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Bias Awareness In Secondary Students: Reactions To Hidden Prejudices

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BIAS AWARENESS IN SECONDARY STUDENTS:
REACTIONS TO HIDDEN PREJUDICES

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work first to my family – Eddie, Conner, and Josie. Eddie, I'm sorry it cost so much money, but it was worth every penny. Conner and Josie, thank you for not being too embarrassed of your mom. I love you very much. I'd also like to thank my Chapin High School family. I literally could not have maintained the stamina to finish if it hadn't been for your friendship and support. Finally, Dr. Ross, I'd like to thank you for talking me into doing this in the first place.

ABSTRACT

Implicit aptitudes are an inherent part of every person, but rarely are these subconscious biases acknowledged or discovered. Not only is their existence rarely acknowledged, on the off chance that awareness exists, rarely is the effort made to determine how they affect overt behavior. Perhaps acknowledging these implicit aptitudes and their effects on behavior can enable people to reflect on what they actually believe. Over the course of one semester 23 students enrolled in an English 2 Honors class were asked to take a race-based IAT in addition to being taught a curriculum embedded with self-leadership skills and multicultural texts. This study sought to determine what implicit aptitudes were held by these predominately White high school students, and if an awareness of these implicit aptitudes along with a purposeful English Language Arts curriculum would increase their cultural sensitivity. Ultimately, it was determined that awareness of implicit aptitudes by these students did increase their cultural awareness and sensitivity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALA	Academic Leadership Academy
AP	Advanced Placement
CCL.....	Center for Creative Leadership
CHS.....	Chapin High School
ELA.....	English Language Arts
IAT	Implicit Aptitude Test

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The hierarchy of one race over another race was formally institutionalized in the United States during the Antebellum period, and the eventual dissolution of the legal enslavement of humans and the long fight for civil rights that followed did little to undo this hegemony that was previously established (Gold, 2004). Arguably, 154 years after human enslavement was made illegal in the United States of America, the country is still suffering the effects of the hegemony that was created during the era of legalized slavery, and because schools are only a microcosm of society, they are also suffering these effects. For a variety of reasons this notion of “Whiteness” as dominant was normalized within the United States, even by those who attempted to study marginalized racial groups simply by creating the binary structure of “non-White” in opposition to White (Guess, 2006). One such effect, and the one most prominent for this study, is the implicit bias White people hold in regard to people of color.

According to a timeline created by Teaching Tolerance (2018), which is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, the fight to desegregate schools began and was denied as early as 1849 when “The Massachusetts Supreme Court rule[d] that segregated schools [were] permissible under the state's constitution. (*Roberts v. City of Boston*). This pre-Civil War Massachusetts Supreme Court case was later used as precedent for the

more familiar Federal Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, establishing the “separate but equal” doctrine¹ that was not overturned by the Federal Supreme Court until *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* in 1954². Although the Court followed this 1954 ruling a year later with the admonition that desegregation was to proceed with “all deliberate speed,” *Teaching Tolerance* (2018) indicated that desegregation didn’t reach an all-time high until 1988.

Frankenberg and Lee (2002), who conducted research as part of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, found “virtually all school districts analyzed are showing lower levels of inter-racial exposure since 1986, suggesting a trend towards resegregation” (p. 4). Ultimately there were several causes of this resegregation including a trend toward neighborhood schools, but as Orfield and Lee (2006) suggested, “the return to neighborhood schools calls for greater increased focus on residential integration but that has not occurred” (p. 32). At Chapin High School, it was this concept of a neighborhood

¹ In 1896 the Supreme Court heard the case of *Homer Plessy* who, as a person of color, was removed from a first class seat aboard a train in Louisiana. This case upheld the 1890 Louisiana law that stated “railway companies carrying passengers in their coaches in that State, [were] to provide equal, but separate, accommodations for the white and colored races, by providing two or more passenger coaches for each passenger train, or by dividing the passenger coaches by a partition so as to secure separate accommodations; and providing that no person shall be permitted to occupy seats in coaches other than the ones assigned to them, on account of the race they belong to.” This verdict cemented the separate but equal doctrine which determined that White people and people of color could be legally segregated as long as accommodations were also provided for the people of color. While this doctrine was applied to many areas of life, the area relevant to this study is education.

