only personal, but part of a larger system that has historical, social, and political roots (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

**White privilege.** Part of this larger system of racism is what McIntosh (1998) calls White privilege. She broke down the positive (should be for all) and negative (unearned advantages) entitlements that Whites have by virtue of their skin color. She came to her realizations about White privilege through her work with Women's Studies. McIntosh (1998) realized that her understanding had always previously been about seeing the disadvantages for the other person, and not the advantages that were afforded to the entitled White person (p.30).

As McIntosh (1998) shows, Whiteness provides for often unearned privileges, much like Harris's "property function of whiteness" *the rights to use and enjoyment* does. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) relate White privilege to education by highlighting inequity in the use of school facilities and materials. They cite Kozol (2012) and the powerful pictures of school inequity that came to light in his book regarding the discrepancies in the resources provided to urban, primarily minority schools and those provided to suburban primarily White schools. It is this dichotomy that points out the property function of Whiteness as the rights to use resources. Secondly, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) point out, again referencing Kozol (2012), the property function of Whiteness of the rights to enjoyment when looking at the mono-cultural nature of the curriculum that largely ignores the diversity of both the students and the world at large. Chapman (2013) stated, "The school curriculum, in its broadest sense, becomes the tool for further marginalization and maintenance of the status quo, rather than a tool of empowerment and social change" (p. 616). Curriculum has the power to be a catalyst for change, but instead it

is often a means of perpetuating stereotypes and systemic racism. Too often teachers are unaware of both the systemic nature of racism and their complicity in maintaining the status quo.

### **Impact Without Awareness: Dysconscious Racism, Teacher Beliefs and Expectations, and Stereotype Threat**



*Figure 1.* Dysconscious racism to stereotype threat: A process.

The following sections will show the connections between dysconscious racism, negative teacher beliefs and expectations, and stereotype threat, which has been proven to negatively affect student scores on standardized tests.

**Dysconscious racism.** King (1991) defines dysconscious racism as “an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (p. 135). As King (1991) asserted, the important thing is not to point out that students (or teachers) are racist, but rather that their “uncritical and limited ways of thinking must be identified, understood, and brought to their conscious awareness” (p.140).

Using the theory of dysconscious racism as part of their theoretical framework, Lewis, Pitts, and Collins (2002) conducted a study of pre-service mathematics and science teachers at a large Midwestern research institution to determine and analyze teacher beliefs about African American students’ ability to succeed in the fields of mathematics and science. Their study, a

three-part open-ended questionnaire, found that more than one in three pre-service teachers exhibited what King (1991) calls dysconscious racism as they are not even acknowledging or aware of a discrepancy in achievement in math and science for African Americans (Lewis, Pitts, and Collins, 2002).

**Teacher beliefs.** At the heart of dysconscious racism are the unacknowledged beliefs of the person. Beliefs are “dispositions to action and major determinants of behavior, although the dispositions are time and context specific” (Pajares, 1992, p. 313). According to Bandura (1986), beliefs indicate what decisions people will make throughout their lives. Therefore, it stands to reason that teachers’ beliefs will affect their classroom decisions. According to Renzaglia, Hutchins, and Lee (1997), beliefs and attitudes are not only “reflected in [teacher] decisions and actions, there is evidence that teachers’ beliefs and attitudes drive important decisions and classroom practices” (p. 361).

There are different theories regarding how to change belief systems (Cunningham, Schreiber, & Moss, 2005; Elliot & Devine, 1994; Festinger, 1957; Middleton, 2002). Cunningham et al. (2005) stated, “We must have students reveal, understand, and test their own beliefs, that is, conduct belief maintenance” (p. 187). In order to change beliefs, one must first acknowledge and understand their belief system. “Fostering an increased comfort with doubt, abduction, and experimentation is paramount” (Cunningham et al., 2005, p. 188). The idea that a change in beliefs requires acceptance of doubt and a reworking of previously held beliefs is similar to Festinger’s theory.

Stuart and Thurlow (2000) researched teacher beliefs of 26 preservice mathematics teachers and found that when students explored their beliefs and own learning experiences they were able to recognize how that affected their teaching practices. Researchers stated, “If

teachers do not bring their beliefs to a conscious level and articulate and examine them (Lasley, 1980), they will perpetuate current practices and the status quo will be maintained” (Stuart & Thurlow, 200, p. 119). One must first understand their beliefs in order to go about changing them.

Cochran-Smith (2000) used narrative of her years as a White, middle class professor of preservice teachers in a diverse area of Philadelphia (though her students were not diverse) to explore “Under what conditions is it possible to examine, expand, and alter long-standing (and often implicit) assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and practices about schools, teaching, students, and communities?” (p. 96). Cochran-Smith’s (2000) narrative led her to the realization that “how we are positioned in terms of race and power vis-à-vis others has a great deal to do with how we see, what we see or want to see, and what we are able not to see” (p. 99). Having real and raw discussions about race and our experiences can lead to an increased awareness.

Festinger (1957) theorized that cognitive dissonance, simultaneously holding conflicting beliefs or attitudes, is the key to changing beliefs. The theory is that the discomfort of these beliefs conflicting with each other will effect an overall belief change. Elliot and Devine (1994) researched Festinger’s theories of dissonance as arousal, a positive conflict, and dissonance as discomfort, a negative conflict, finding that cognitive dissonance is a motivational factor for belief change.

McFalls and Cobb-Roberts (2001) conducted a study of 124 undergraduate preservice teachers to determine if metadissonance, an awareness of cognitive dissonance, before being exposed to the information that will cause Festinger’s cognitive dissonance would cause less resistance to changing beliefs. Students were given a copy of Peggy McIntosh’s “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” to read and respond to. Half of the students were first given information on

cognitive dissonance before reading the article that brings to light often unconsidered effects of White privilege. Students were asked to “Reflect upon/provide a reaction to the article you just read” and then a discussion was held (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001, p 166). Following the discussion, participants anonymously answered three questions (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001, p 166):

1. What is the one important thing you’ve learned in this session?
2. What is one question that you still have?
3. Do you have any additional comments?

The data was analyzed and three themes were found: awareness, uncertainty, and denial. In the group that received the information on cognitive dissonance before the article and discussion there was a higher rate of awareness, indicating that students were more aware of hidden privileges, and a lower rate of denial, indicating that students rejected the information presented in the article and in the discussion (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001).

Middleton (2002) combined different theories to propose a multi-pronged approach to presenting multicultural material to students and effecting a change in beliefs. Middleton’s (2002) approach is that the multicultural material must be presented in a nonthreatening and authentic way, must fit cognitive and affective styles of development, must “gently force” an examination of one’s own biases, and must allow time and freedom to make informed changes in thinking (p. 351).

All of the above theories require a realization or awareness to be present for belief change to occur. Howard (2006) warned the following:

We cannot fully and fruitfully engage in meaningful dialogue across the differences of race and culture without doing the work of personal transformation. . . . We cannot help our students overcome the negative repercussions of past and present racial dominance if we have not unraveled the remnants of dominance that still linger in our minds, hearts, and habits. . . . [T]here will be no meaningful movement toward social justice and real

educational reform until there has been a significant transformation in the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of White Americans. (p. 6)

This exploratory study attempts to effect that realization or awareness to move teachers toward a change in beliefs. Whether these beliefs are conscious or not, they often filter through to teachers' expectations for students.

**Teacher expectations.** Teachers having varying expectations for and behaviors toward African American students is not a new or rare thing (Rubovits & Maehr, 1973; Casteel, 2001; McKown & Weinstein, 2007; Terrill & Mark, 2000), and it has been noted not just by researchers, but by parents and students themselves (Cooper, 2003; Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007). Research also connects teachers' implicit attitudes about race to their expectations for students and consequently the achievement gap (van der Bergh, Denessen, Honsra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010).

In a United States study, Tettegah (1996) administered a teacher background questionnaire, the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale, and the Teachable Pupil Survey to 96 White student teachers aged 22 to 50 years of age. The study found after analyzing the data gathered from the surveys that teachers do hold differing attitudes regarding the abilities and teachability of students from different ethnic backgrounds (Tettegah, 1996). Results indicated that White teachers tended to have negative expectations for the teachability of students of color (Tettegah, 1996).

McKown and Weinstein (2007) also studied two independent data sets of 1,872 elementary-aged children in 83 classroom, looking at classroom context in moderating the relationship between teacher expectations and child ethnicity. They found that in classrooms with high ethnic diversity, high differential treatment towards toward students of differing achievement levels (high and low), and sometimes in mixed-grade classrooms, teachers have

higher expectations for White and Asian American students than for African American and Latino students even with similar records of achievement (McKown & Weinstein, 2007, p. 256).

Similarly, Van der Bergh et al. (2010) studied the biases of 41 elementary school teachers through self-report and an Implicit Association Test for 434 students. Achievement scores were also gathered for the 434 students. This study took it a step further, finding that there was a relationship between the prejudiced attitudes of the teachers as found on the Implicit Association Test, the differing expectations of the teachers, and the size of the ethnic achievement gap (van der Bergh et al., 2010, p. 518).

Oates (2003) used the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) 1988 data to determine if teacher-student racial congruence impacts teacher perceptions on student test performance. The study found that there is a pronounced impact on students' test performance in classrooms where there is a White teacher and a predominantly Black student body. Oates (2003) cited self-fulfilling prophecies as a mechanism through which teachers', particularly White teachers', perceptions can influence the performance of their Black students (p. 510). These findings are closely related to stereotype threat which will be discussed in the following section. Through the theory of stereotype threat, one can see how teachers' beliefs and expectations can have a direct impact on students' achievement.

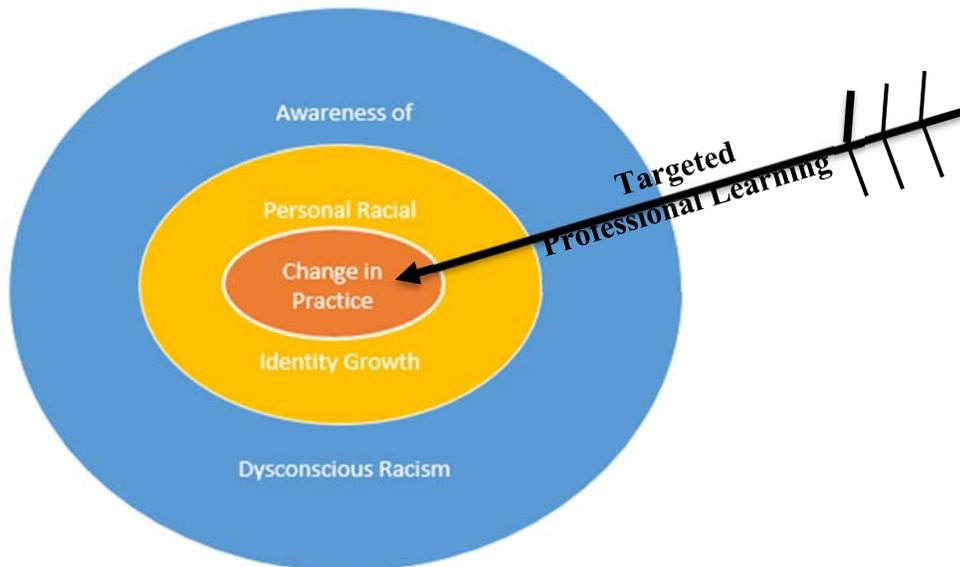
**Stereotype threat.** These negative perceptions of students, particularly African American students, can lead to something that Steele and Aronson (1995) call stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is "the threat that others' judgments or their own actions will negatively stereotype them in the domain" (Steele, 1997, p. 613). It is a state of psychological discomfort that often manifests during situations of evaluation, leaving the member of the stereotyped group unable to perform at his or her full potential due to a fear of failure (Appel, & Kronberger, 2012).

Steele and Aronson's (1995) studies found that when African Americans feel stereotype threat in the academic domain, it dramatically affects their standardized test performance.

In a recent integration of the current studies looking at stereotype threat and learning, Appel and Kronberger (2012) concluded that stereotype threat during test taking is only the final stage, and that stereotype threat during learning and preparation is also impactful. Stereotype threat impacted the stereotyped person's ability to encode material, summarize and evaluate information, comprehend rules, and efficiently use strategies (Appel & Kronberger, 2012). While stereotype threat is an important consideration when looking at the test scores, it is also important to look at how those students might have arrived at those scores, with stereotype threat also affecting their learning prior to testing.

Though there are studies that suggest that helping the students overcome the anxiety that is associated with stereotype threat is the way to approach the issue and thus reduces the achievement gap (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003), and these studies have found some success, I propose that this is only a bandage for a larger problem – the racial stereotypes and perceptions that persist in the minds of our teachers.

## Moving Toward Awareness: Racial Identity Development



*Figure 2.* Changing practice through targeted professional learning.

Racial identity theory involves a person's individual racial identity and his or her beliefs and attitudes towards other racial groups (Helms, 1995). In 1995, Helms updated her 1990 White Racial Identity Theory to revise some of the language to better represent the dynamic and overlapping nature of the constructs she discusses.

There are two primary assumptions that undergird Helms's theory: 1) Whites are the dominant members of society and as such feel privileged; and 2) Whites do not have to acknowledge having a race, because it is the norm, until they are forced to acknowledge the physical reality of another race (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). The primary issues for Whites in progressing through the statuses of White Racial Identity development is the loss of power and privilege that comes with accepting White as a race, seeing the racism inherent in the system, and beginning to actively work to combat racism (Helms, 1995).

Helms's (1995) theory of White Racial Identity development consists of six statuses that can be overlapping, are dynamic, and are not mutually exclusive. Helms (1995) intended the statuses, "defined as the dynamic cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that govern a

person's interpretation of racial information in her or his interpersonal environments," to be used to explain not categorize (p. 184). Schemata arise from statuses; they are how you react to situations based on the status(es) you are in (Helms, 1995). Helms (1995) also noted that as society changes, so may the statuses and schemata. The six statuses are as follows (see Figure 3):

1. Contact – This phase is characterized by the attitude that race doesn't matter; people who are responding using this framework tend to think in raceless terms or claim to be 'colorblind' (Helms, 1995; Carter & Goodwin, 1994). In a sample of 234 college students from an undergraduate psychology course who completed the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale and the New Racism Scale, Carter (1990) found that "the higher the Contact attitudes, the less likely White women were to endorse racist beliefs" (p. 49). While on the surface this may seem a positive, claiming color-blindness is itself racist. Ignoring race, both in yourself and others, can be just as harmful as more overt acts of racism (Carter, 1990).
2. Disintegration – This status is characterized by confusion and moral dilemma; because of the painful nature of finally confronting racial inequity, people often resort to victim blaming (Helms, 1995, Carter & Goodwin, 1994). In Pope-Davis and Ottavi's (1994) replication and extension of Carter's (1990) study, they found that in the younger age group disintegration (as well as reintegration and pseudo-independence) were indicative of racist beliefs or attitudes.
3. Reintegration – Because the White race is the politically dominant group, this status is particularly easy to perpetuate (Helms, 1995). This status is characterized by attitudes of White superiority, and though discrepancies in the statuses of White people and people of color are noted, blame is displaced (Helms, 1995). For example, there is the mentality that anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and find success without accounting for the years of oppression and the system of White privilege that makes that impossible for so many. Carter (1990) found that racist attitudes were more likely in White men who exhibit Reintegration attitudes. Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994), however, found this to be true for White women as well. Both Carter (1990) and Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994) point out that it is not unusual for someone with high Reintegration attitudes to exhibit racism, as the status is one which associates Whiteness with positive and Black with negative.
4. Pseudo-Independence – This status begins the journey into self-identity as a White person; it is characterized by a scaled down positive idea of Whiteness (Helms, 1995; Carter & Goodwin, 1994). Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994) did, however, find in the younger age groups that Pseudo-Independence (along with Reintegration and Disintegration) were indicative of racist beliefs and attitudes.
5. Immersion-Emersion – This status is characterized by an effort to understand the dominant narrative through an active examination of racism and White culture; it

involves a realistic self-appraisal and the moral re-education of other Whites (Helms, 1994; Carter & Goodwin, 1995).

6. **Autonomy** – This is final status when the person searches out opportunities to confront racism and seeks both cross-racial and within race experiences to become a better humanitarian (Helms, 1994, Carter & Goodwin, 1995). Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994) found the older age group in their study had higher levels of Autonomy attitudes than did the younger age group, extrapolating that as one matures there seems to be more likelihood of being more comfortable and perhaps more accepting of race and racial differences.

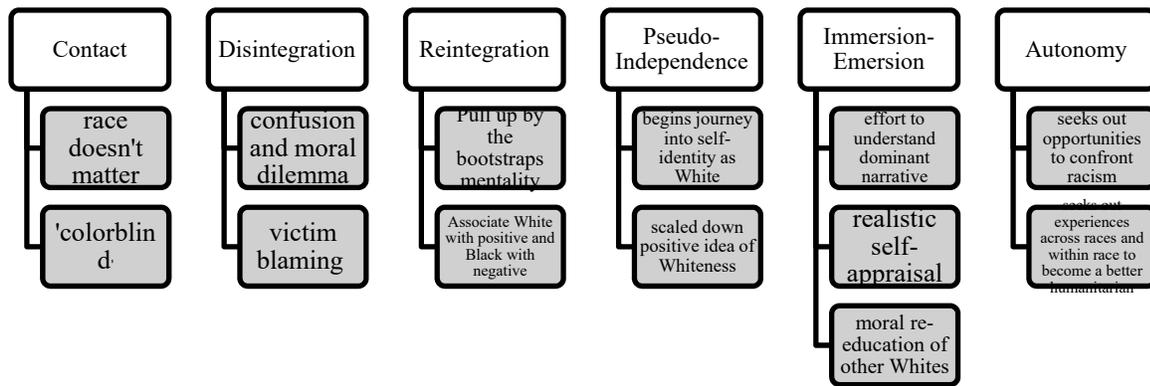


Figure 3. Helms's statuses of White racial identity.