² In 1954 the Supreme Court heard the case of *Oliver Brown et. al. against the Topeka, Kansas Board of Education* in regard to desegregating public schools. The Supreme Court voted in favor of Brown, which began the decades long process of desegregating public school effectively overturning the precedent of *Plessy v. Ferguson*’s separate but equal doctrine. While this ruling affected other areas of public life, the case was directly related to the segregation occurring in public schools.

school that, in part, explained its lack of diversity as the town itself lacked diversity. While often this phenomenon was a result of White flight from other neighborhoods or gentrification, in the case of Chapin, the town began as a predominately White town, and has simply never segregated. Ultimately this meant that the teachers at these resegregated schools must make a more conscious effort to bring cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity to our homogenously grouped students. In the absence of integrated neighborhoods and communities, the students of Chapin High School were limited in their exposure to people of color.

Problem of Practice

These students did not come to school as tabula rasa or vessels to be filled with knowledge (Locke, 1689; Freire, 1971). They came complete with the biases inherited from their society, which often inhibited their ability to see a variety of issues from the perspectives of others. As mentioned previously, schools were only microcosms of the society in which they were situated, and they therefore came complete with societal constructs firmly in place. Such a societal construct that inhibited these primarily White students from understanding the struggle of people of color was their firm belief that simply by working hard you achieved and that the playing field was truly level. A problem within my practice then was creating an environment where they could acknowledge their implicit biases, so they could begin to see the flaws in the societal constructs in which they have faith, in an effort to move beyond to a more realistic world-view. Also, while not necessarily a problem of practice, it was important to note that in order for this research to be effective at all the “fundamentally *narrative* character” of

education must shift to create an environment of co-learning through which the students become aware of their own unique place within the paradigm (Friere, 1970, p. 71).

To further explain this problem of practice, as White students, they had never been asked to question their constructs, as their constructs have been normalized by United States society. The projections they have viewed through their families and through media perpetuate the normalcy of Whiteness especially as opposed to other-ness. In other words, as stated by Nishi, Matias, and Montoya (2015), “The accumulated wealth and privilege of whites develops a social caste-like system that unfairly privileges whites as the dominant caste while simultaneously normalizing their perspectives, ideologies, and behaviors” (p. 460). Not only were these students unaware of biases they held, but it was likely that even upon realizing their biases they may not understand them due to the normalization of their Whiteness. To exacerbate this problem of practice, often these White students were not equipped to move beyond guilt and anger as I occasionally witnessed when teaching issue fiction by and about people of color. These White students felt very deeply the wrongs being perpetrated against protagonists of color, but due to their lack of preparation were unable to see their role in either the wrong itself or the righting of the wrong as applied to society beyond the fictional account being discussed in their English class. They needed to become aware of their status as oppressor in order to see the oppressor and oppressed relationship more clearly before they could build the capacity to affect positive change in their own lives or their communities (Freire 1970).

One way to have these White students explore their beliefs was to expose to them their implicit aptitudes and discuss ways in which these biases developed and how they often manifested themselves in our actions without our conscious intention to do so. At

the school where I teach, the population of both teachers and students was primarily White. Of our student body, 10% are students of color, and of that 10% only about half consider themselves Black or mixed race with Black being also indicated. To really bring these numbers to the forefront of the discussion, of the approximately 1350 students at this high school 67 were either Black or mixed race with Black being one of the races indicated and 135 total were students of color. Like most White people, especially White people in such a homogenous area, these 1215 White children were rarely taken out of their comfort zones in terms of race relations, and like most White people they were unaware of the privilege that this afforded because they have simply never had to consider it. This cultural hegemony as was described by Gramsci as "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" was simply a concept that was so much a part of their lives that they had never been asked to consider it (Lears, 1985). I knew life outside of Chapin, SC and beyond high school into college and the work force was likely to be very different for them though, and I wanted to begin these conversations about status quo and hegemony while they were still in a safe environment with an educator who cared about their wellbeing and was forgiving of the mistakes and assumptions they made. I needed to create an environment where the problem of cultural sensitivity and its constituent constructs was posed, so as equals my pupils and I could move towards an understanding together (Freire, 1970).