Carter and Goodwin (1994) pointed out that, according to racial identity theory, “we each understand the world from our own level of racial identification and perspective” (p. 314). As educators, this is very important; we may feel like we’re acting appropriately in a situation given our current racial identity status and schemata, but we may in fact be acting inappropriately or in a racist way without even realizing it (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). Gay (2010) contended that for teachers, “critically analyzing their beliefs and being cognizant of their own cultural heritage are just two of many essential components of preparation for teaching to and through cultural diversity” (p. 149). This is why it’s important for teachers, both in-service and pre-service to explore their own racial identity in order to better teach for cultural diversity.

## **Finding the Way: Effective Professional Development**

One way to guide teachers through the process of exploring racial identity and learning to teach for cultural diversity is through effective professional development. Desimone (2011) defines professional development as “increasing teacher knowledge and instruction in ways that translate into enhanced student achievement” (p. 68). According to a national probability sample of 1,027 math and science teachers, the key components of effective professional development, explained in detail below, are content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation (Desimone, 2011; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Suk Yoon, 2001).

Content focus means that the professional development focuses on the content that the teachers will be teaching and how students learn that material (Desimone, 2011). The active learning component is the active involvement of the teachers in the learning process (Desimone, 2011). The component of coherence means that the professional development teachers receive should be in concert with other professional development they’re receiving, any professional development policies in place, and their knowledge (Desimone, 2011). According to the duration element, professional development should last at least 20 hours and be spread out over a semester (Desimone, 2011). Collective participation means that professional development should work to help build an interactive learning community (Desimone, 2011). Effective professional development is not a simple, quick meeting to disseminate information; effective professional development requires purposeful direction, action, and change.

**Making small, effective changes.** There are many small, effective changes that teachers can make in the classroom as part of a larger process of professional development that are positive steps for their students and that can help create a more diversity-positive environment. These changes may include the following:

1. Learning how to pronounce the names of all of your students, as Kohli and Solórzano (2012) pointed out:

As a baby, identity and self-concept are developed through a family's repeated use of a child's name (Sears and Sears, 2003). A child begins to understand who they are through their parents' accent, intonation and pronunciation of their name. Additionally, names frequently carry cultural and family significance. Names can connect children to their ancestors, country of origin or ethnic group, and often have deep meaning or symbolism for parents and families. When a child goes to school and their name is mispronounced or changed, it can negate the thought, care and significance of the name, and thus the identity of the child. (p. 444)

Names are important and carry symbolism. As educators, we need to honor this and learn the correct pronunciation of our students' names.

2. Including more images of diversity in PowerPoints. This change reflects the idea that curriculum should be both a window and a mirror (McIntosh & Style, 1999). Style "imagines the curriculum as an architectural structure that schools build around students. Ideally, for each student, this structure will provide windows out, into the experiences of others as well as mirrors of the student's own reality and validity" (McIntosh & Style, 1999, p. 143). By consciously choosing diverse images for lessons, teachers are providing both windows and mirrors for their students.
3. When introducing new vocabulary, ask for students who speak another language to share the word in their language. Chapman (2013) says, "The school curriculum, in its broadest sense, becomes the tool for further marginalization and maintenance of the status quo, rather than a tool of empowerment and social change" (p. 616). Allowing students to own and be proud of their parent languages is one way to use curriculum as a tool of empowerment and social change. This is also an example of culturally relevant pedagogy, teaching that utilizes the cultures of the students to make the content more relevant.

This literature review examined the research on critical race theory, White privilege, teacher beliefs, stereotype threat, White racial identity development, and effective professional development. The literature demonstrated the importance of teachers examining their own beliefs in order to better serve their students. The research described also provided a snapshot of the system in which the action research of this dissertation took place.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this section I will discuss the context of the research, the research question being addressed and the process through which it is addressed, including participants and procedures.

#### **Context: Keystone Cyber Charter School**

We are teaching in an increasingly diverse world (Children's Defense Fund, 2014). It is time for our teaching force to recognize that and begin teaching for the students that we have (Howard, 2006; Singleton, 2014). And just as our student population is more diverse, so are our schooling options for students. As of 2012, there were 311 full time virtual school with an estimated 200,000 students enrolled (Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Pape, 2014). Pennsylvania itself has 14 fully online cyber charter schools serving 36,596 students as well as many districts and Intermediate Units offering online courses (Watson et al., 2014).

**Student demographics.** As was noted above, the student demographics of the school are diverse (59% White, 28% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 5% other, including multi-racial, Asian, Native American, and Native Hawaiian). However, it is important to note that our demographics are in constant flux. Whereas brick and mortar schools tend to only receive new students as they move into the physical district, our school's district is onboarding new students weekly throughout the school year, because as a state-wide public online charter school, our district is effectively the entire state. In addition, in part because our initial numbers are so high, our student numbers regularly decrease as well, losing students back to their home districts, to out-of-state moves, and to other charter schools. In short, our class numbers and demographics change frequently, though not dramatically, because our classes are regionally grouped. For example, we might have a middle school team for which all of the students come from the center of the capital city of the state and another team for which all of the students come from all of the

remote regions of the western part of the state. Generally new students are placed on the team corresponding to their geographic location. This tends to maintain a similarity in our class demographics.

**Teacher demographics.** While our student body is diverse, our teaching staff is not representative of that same diversity. Our teachers are predominantly White and middle class, and most of these educators have had little to no exposure to multicultural education and what it means in the classroom beyond the token celebrations of multicultural holidays. As Ladson-Billings (1998) said, “Rather than engage students in provocative thinking about the contradictions of U.S. ideals and lived realities, teachers often find themselves encouraging students to sing ‘ethnic’ songs, eat ethnic foods, and do ethnic dances” (p. 22). These token acknowledgments of diversity are often considered enough. Coming from primarily White middle class homes, many of the teachers have not had any significant experiences to move them to what Helms (1995) calls the disintegration phase of abandonment of a racist identity. As Howard (2006) explained, White people in this phase experience disequilibrium, beginning to question their previously held beliefs about race (p.93). When we don’t make it to this phase, we don’t even know or think to acknowledge or question the status quo.

**Teacher professional development for diversity.** Since I began working with the school in February of 2012, we have had two instances of diversity professional development. In the fall of 2014, a speaker from the local Intermediate Unit came and addressed the entire school, including K-12 teachers, family coaches (non-certified staff with Bachelor’s degrees who serve as in-person points of contact for the families who work with our school), and administration in an assembly-style speech. The speaker shared a TED talk, “Every Kid Needs a Champion,” by Rita Pierson, and then spoke about how she had been judged as a student because of a physical

disability. The presentation, while it spoke generally to the need to serve all of our students, did not involve us in the deeper work of looking closely at our own beliefs about race and how those beliefs affect our classroom practice and the lives of our students. Given the large audience and the time constraints (the presenter had only an hour block), perhaps attempting the difficult work of confronting White privilege and dismantling previously held belief systems would have been an unrealistic goal; however, for a school our size and with our diverse student body, more and more targeted professional development in multicultural education is necessary. It is also worth noting that this professional development experience was quick and offered no opportunity for follow-up.

Similar to the prior diversity training, this past school year in the fall of 2016 the school administration held a virtual professional development on diversity for the entire middle school. The training was led by several county office staff. The focus of the training was on our population of economically disadvantaged students. They shared statistics and figures surrounding the effects of poverty on learning. It was an interesting, if incomplete, look at diversity in our school. There was no follow up to the hour long online session.

Both of these professional development instances fall short of Desimone's (2011) guidelines for successful professional development. The professional development did not focus on content or direct application to the students and classroom. Neither instance involved teacher participation and active learning. The duration of the two separate sessions was significantly less than recommended by Desimone (2011), and there was no collective participation in either.

Not only do the above meager attempts at social justice professional development fall short of Desimone's (2011) criteria for effective professional development, they are also indicative of a larger issue of a dearth of sustained and well-designed social justice professional

development as a whole. According to research on the Schools to Watch® (STW) programs (a program designed to recognize middle-schools that are ‘high performing’) in the state of Pennsylvania by Parke, Generett, and de Almeida Ramos (2017), “schools’ attempts to address the STW social equity criteria were quite varied, unclear, and in some cases, repetitive and overlapping” and “there were no descriptions of structure or systems within the schools that specifically address social equity” (p. 22). Furthermore, through their research, Parke, et al (2017) found that, “equity is much more than programs and recognitions. Indeed, equity requires a systemic approach to dealing with issues that make schools less than optimal learning experiences for certain groups of students” (p. 16). In short, social justice, diversity, and social equity development require time, dedication, and awareness.

As an additional means of professional development, our school has also this year initiated Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a means of professional development. DuFour (2004) defined a PLC as a group of educators gathering with the following big ideas and goals: ensuring that students learn, fostering a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results. These big ideas and goals connect to Desimone’s (2011) guidelines for an effective professional development in that they focus on student learning and collaboration. Our PLCs are our grade level teams and consist of one science, one math, one history, and one English teacher. In our school, the general attitude toward the PLCs is a negative one, with teachers resenting the time the meeting seems to take away from planning and grading. The staff member (teacher) chosen to run the PLC has no particular training or experience in PLCs. PLCs could be more effective if the time was more focused, with less busy work of filling out forms to prove we’re working, and more time to spend discussing individual student concerns. Given the current culture of the school surrounding PLCs and professional development, it is best to start small, giving teachers’

choice and to combine this as part of a larger professional development experience that starts slowly.

In many schools, Ladson-Billings (2009) and King (1991) report the curricular materials and resources reflect the dominant culture. Characters in school texts have had names similar to those of their family members. Their ancestors' histories were told in class. Pictures in children's books and on posters on their classroom walls looked like them. Questions on standardized tests were about topics with which they were comfortable and familiar. And according to the research they were praised more, called on more, and generally better liked by their teachers (Casteel, 2001; Rubovitz & Maehr, 1973). Without thoroughly examining their own racial stories and biases, how can we expect educators to be able to teach culturally relevant pedagogy with a goal of social justice?

### **Research Question**

This action research plan answers the following research question: How does engaging in consciousness raising professional development affect the diversity awareness of the participating teachers? The question was answered through the process of participants volunteering for a small action research plan, journal, and follow up discussion. The discussion transcripts and participant journals were analyzed by the researcher to answer the research question.

The process, as a collective, is an example of several characteristics of what Desimone (2011) deemed as effective professional development.

1. Content Focus - The questions in the discussion starting survey that are asked regarding curriculum, though general, allow the element of content focus, giving the participant the opportunity to reflect on her own curriculum specifically, as does the freedom to choose the focus in the action research portion of the professional development.

2. Active Learning - The action research portion that has the teacher come up with and implement a small change or changes in her classroom allows for active learning.
3. Coherence - The process is coherent in that it follows through from the learning experience, to the teacher-led action research, and with the generative impact of the participating teachers carrying their experiences to their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
4. Collective Participation - This process also allows for collective participation with both the discussion and the continuation through the generative impact work with PLCs.

## **Participants**

The participants in the initial learning experience were a convenience sampling of 14 of the 21 members of the English department of the KCCS middle school. This participant pool was chosen as they were easily accessible being in the department in which I also work, and I acquired permission from the middle school principal to work with them. The participants were all White females.

Of the 14 who participated in the initial learning experience, 4 agreed to attempt the classroom change(s), journal, and culminating meeting. Of the 4 who agreed to participate, 2 completed the entire process. One removed herself from the process in the middle of the action research phase, and one removed herself before the culminating meeting. No data were gathered or analyzed for either of those two participants.

The two participants are full time middle school English teachers at KCCS, a public cyber school. The school has a diverse student population, but its teachers are primarily White females. The school has had two diversity trainings that were delivered at all-school professional development sessions.

## **Procedures**

The 21 members of the KCCS middle school English department were invited to attend an initial professional learning experience that began with a discussion starting personal survey

and ended with an opportunity for teachers to volunteer to participate in action research. Following the professional learning experience, 2 teachers followed through with action research in their classrooms, completing journals about the process. They then attended a recorded culminating discussion.

**Index.** As a discussion starter, 14 participants participated in a 30 question diversity index at the beginning of the professional learning experience. The survey was shared with the participants as a Word document that was distributed to each participant, so only they saw their index and answers. The survey was specially constructed, derived and adapted by the researcher from Pohan and Aguilar's (2001) Personal Beliefs About Diversity Scale, a 15 question Likert scale survey, and the Professional Beliefs About Diversity Scale, a 25 question Likert scale survey (Appendix A). As the present exploratory study is most concerned with issues of race and language diversity in the school setting, only the first seven questions come from the Personal Beliefs About Diversity Scale, while the following 19 come from the Professional Beliefs About Diversity Scale. It is important to note that the survey data were not compiled, and the survey was used only as a discussion tool by the 14 teachers who attended the initial professional development session. Survey data were not collected so that participants could respond honestly and anonymously.

**Professional learning experience.** The researcher offered a 45 minute professional learning experience to all 21 members of the middle school English department, of which 14 teachers attended. As a discussion starter, the participants were first presented with the Adapted Beliefs About Diversity Index as explained above. Participants were presented slides on equality versus equity and systemic barriers to help develop a common terminology around which to discuss how race is addressed, portrayed, and discussed in their classrooms. (See Appendix B

for slides.) Participants engaged in a group discussion around questions based on the survey questions (Appendix C). As a discussion starter, the question in the survey index worked well. It prompted discussion of the diversity in our curriculum, and how we could enhance it. It also prompted more personal stories of realization and awakening. Participants were then challenged to come up with ways over the next several weeks that they could acknowledge and honor diversity in their classrooms.

**Action research.** I then asked for volunteers to participate in a small action research plan to implement the new ways of acknowledging and honoring diversity in their classrooms, maintain a weekly journal highlighting the effects of the change, and then share back with a follow up discussion in three weeks (Appendix D). Participants agreed to keep a small weekly journal highlighting the change they made that week. They answered three questions each week in their journals:

1. What did I change this week?
2. What did I learn from this change?
3. How did it affect my students?

Participants emailed the researcher to agree to participate and received an email in return with detailed instructions on how to proceed with the action research (Appendix E).

**Discussion group.** The discussion group, consisting of the researcher and 2 teacher participants, gathered for a recorded 25 minute culminating session in an online Blackboard classroom approximately three weeks after the initial meeting to discuss if and how implementing the small changes in the classrooms affected their classrooms and themselves. Appendix F contains a script for beginning the discussion group and helping to set the tone. The information gathered during the culminating meeting was recorded in Blackboard and then transcribed by GMR Transcription Services. It was then analyzed using an inductive qualitative

analysis. I analyzed the transcription and journals for emerging and recurring themes.

Participants signed an informed consent form to participate in the journaling and culminating discussion (Appendix G).

### **Process**

The information gathered during the focus group meeting was recorded in Blackboard, transcribed by GMR Transcription Services, and then analyzed using an inductive qualitative analysis. I analyzed the transcription and participant journals for emerging and recurring themes. The anonymity of participants was protected by assigning them a participant number. The data was coded by carefully noting the patterns, themes, and issues over several readings. I used the following a priori codes: social awareness, personal awareness, social justice, and professional development. I also looked for emerging and in vivo codes. One emerging code was peer-to-peer learning. Once the data was coded, it was organized into similar categories. I then summarized the main themes. After identifying and summarizing the main themes, I interpreted the findings by explaining their significance.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The data from the two participants will be presented and organized by participant and then broken down by the changes each participant made in her class.

### Participant One

Participant One is a White, 33 year old, middle class female. She is certified in Elementary K-6 and Mid-level English 7-9 and as a Reading Specialist. She has a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and is finishing her Master's in Reading. She held long-term substitute positions in brick and mortar schools for three years before she was hired for a full-time middle school English online teaching position with KCCS. She currently teaches seventh grade English Language Arts at KCCS. She has been teaching at KCCS in this position for five years. She chose to make one change each of the three weeks in her classroom, finding that overall the process increased her awareness. In the wrap-up discussion she said, "So I think just being more conscientious about diversity in my classroom is something I really took away from this."

**Change one.** For her first change, Participant One chose to incorporate more diverse images in her class presentations. She wrote in her journal:

In order to make our lessons more engaging in a virtual model, we try to add graphics and other pictures to our lessons. As I was selecting appropriate pictures, I tried to be very cognizant of my use of real life people and how many times I used people of different races.

Participant One noted two significant responses as she discussed and reflected on this change. She found that searching for diverse images required more effort and longer, more thorough searches; she couldn't just choose the first image that popped up: "After implementing the change to try to make sure that my pictures were showing more diverse spaces, I realized that it actually has to be a very conscious change because you have to dig a little bit." This speaks to

the systemic bias in our world. When you Google for images of ‘student’ the majority of the responses that populate are of White students.

She also reflected that the process required her to make conscious choices that sometimes went against her first instincts:

Just today as I was making a lesson for next week, I was trying to find an image to go along with the word tomorrow. Annie popped into my head, and it popped – I Googled that Annie. I thought I’m not going to use the original Annie. So she’s here in my heart as a redhead, but I thought I’m going to use the new Annie. You know, the movie that was just made featuring an African American Annie. I thought that was – typically I would have probably put the original Annie, but I thought, no, I think we need to really make sure we’re changing it up and representing all my students’ faces and colors.