In addition to creating a safe environment that was conducive to hosting honest conversations about hegemony, I also had to choose materials that fostered these conversations and thus the awareness and growth of the students. As an English teacher, I

had standards that tended to be application-based (S.C. Dept. of Education, 2015), so I had some autonomy in choosing the texts to which they were applied. However, my hands were somewhat tied in terms of societal expectations about classical and literary texts that the students were expected to read in order to be considered “well-read” (Lauter, 1983). A comprehensive list of texts the College Board had suggested for the open ended questions on their AP Literature and Composition exam since the early 1970s showed a list of primarily White male authors (ALBERT, 2017). The English Language Arts curriculum, in general, was often biased and teachers were expected to teach what many consider a race neutral curriculum; thereby reinforcing the biases and stereotypes White students have about certain racialized population. As such, White children rarely had opportunities to challenge the biases and stereotypes they had. In fact, in a recently published article in *The Washington Post*, Viet Thanh Nguyen (2018), the English Chair at the University of Southern California, detailed his frustration as a PhD candidate in 1992 by saying, “I told the English department chairman, a famous Americanist, that I wanted to write a dissertation on Vietnamese and Vietnamese American literature. ‘You can’t do that,’ he said, fretting over my ambition to teach in a university English department. ‘You won’t get a job.’ Since even my Marxist mentor agreed with the chair, I took the safer route and wrote a dissertation on Asian American literature, a subject in which *some* people had gotten tenure-track professorial positions.” It was no longer the 1990s, but many of these same values regarding literature were firmly in place, and if this was the general attitude at the university level, it was certain to trickle down into secondary instruction.

This scenario was both exacerbated and alleviated with this particular group of Academic Leadership Academy students. As pre-AP honors students, their matriculation would lead directly to Advanced Placement Literature. Thus these students were expected to have an in-depth knowledge of many canonical texts from which to choose on the open-ended question, and my school expected this acquisition of texts to begin occurring at the onset of high school as freshmen. While the texts the College Board considered literary had certainly expanded in recent years to include more texts that were not written by British White males, it was still heavily focused on texts that were. As Jeanne Dyches (2017) states, although text choices were expanding, “British presence in the secondary English classroom has actually managed to preserve a remarkable stasis” (p. 301). What made this particular group of honors students unique, however, was that as part of a leadership academy it was also expected that they be exposed to texts, typically non-fiction texts, which would expand their self-awareness and their understanding of their place in the world around them in addition to the more traditional canonical fiction texts.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to help a selected cohort of White students to become aware of their biases and as a result their often unintended stereotypes of all marginalized populations, and in the context of this particular study more specifically Black people.

The following questions are advanced for this study:

- 1) What implicit aptitudes do these predominantly White high school children possess that may affect their cultural sensitivity?

- 2) How would the awareness of implicit bias, along with a curriculum infused with multicultural media and introspective self-leadership skills over the course of a semester, increase White high school students' ability to discuss culturally sensitive topics in a manner that showed increased cultural sensitivity?

Significance of the Study

While one of the potential weaknesses was the transferability of this study, if it was found that the outcomes could be helpful to other educators, the possibilities for affecting positive social change could be limitless. Just the basic ability to understand how one's subconscious was formed and how one's subconscious affected one's conscious actions could be a profound turning point in any person's life, but it also had the potential to open up one's ability to be honest about beliefs and thereby participate in honest conversations about those beliefs. These transparent conversations were the only way to progress through the decades old cyclical racism in which our country had been embroiled. In a study conducted by Eliasoph (1999), she noted that "pulling the thread of polite avoidance out of conversations about race could open up the civic forum to conversation about other political problems as well, not because racism is the deep basis of other political problems, but because the civic etiquette that encourages good citizens to avoid confronting racism also helps them avoid discussing the rest of the world's problem" (p. 498).

While I was choosing to focus primarily on race and ethnic identity for my study in an effort to keep my variables to a minimum, the IATs had tests on a variety of implicit aptitudes including gender, sexuality, weight, religion, and etc. As I mentioned,

this country seems to have a difficult time discussing race relations in such a way where positive change could actually occur, but race was not the only deficient area.

Conversations about the rights of the LGBTQ community were also at a seeming standstill, as were the conversations in regard to religious freedom, women's roles in the workplace, and even how to discuss people's weight. If this study was successful in its efforts to illustrate the positive benefit of classroom-based discussion on issues of exclusion and oppression, understanding the general need for such conversations could be transferred to other topics as well as other classrooms. There was the potential to create a group of young people who will be able to further these conversations in addition to conversations about race in productive ways as they come of age in college and in the work force.

Methodology

As an educator, I conduct informal action research on a regular basis. For this dissertation in practice, the action research was necessarily more formalized, but still based on a problem noted within my professional practice. This particular action research used a mixed methodology that weighed heavily toward qualitative analysis of student responses. The quantitative nature of this research was a metric of growth between the initial IAT and the IAT that followed the initiatives.

The participants in this study consisted of 23 English 2 Honors students enrolled in the Academic Leadership Academy at Chapin High School. Of these 23 students, 20 are freshmen and three are sophomores. They ranged in age from 14 to 16 by the end of the first academic semester. 11 of them were male and 12 were female, so the class was

almost equally divided by sex. However, of these children 20 of them self-identified as White, one self-identified as Black, one self-identified as Asian, and one self-identified as Native-American, making the class 87% White and 13% students of color. The percentage of White children in this class was similar to the overall student body population which was 90% White.

I compiled baseline data on the children by asking them to answer survey questions about their racial and ethnic identities, and because part of my goal here was to make them understand the subconscious biases of which they may not have been aware, I also asked them to take Implicit Aptitude Tests (IATs). These tests were created by a group of university researchers who were interested in “implicit social cognition - thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control” (Project Implicit, 2011). These tests were essentially computer based speed association tests of both pictures and words. Unfortunately, as Blanton, Jaccard, Strauts, Mitchell, and Tetlock (2015) point out, the IAT uses “arbitrary metrics,” and is therefore not currently reliable in terms of quantitative information (para. 4). This would have little effect on my research question however, as my purpose was not to determine how much bias existed, but rather if one existed at all and how it affected conscious thought. IATs exist to determine a wide variety of biases, but for the purpose of this study I only intended to have them take the Race IAT and the Skin-tone IAT. As a part of the survey, they uploaded their IAT results and provided an initial written reaction to them as part of the survey mentioned earlier.

The theoretical framework for my research was based on critical pedagogy as expounded upon by Freire’s (1971) work. It was important to note the role of educator

and student as co-learner in working together in recognizing the status quo for what it is in an attempt to affect revolutionary change, as well as noting the relationship between oppressor and oppressed in the creation and perpetuation of the status quo and cultural hegemony that existed.

Potential Weaknesses

This study had many potential weaknesses, but the first and perhaps most damaging would be if I was wrong in my assumption that these children have implicit aptitudes that affected their cultural sensitivity. I have formed my belief based on my own experience, the experience of my other students who have taken IATs, and the experiences of both the author and subjects of *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (2005). However, I must accept the fact these new students may not have been affected by their surroundings in the same way the rest of us have. In spite of this potential weakness, I still think the study could be valuable. If they simply showed no biases at all, then perhaps I could work towards creating positive implicit aptitudes rather than simply seeking to diminish the negative implicit aptitudes I was anticipating them to have.

Another potential weakness of this study was my assumption that exposure to their implicit biases and subsequent classroom conversations among pupils and teacher that were tied to curriculum would have an impact on their cultural sensitivity at all. Because these aptitudes were indeed implicit, and because they were formed over the course of 14 years of exposure to elements that created these biases and were unlikely to have been removed from the lives of the children, it may have been presumptuous of me

to think that five months of any purposeful activity could have an impact other than simple awareness. However, I still felt that simple awareness was nothing to scoff at. Perhaps it would not prove my thesis, but knowing that these children would at the very least be more aware in the end than they were in the beginning was still a starting point for the bigger picture.