Though she had an initial bias for the red-headed Annie who resembled her, she began a journey to awareness by consciously choosing the newer representation of Annie, an African American girl.

**Change two.** For her second change Participant One chose to ensure that she was pronouncing all of her students’ names correctly. She wrote in her journal:

I feel like a student’s name is part of their identity, so what does that say when we pronounce it wrong? That they are not worth the time for us to say it correctly? Since we work in a cyber environment, a student’s name is even more powerful. We cannot see our students, we cannot make eye contact with them, or greet them with a gesture. All we have is their name, so we better say it right!

Participant One acknowledges that students’ names are an important part of identity and that by mispronouncing them the teacher is essentially saying that the students’ personal identities are somehow unimportant. She also points out the particular importance of correctly pronouncing a student’s name in an online environment, because in that setting you don’t have other physical cues. In order to help her remember pronunciations of her students’ names, Participant One keeps a list of their names with a phonetic pronunciation beside them. She said, “I actually phonetically wrote down all my students’ names that I wasn’t sure about how to pronounce so I

could remember and keep repeating it to myself. I thought maybe it's not something that we all think about."

Participant One cited a particular incident in both her journal and the culminating discussion where in a group classroom, a colleague pronounced a student's name differently than she had been pronouncing it. To clarify, she pulled the student into a separate online room and asked how to pronounce her name.

But I did notice that there's one student on my team who – we were in PLT, personal learning time, the other day, one of my other teammates pronounced her name. I thought, oh, gosh. That is not how I've been saying it the whole time. So I pulled her into the breakout room and said to her am I saying her name correctly? Or was that it? I apologize if I've been saying it wrong this whole time.

She found out that she had been pronouncing it correctly: "So I guess there was a part of me that thought, first of all, I was relieved. Second of all, I thought I wonder if not everyone thinks of that maybe." This led Participant One to realize that not all teachers make a conscious effort to correctly pronounce students' names. She recognized the appreciation from the student just for verifying the pronunciation, and wondered why it wasn't a more common practice, particularly in this online environment.

**Change three.** For her third change, Participant One chose to ask students for Spanish/English cognates (words that look and mean the same in different languages) as she introduced new vocabulary. In the culminating discussion, she noted that students were very excited while participating in this activity as it gave them an opportunity to talk about themselves and their families. Participant One also recognized a change in her own thinking, stating:

Just thinking about my students who share if they have maybe their parents speak Spanish or their parents speak another language. I probably would have never known that because I don't know if I would have thought to ask it before.

Participating in this action research helped Participant One to learn more about her students and become more aware of the diversity in her classroom.

Participant One wrote in her journal: “I learned that in order to change the attitude some people have about people who speak other languages, we have to teach our students that our country is a mixing pot of different cultures. Our diversity is one of our strengths.” For Participant One, this change seems to have had the greatest overall impact on both her and her students. She recognized the importance of celebrating the diversity of her students, both as an act of social justice and as a way of recognizing and celebrating students’ diversity, journaling, “I saw a lot of students sharing that they have people in their family that speak another language! It made them feel important and recognized!”

### **Participant Two**

Participant Two is a White, 46 year old, middle class female. She is certified in 7-12 Secondary Education English. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Secondary Education English/Humanities and Masters of Education in English. She taught at a technical college for three years before she was hired for a full-time middle school English online teaching position with KCCS. She currently teaches eighth grade English Language Arts at KCCS. She has been teaching at KCCS for five years, one in seventh grade English and four in eighth grade English. She chose to make one change each of the three weeks in her classroom, finding that overall the process increased her awareness of her students as individuals as well as her students’ understanding of her appreciation of them. In the wrap-up discussion she said,

I feel like they actually think we care about them more. They’re relevant to us, and we really do want to know who they are, what makes them tick, and have them share about themselves. I just feel like we can celebrate that more now from this.

**Change one.** For her first change, Participant Two incorporated a time for personal sharing in her homeroom class. She opened herself up by sharing a slide with examples of traditions and customs from her Greek heritage. She then encouraged the students to post their own pictures and share their own heritages on the microphone. She noted in her journal that,

“They appreciate being able to express with their peers, what makes them who they are.” The students were vocal in their appreciation; Participant Two found: “Students were smiling, saying “great job,” and encouraging each other to share more.”

In her journal, Participant Two mentions a student who shared pictures of India, the reaction it caused in her students, and the realization she came to because of it.

One student in particular shared pictures of India and how much she loved going there, which created interest in others to share and speak in other languages, which made me realize that I am at a deficit when wanting to communicate in other languages with our students.

This change in her classroom not only led to increased awareness and celebration of diversity among her students, but also led Participant Two to reflect on ways that she could better connect with her diverse student body through other languages.

**Change two.** For her second change, Participant Two encouraged students to take the microphone in class and sing or countdown in a language other than English for polling questions:

So whenever we have polling, I used to always be kind of sing songs or do something kind of quirky. But I never really gave the students the opportunity to do that. So I tell students now if you want to go ahead and do polling, like a countdown from ten or if you want to do a send announcement and put it into your native language or a different language that you’re studying and celebrate that and embrace that.

In online school students are often asked to use Blackboard tools such as emoticons or polling (the option to answer multiple choice or yes or no questions) to show understanding of the topics being covered in live lessons. Often they are given a time limit for answering those questions and a teacher will count down the final seconds before answers are required. Participant Two used this common online classroom practice to incorporate an opportunity for students to share their cultures.

Participant Two noticed a significant increase in student engagement from incorporating this practice. In the culminating discussion she said,

One thing that I noticed, the polling in the different languages, the kids are so excited. They are so excited. They will just – it just seems to create this infectious happiness in the classroom. The demeanor seems to be better; I guess you could say.

In her journal she noted, “They find it fun and a break from the potential monotony of the cyber classroom.” Participant Two primarily focused on the reactions of the students to the changes, however, and not how those changes affected her or her teaching.

**Change three.** For her third change, Participant Two incorporated a student information slide in her student-led fourth period class. In this class, she has a different student lead the lesson each day. At the beginning of the lesson, she has that student share a slide he or she has made that shares information. In the culminating discussion, Participant Two shared:

But to have them always start with why they are so different, why they’re so special, and why they’re so unique. To hear them talk about the fact that maybe they’re Spanish or Japanese and their native language is Japanese. Then, to have the parents right behind them on the webcam saying hi and say hi in a different language.

This change offered an opportunity for students who live all across the state to share their homes and their families with their classmates and online friends.

With this change, Participant Two found that,

Then, the kids are so excited in that classroom. So I do feel like the bond has been strengthened. I feel like I know my students better. I feel like they think I care more as opposed to feeling like maybe we go through the motions or whatever of teaching.

Again her focus remained on how the change affected her students’ roles in the classroom and the classroom atmosphere. In her journal she noted, “It’s creating a healthy awareness of diversity and acceptance of others. I can say that this is my 5<sup>th</sup> year here and I have never seen a group of students closer and healthier in the classroom, than this year.” As a teacher, she’s noting the differences and growth of her students, but she isn’t delving deeper into the effects of

the changes to see how they currently affect and will continue to affect her personally as well as her teaching practice.

Both teachers experienced an increase in awareness, though for one it was more of a personal awareness and for the other it was more of a general awareness. Participant One examined more deeply her own personal beliefs and why she held them, while Participant Two focused more on how the changes she made impacted her students and not on how or why she was making those changes, nor her own personal beliefs. The data will be further analyzed in the Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

This chapter furthers the analysis of the research, connecting it to existing scholarly literature and to the research question: How does engaging in consciousness raising professional development affect the diversity awareness of the participating teachers? This chapter will also explore the generative impacts of the research, offer considerations for future research, and put forth the final conclusions.

### **Culminating Discussion**

Before discussing individual responses it is important to acknowledge the structure of the participating cyber school. This school does not have regularly scheduled department meetings. There are no department chairpersons. Professional development is not a focus of the administration; therefore, there was not administrative support beyond a one-time project. It may be that things would have been different in a brick and mortar school with a different administrative structure and focus. In addition, in a school with regularly scheduled department meetings and dedicated professional development time, participation might have been greater and teachers would have had more time to examine their diversity beliefs and change their practice.

Both Participant One and Participant Two recognized effects from implementing into their classroom practices changes that highlighted diversity. Participant One recognized her burgeoning conscientiousness when designing and preparing lessons for her culturally diverse students. Participant Two recognized an increase in engagement and acceptance among her students.

In both her journal and the culminating discussion, Participant One exhibited an advancing diversity awareness. She recognized instances where she had to consciously change

her way of thinking, her initial reaction, to honor the diversity in her classroom. Participant One also noted in the culminating discussion that making these small changes to promote diversity was something she hadn't even considered before: "It kind of feels like now that I've done it I'm like, oh, light bulb. Why haven't I been doing this?" This speaks to the need in our education system for hands on professional development in diversity awareness, also something that Participant One noted. She said, "I'm feeling like it should really be a training for us. It really should be a professional development, especially in our school model and our diverse group of students. We should have more focus on this." Something as simple as beginning to consciously add images of diversity in a lesson can be the spark that a teacher needs to begin moving past dysconscious racism and lack of awareness of issues of social justice in the classroom.

Participant Two, on the other hand, reflected in her journals and in the culminating discussion on the observed effects on her students rather than on herself personally. She noted "Students enjoyed being given the opportunity to talk about themselves, their families and how they celebrate different holidays or traditions," and "Students are proud of who they are and where they come from." She did not, however, further explore how that affected her and her classroom preparation and practice. While Participant One reflected on the process of implementing the changes and her conscious efforts to carry the changes out, Participant Two remained focused on the effects of the changes for the students only, missing an opportunity for deeper analysis of how and why she made the choices she made for her classroom.

### **Making Connections: The Research, the Literature, and the Research Question**

As King (1991) pointed out, the important thing is not to call out students (or teachers) as racist, but rather to guide them so that their "uncritical and limited ways of thinking must be identified, understood, and brought to their conscious awareness" (p. 140). This exploratory

action research study attempted to foster that increased awareness in teachers and answer how engaging in consciousness raising professional development affected the diversity awareness of the participating teachers; the gathered qualitative data indicates that guided teacher action plans to increase diversity representation in the classroom did increase these teachers' conscious awareness. The following will address the major themes found in the data.

**Systemic awareness.** From the beginning of the learning experience, Participant One seemed to be operating within the Pseudo-Independence status of Helms's (1995) theory of White Racial Identity development. This status begins the journey into self-identity as a White person; it is characterized by a scaled down positive idea of Whiteness (Helms, 1995; Carter & Goodwin, 1994). Because of her work with her students, she had developed a burgeoning awareness of the inherent racism of the system, though she was still struggling with her role in the system.

With her first classroom change, ensuring more images of diversity in her lessons, she began developing a greater awareness of how deliberate her choices and actions needed to be to promote a socially just classroom atmosphere. As she reflected on this change in the culminating meeting, she said:

I would just kind of grab a picture, paste it on there, and as long as it related to the lesson that would work for me. But after implementing the change to try to make sure that my pictures were showing more diverse spaces, I realized that it actually has to be a very conscientious change because you have to dig a little bit.

With this reflection Participant One shows that she is becoming aware of the racist system in which we are operating; she acknowledges that the first images in a search are 'homogenous' and finding images that more accurately reflect the diversity of the faces of her students takes a purposeful search. On a small scale, with her Google image search, she experienced that, as Vaught and Castagno (2008) assert, racism is systemic, not merely individual. She is beginning

to move beyond what Joyce King (1991) describes dysconsciousness as, that “uncritical habit of mind” that accepts the prevailing system of White dominance without questioning, reflecting, or acknowledging the possibility of alternatives (p. 135). She noted, “Not that it was difficult, it just took a little more time was making sure that my lessons had more culturally diverse images in them.” Making this small change in her planning forced her awareness of an aspect of the racism inherent in the system.

Participant One’s second change, learning the pronunciations of each of her students’ names, also produced an increased systemic awareness. In the culminating meeting she said,

This year, I have a lot of students who are from different parts of Pennsylvania and have a very diverse group of names. So I really wanted to make sure that I knew how to pronounce all their names. I think there’s nothing worse than having your name pronounced wrong for a school year.

She was cognizant of the importance of names, even though she might not have understood the full import. Mispronouncing names, a reflection of one’s culture and family, can be seen as a racial microaggression (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012).

While individual microaggressions may not seem significant, there can be a negative impact from cumulative experiences with this covert form of racism. It can result in children shifting their self-perceptions and world-views, and believing that their culture or aspects of their identity are an inconvenience or are inferior. (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 455)

Participant One went so far as to compile a list of the phonetic pronunciation of each student’s name. She would double check her pronunciations with her students as well.

According to King (1991), “Critical, transformative teachers must develop a pedagogy of social action and advocacy that really celebrates *diversity*, not just random holidays” (p. 134).

Participant One worked towards this by actively welcoming and recognizing the first languages of her students to have a voice in the daily learning.

Participant Two, unlike Participant One, did not appear to have delved as deeply into why classroom changes were needed. This may be due to the fact that she fits well into Helms's (1995) Reintegration phase of White Racial Identity Development when referring to the concept of people being able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

Some of Participant Two's comments indicate a lack of awareness, of consciousness, of the implications of her statements in our racialized society. During the culminating discussion after Participant One spoke of using diverse images in her PowerPoints, Participant Two said, "I think the students would really appreciate that because I do have a lot of inner city kids." She implies that 'inner city' equates with students of color. Later, however, she clarifies, "our inner city students not necessarily just African American but a lot of our inner city students period, they were really excited about this unit and so excited about sharing the different types of adversities that are out there." She was speaking of a unit including Frederick Douglass. She was able to connect the lessons of Frederick Douglass to modern issues that students might be aware of or experiencing. Her second quote, acknowledging that inner city doesn't equate with people of color, shows that she is becoming more conscious of how her words can be construed. Her intent was not to seem dismissive in the use of the term inner city, and when given a chance, she clarified her meaning. However, the initial utterance just serves to illustrate that "particular discursive practices operate to create categories that soon function as taken-for-granted assumptions" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 218).

The unit focusing on Frederick Douglass for Participant Two seemed to promote some increased social awareness, at least for her students:

They were really excited about this unit and so excited about sharing the different types of adversities that are out there. We talked about de-humanization. We talked about being oppressed. We talked about a lot of things that I think hit home to a lot of these

kids still – a lot of the families still. But that’s only sheer luck, I think, because we did Frederick Douglass.

She acknowledges that these discussions only came about, however, because of the content of the unit encouraging them. She noted several times that “we were able to discuss change and acceptance more freely and at a comfortable pace because of the material we are studying together in class.” It was easier for her to address these issues in the context of a Frederick Douglass unit than it would have been in most any other units. She referred to it as “a powerhouse month, I guess you could say, for diversity and culture,” which suggests that she is unaware that all months should be powerhouses for diversity and culture.

**Personal awareness.** Participant Two did experience some burgeoning personal awareness, though it seemed to stem more from the act of discussing classroom changes with Participant One than from her own experiences, saying,

I’ll be honest; I probably would not have done it the same way that you were talking about, [Participant One]. I don’t know that I would have made that conscious effort to do that had I not been a part of this.

This quote was in reference to Participant One making a conscious effort to change up the images she presented in her classroom to reflect more diversity. She also expressed interest in following up by making some of the same changes that Participant One had made:

I really feel like the kids would be represented more if I were to make a better effort at putting appropriate pictures in there. Maybe talking more about diversity, especially through poetry. Maybe go off a little bit and not necessarily work just on the poetry that’s in K12. Maybe find some that are written from different cultures and different perspectives as well for the next unit.

Participant Two has begun to be more personally aware of her role as the teacher in consciously planning and implementing lessons that promote and reflect diversity, moving more towards the Pseudo-Independence stage of Helms’ White Racial Identity (Helms, 1997).

Participant One sharing her experiences with making sure she pronounced all of her students' names correctly also affected Participant Two's awareness. Through her own personal experiences, she can see that knowing pronunciation of students' names is important, but she feels it is at most 'frustrating' to mispronounce a student's name and doesn't see past that to the possible damage it could do to a student.

Participant Two came to a realization through her own changes as well. While she realizes what she perceives as a deficit, she is again remaining focused on herself. Though her desire to speak other languages comes from a desire to better communicate with her students, she does not take into account that these students are already bilingual and able to communicate with her. While an effort on her part to learn their languages would surely be appreciated, these students have already done the hard work of bridging cultures through language. As educators it is now our turn to appreciate and acknowledge the experience and skills these students bring to the classroom.

Participant One's experiences were a bit different than Participant Two's. In addition to becoming aware of the systemic nature of racism and how it affected something as seemingly inconsequential as a Google search through her first change, Participant One also noted that making this change required a conscious effort, an increased personal awareness, on her part. Participant One began to realize that not only was there systemic racism but that it affected her thought process in ways that were at first not very apparent and required conscious rethinking. She was aware of where her initial bias lay, and worked past it to make a decision that was more representative of her student body.

When reflecting on encouraging students to share cognates as part of the vocabulary work, Participant One noted the following:

Just thinking about my students who share if they have maybe their parents speak Spanish or their parents speak another language. I probably would have never known that because I don't know if I would have thought to ask it before. I don't know if I would have asked that question. So I think just being more conscientious about diversity in my classroom is something I really took away from this.

Making these changes in her classroom, pulled an awareness from Participant One. Things she hadn't considered before in the midst of the overwhelming amount of work that teachers have before them, she was able to separate out and think purposefully about diversity as a result of making these changes. She was able to increase her personal awareness of her students and their cultures, showing a move towards Helms' Immersion/Emersion phase of White Racial Identity where the person becomes more self-aware (Helms, 1992).

**Social justice.** When analyzing the gathered data, there were several moments of realization that these changes were bigger than just the classroom. These moments show an awakening to the social justice piece of this research. Participants One and Two both realized that this action research was about more than just meeting a diversity quota; it was about building relationships.

With each of her three changes, Participant One noted how those changes had a deeper impact on her students and her relationship with them. After ensuring images that were more representative of her students, she journaled, "I have a large percentage of African American students, and my hope is that they paid attention a little more when they saw a face that was more similar to theirs." Because she recognized the red-headed Annie was dear to her because of her own red hair, she was able to recognize that seeing images of other students who had similar features to them might be beneficial to her students.

With Participant One's second change of correctly pronouncing all of the names of her students, she noted the following:

I feel like a student's name is part of their identity, so what does that say when we pronounce it wrong? That they are not worth the time for us to take it say it correctly? Since we work in a cyber environment, a student's name is even more powerful. We cannot see our students, we cannot make eye contact with them, or greet them with a gesture. All we have is their name, so we better say it right!

Her tone changes at the thought that her students might think they are not worth the time to have their names pronounced correctly. She is adamant that, particularly in a cyber setting where a name is really the only way we have of connecting directly with a student, we learn to pronounce their names, that part of who they are, correctly. According to Kohli and Solórzano (2012), "A teacher's mispronunciation of a name may seem so insignificant. However, when analyzed through historical racism, the cumulative effect of mis-saying a name intended to instill dignity can diminish its power" (p. 457). She recognizes that a person's name is part of his or her personhood, and, therefore, correctly pronouncing it is a matter of social justice.

According to Participant One, the final change of having students share cognates during vocabulary, "made them feel important and recognized!" Curriculum should empower and promote social change (Chapman, 2013). With this last change, Participant One allowed her curriculum to do just that. She found that: "They really love hearing stuff about themselves. All kids do. I think it made them feel good. Feel special whenever they were able to say my mom speaks Spanish, or my parents speak Spanish, or other languages." She empowered her students to share their home languages and valued their contributions and incorporating them into the curriculum.

Participant Two noted many of the same changes and reactions as did Participant One. She found that "Students are proud of who they are and where they come from." With her changes she offered them chances to participate and share parts of what make them who they are. At the culminating meeting she spoke about how the changes and sharing of diversity helped build a bond in the classroom, not just among the students, but also between her and the students:

So I do feel like the bond has been strengthened. I feel like I know my students better. I feel like they think I care more as opposed to feeling like maybe we go through the motions or whatever of teaching.

By empowering her students to share who they are, she built a supportive, open classroom environment.

**Peer-to-peer learning.** Other than the actual act of implementing classroom changes, another important aspect of this professional development experience was the sharing and learning in the culminating meeting. According to Desimone (2011), collective participation, one of the key components of effective professional development, means that it should work to help build an interactive learning community. The culminating discussion showed this to be true. The conversation between Participants One and Two was peppered with comments like “That’s so cool.” and “I want to steal that.” Because they had this time to talk about and reflect on the changes they had made with each other, they were able to learn from each other’s changes in addition to their own.

Each participant noted at least one particular change from the other that she would like to pursue in her own teaching. Participant One noted:

So, I love your idea about having slides in there that really talks about diversity. Making sure that they know that, again, we might be on the other side of a computer; but we very deeply care about them and want to know more about them. So I want to do more with that this year, more than I have already done.

Participant Two said, “Just thank you, [REDACTED], for getting the idea especially of the pictures. I really love that. I want to do that especially with the poetry unit.” Both Participants carried away from the culminating meeting actual, classroom-tested ideas to further implement to promote diversity awareness in their classrooms.

**Professional development.** Both Participant One and Participant Two spoke in the culminating meeting about the importance of professional development for teachers in this area.

Participant One said:

I'm feeling like it should really be a training for us. It really should be a professional development, especially in our school model and our diverse group of students. We should have more focus on this. I'm so glad I got to participate in this.

She indicated an overall need for more professional development in the area of personal diversity awareness. Participant Two said, "I don't know that I would have implemented it to this level had we not been a part of this." indicating that this type of hands-on professional development, actually implementing change, affected her teaching practice. Participant One also indicated that this type of active professional development might promote more sustained change in the classroom. Becoming aware through this small, focused action research is leading her to more consistent classroom action that has a social justice direction.

### **Generative Impact**

This process will move forward through the continued implementation of changes by the participants. Participant One found that it now feels consistent, saying: "It kind of feels like now that I've done it I'm like, oh, light bulb. Why haven't I been doing this? So that's definitely something that has – that I know I'm going to continue doing." Participant Two also said she'd continue moving forward with her changes and indicated that she'd like to implement some of Participant One's changes as well.

Suggestions to extend the work would be for teachers to take the process to their grade level Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that are already in place. In this way the learning could continue and grow, and the school could use the professional development infrastructure that is already in place. The researcher will reach out to administration with the results from this action research in the hopes that it can be implemented for the entire middle

school. The plan will be for one department, most likely English, to take the lead with the initial action research. They will follow up with each other, before branching off to work through the process with their grade level team of one science, one math, and one history teacher. In this way, there will always be one ‘expert’ in the group who has already completed the process.

### **Limitations**

The qualitative nature of this exploratory study meant that it was specific to the setting and therefore not generalizable to other settings. Another limitation of the study is that it used data from a small sample of 2 teachers. A further limitation is that data were analyzed and described by one researcher.

Should this action research be implemented again, some further considerations should be made. I did not record and analyze the initial learning experience. Although I could recall the general tenor of the conversation and some of the main themes, recording and analyzing the initial learning experience would have given me more insight into the beginning stages of the participants as well as a baseline of awareness for the department as a whole.

This exploratory study only had two participants, which limited the scope of the research and the ability for collaboration. Recruiting more participants would make the culminating discussion more meaningful and powerful. Upon reviewing the journals submitted by the participants, I realized I could have added questions to prompt deeper personal analysis. Adapting the journal prompts to inspire more personal reflection and deeper analysis would help the participants to fully benefit from the experience.

### **Drawing Final Conclusions**

As outlined in Helms (1991) White racial identity theory, there are 6 stages of white racial identity development [contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence,

immersion/emersion, autonomy]. Though the data are limited findings seem to indicate that through purposeful action-based professional development, both Participant One and Participant Two made steps forward in increasing personal awareness. Participant One showed greater awareness on both a social and personal level than did Participant Two, however, probably due to her higher initial consciousness. Participant Two made greater strides towards awareness and effective changes as Participants One and Two spoke in the culminating meeting, though her reflections and analysis were still based in her personal experience as a middle class, White female.

### **What Did I Learn?**

Over the course of this dissertation in practice, I learned many things about academic research and writing, myself as both a researcher and a teacher, and about dysconscious racism in teachers today. As an English teacher, I am used to teaching writing as narrative or expository, to encouraging creative elements such as hooks to draw the reader into the writing. Academic writing eschews those elements of writing for a more verbose and detailed approach. The research portion was also new to me; in my classes we teach a basic research report, but it has very different elements from both a literature review and action research, in which you must analyze and decode your own research.

As an individual, a teacher, and a student, I learned that it had been way too long since I had been on the other side of the metaphorical teacher's desk. I had forgotten what it is that my students are expected to do every day, and losing sight of that as a teacher is a dangerous thing. This process helped me to rediscover myself as a student, thereby inspiring me anew as a teacher. I am now more aware of the importance of engaging my students in the learning process, making it real for them.

This dissertation in practice, of course, also taught me about the topic of my research: dysconscious racism among teachers. Through the gathered data on my two participants, I was able to see a marked increase in awareness and consciousness of their classroom practices. Though it was a small sample, it was a thorough process involving three weeks of gathered data from each teacher.

I also learned about myself through Helms' (1995) racial identity theory. I realize that I probably started this process in the Pseudo-Independence phase, where I was aware of the negatives of White privilege, but I was not actively working against the system. Through the research and reading, I believe I have entered the Immersion-Emersion phase, characterized by an effort to understand the dominant narrative through an active examination of racism and White culture, involving a realistic self-appraisal and the moral re-education of other Whites (Helms, 1994; Carter & Goodwin, 1995).

### **My Leadership Agenda**

The initial phase of the research for this dissertation in practice might be over, but that does not end it all. I intend to continue working with diversity awareness in teachers in the immediate future in my current employment as a middle school English teacher by expanding the action research that I had the participants complete. I will present in our online professional development sessions. In addition, I hope to gain employment as a teacher educator, giving me more access to teachers and preservice teachers from other schools with whom I can continue to impact the field of diversity awareness for teachers.

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## Appendix A: Adapted Beliefs About Diversity Index\*

### Personal Beliefs

- |   |       |         |          |                   |
|---|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. There is nothing wrong with people from different racial backgrounds having/raising children.    |       |         |          |                   |
| 1   | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree  | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 2. America's immigrant and refugee policy has led to the deterioration of America.                  |       |         |          |                   |
| 1   | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree  | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 3. Accepting many different ways of life in America will strengthen us as a nation.                 |       |         |          |                   |
| 1   | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree  | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 4. The reason people live in poverty is that they lack motivation to get themselves out of poverty. |       |         |          |                   |
| 1   | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree  | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 5. People should develop meaningful friendships with others from different racial/ethnic groups.    |       |         |          |                   |
| 1   | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree  | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 6. In general, White people place a higher value on education than do people of color.              |       |         |          |                   |
| 1   | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree  | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 7. It is more important for immigrants to learn English than to maintain their first language.      |       |         |          |                   |
| 1   | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree  | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

### Professional Beliefs

- |  |       |         |          |                   |
|--|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 8. Teachers should not be expected to adjust their preferred mode of instruction to accommodate the needs of all students. |       |         |          |                   |
| 1  | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree   | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 9. The traditional classroom has been set up to support the middleclass lifestyle.   |       |         |          |                   |
| 1  | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree   | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 10. Students and teachers would benefit from having a basic understanding of different (diverse) religions.                |       |         |          |                   |
| 1  | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree   | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 11. All students should be encouraged to become fluent in a second language.   |       |         |          |                   |
| 1  | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree   | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 12. Only schools serving students of color need a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse staff and faculty.          |       |         |          |                   |
| 1  | 2     | 3       | 4        | 5                 |
| Strongly Agree   | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

13. Tests, particularly standardized tests, have frequently been used as a basis for segregating students.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

14. People of color are adequately represented in most textbooks today.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

15. Generally, teachers should group students by ability levels.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

16. Students living in racially isolated neighborhoods can benefit socially from participating in racially integrated classrooms.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

17. Historically, education has been monocultural, reflecting only one reality and has been biased toward the dominant (European) group.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

18. Whenever possible, second language learners should receive instruction in their first language until they are proficient enough to learn via English instruction.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

19. Teachers often expect less from students from the lower socioeconomic class.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

20. Multicultural education is most beneficial for students of color.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

21. Large numbers of students of color are improperly placed in special education classes by school personnel.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

22. In order to be effective with all students, teachers should have experience working with students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

23. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds typically have fewer educational opportunities than their middle-class peers.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

24. Students should not be allowed to speak a language other than English while in school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

25. It is important to consider religious diversity in setting public school policy.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

26. Multicultural education is less important than reading, writing, arithmetic, and computer literacy.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

\*Adopted and adapted from Pohan, C. A., & Aguilar, T. E. (2001). Measuring educators' beliefs about diversity in personal and professional contexts. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(1), 159-182.

## Appendix B: PowerPoint

1  **DID YOU KNOW?**

**A DIVERSITY AWARENESS DISCUSSION**

Dorry Altman

Duquesne University

2  **Take a quick survey to get you thinking.**

The Adapted Beliefs About Diversity Index

Personal Beliefs: influence what you do

Professional Beliefs: what you already put into practice in the classroom

3

*Whiteboard Warm Up:*

*What does diversity mean to you? What does it mean for education and your classroom?*

4  **Diversity:**

**The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.**

5

6

1 • Equality = Sameness

2 • Equity =  
Fairness

7

8  **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

*What small change could you make in your classroom to make a big impact?*

9

Make a commitment to:

- Learn how to pronounce the names of all of your students
- Include more images of diversity in your PowerPoints
- Use more diverse names/situations in your examples
- Critically review how you adapt your modes of instruction to meet the needs of all of your students.
- When making small groups, purposefully mix ability levels.
- When introducing new vocabulary ask for students who speak another language to share the word in their language.
- Examine your curriculum to see how/if people of color are represented.
- 

Are you willing to try it?

10  **THE FOCUS GROUP WILL:**

- Complete a weekly journal answering what change you implemented, what you learned from it, and how it affected your students.
- Agree to come back in three weeks to discuss the small changes they made and how they affected their classrooms.

## Appendix C: Small Group Discussion Prompts

### Personal Beliefs

1. Why do people stay in poverty? Why don't they pull themselves out of poverty?
2. Describe the typical person who places the highest value on education.
3. Does it matter if you have friends from different racial/ethnic groups? Why?

### Professional Beliefs

4. What type of student is the typical classroom set up to support?
5. Does learning about other religions in school matter? Other cultures? Other languages? Why?
6. Does your curriculum adequately represent people of color?
7. Who benefits most from multicultural education? Why?

## **Appendix D: Small Change Ideas Prompted From Survey**

4. Learn how to pronounce the names of all of your students.
5. Include more images of diversity in your PowerPoints.
6. Use more diverse names/situations in your examples.
7. Critically review how you adapt your modes of instruction to meet the needs of all of your students.
8. When making small groups, purposefully mix ability levels.
9. When introducing new vocabulary, ask for students who speak another language to share the word in their language.
10. Examine your curriculum to see if/how people of color are represented.

## Appendix E: Letter to Participants

Dear English Department Colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the action research focus group. You can rescind your participation at any point in the process, and your data will not be gathered.

As I'm sure many of you know, I am working on my Education Doctorate at Duquesne University with my dissertation advisor Dr. Anne Marie FitzGerald. As part of my dissertation in practice I am interested in learning more about the diversity awareness of teachers, and I would like your help.

For this action research focus group, you will be responsible for the following:

1. Implementing one small change in your classroom for three weeks
2. Journaling once weekly to record the affect the change is having on you and your students
3. Attending a focus group meeting after three weeks to discuss your findings

The small change could be to:

- Learn how to pronounce the names of all of your students.
- Include more images of diversity in your PowerPoints.
- Use more diverse names/situations in your examples.
- Critically review how you adapt your modes of instruction to meet the needs of all of your students.
- When making small groups, purposefully mix ability levels.
- When introducing new vocabulary ask for students who speak another language to share the word in their language.
- Examine your curriculum to see how/if people of color are represented.
- Do something else of your choice.

Your journal should be in electronic format (Microsoft Word) and be an informal chronicling of the change you've made and its effect on you and your students. You should journal one time each of the three weeks and answer the following three questions:

1. What change did you implement this week?
2. What did you learn from this change?
3. How did this change affect your students?

The focus group meeting will be held following the third week of your action research during a convenient time. More information on that will follow.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Dorry Altman

## Appendix F: Focus Group Outline\*

### Welcome

Introduce self

### Our Topic Is . . .

Briefly review project

The results will be used for a doctoral dissertation under the direction of Dr. Anne Marie FitzGerald.

You volunteered to participate in this portion of the study. Thank you.

### Guidelines

No right or wrong answers, only differing viewpoints

We're recording, only one person speaking at a time

We're on a first name basis

You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views.

My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion.

Talk to each other.

### Opening Questions

What changes, if any, did you observe in your classroom from implementing the one small change?

What changes, if any, did you note in your teaching from implementing the one small change?

\*Adopted and adapted from Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix G: Consent to Participate



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** Action to Awareness: Surfacing dysconscious racism through focused professional development
- INVESTIGATOR:** Dorry Altman  
[daltman@duq.edu](mailto:daltman@duq.edu)
- ADVISOR:** (if applicable) Dr. Anne Marie FitzGerald  
412A Canevin Hall  
Duquesne University  
600 Forbes Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA, 15282  
413-396-2592
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in The School of Education at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate how engaging in consciousness raising professional development affects the diversity awareness of participating teachers.
- In order to qualify for participation, you must be:
- A current teacher at the school
  - In the English Department

**PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:**

To participate in this study, you will be asked to: choose a small change you can make in your classroom for two weeks that reflects your diversity awareness and keep a weekly journal about how the change affects you and your students. Following making the change, you will come together with others who made similar changes and share your experiences in a focus group.

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

There are minimal risks associated with this participation but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. A benefit for participation in this research, is an increase in self-awareness of diversity issues surrounding oneself as an educator.

**COMPENSATION:**

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Your participation in this study and any personal information that you provide will be kept confidential at all times and to every extent possible.

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. Any study materials with personal identifying information will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed.

A recording will be made of the focus group meeting through Blackboard. Your identity in the recording is kept anonymous, as you are listed as participant number and not by name.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time by discontinuing the survey completion. At which time your data will no longer be counted towards the final survey results.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Dorry Altman at xxx-xxx-xxxx or Dr. Anne Marie FitzGerald at 413.396.2592. Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may call Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at 412.396.1886.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date