The transferability of this study was also another potential weakness. When placing students into uncomfortable situations such as this, it was imperative that the right instructor be involved and trained in the methodology. This was not a curriculum where one size fits all; therefore, the ability of another teacher to effectively recreate the appropriate environment was of paramount importance in the replicable success of the study. The type of appropriate classroom would have some elements that were givens such as being nonjudgmental, being willing to entertain politically incorrect statements made out of innocence or ignorance, and being willing to face your own implicit aptitudes. Other elements may depend on the students and teachers involved and may vary from teacher to teacher, from class to class, and from school to school. Even my ability to replicate this study with a different group of students would be something I would have to carefully consider based on age, ability, and the desire to have their beliefs questioned.

Key Words/Glossary

Bias – prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

Center for Creative Leadership – CCL has been conducting original scientific research in the field of leadership development for nearly 50 years and currently owns the largest leadership research database in the world. Our mission is to leverage evidence-based science to accelerate leadership performance for the benefit of society worldwide. We specialize in big-picture, original, and cutting edge thinking that directly shapes our clients' best practices while creating new knowledge (Center for Creative Leadership, 2017).

Ethnicity – the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition.

Hegemony – 1) preponderant influence or authority over others; 2) the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group

Implicit Aptitude – 1) implied though not plainly expressed 2) a natural ability to do something. An implicit aptitude is a natural inclination toward or against something that is implied rather than overtly expressed.

Implicit Aptitude Test – The Implicit Aptitude Test (IAT) is a speed association test created by Project Implicit to determine a person's implicit aptitude or subconscious bias.

Project Implicit – Project Implicit is a non-profit organization and international collaboration between researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition - thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control. Project Implicit was founded in 1998 by three scientists – Tony Greenwald, Mahzarin Banaji, and Brian Nosek (Project Implicit, 2011).

Cultural Hegemony – Cultural dominance or ascendancy; the predominance of a particular set of cultural norms; specifically (in Marxist theory) the cultural domination of a society by a ruling class which imposes or inculcates its own ideas, values, etc., thereby ensuring acceptance of the status quo by other classes.

Race – “Scientists generally do not recognize races as biologically meaningful. Yet scientists, including me, discuss race and describe the racial composition of our samples. To be clear, I am not advocating that we ignore race. In fact, there are many dangers in ignoring race as a social topic. Race is “real”. But race is socially real, not biologically real. Socially important categories can be very real and meaningful, but arguably nonetheless arbitrary in nature” (Hodson, 2016).

Social Awareness – the ability to comprehend and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds in an effort to better improve interaction.

Conclusion

Teenagers have a lack of awareness into their implicit aptitudes, how those implicit aptitudes were formed, and most important how those implicit aptitudes could manifest themselves in explicit ways in spite of how they tended to believe on a conscious level (Kirwan Institute 2015). It is likely these young people, who were still in formative states, when made aware of these biases, could make more informed decisions, or at the very least understand their decisions and responses to the existence of others. The purpose of this study was to determine if this was indeed the case, especially when paired with an intentional curriculum that would bolster self-leadership and multicultural awareness. Because these were my students, and I was personally invested in their

success, it was imperative that I was transparent about my position as a researcher in relation to the students in this study.

As previously mentioned, I believed I was entering new territory by bringing together the study of implicit aptitude, multicultural awareness, and self-leadership skills among a teenage population – especially a White teenage population. This was the very reason I have to forge forward even if it means piecing together other studies and simply being reflexive in my action research to keep my results as authentic as possible in spite of my close association to the research itself.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There appeared to be a dearth of research in regard to determining how White high school aged children respond when confronted with their implicit biases in combination with a culturally sensitive curriculum and a leadership curriculum focused on understanding of self and relationships. There did, however, appear to be a great deal of research that indicated prejudice was a result of both explicit and implicit biases, and that these prejudices did have an impact on individuals, groups of people, and society at large. There was also a great deal of research indicating that focused, culturally sensitive curriculum is beneficial to children of all races and ethnic backgrounds including the White students I was trying to reach.

The purpose with this literature review was to study the constituent elements of what I wanted my research to be based around, so the study could be designed to further the body of knowledge that already existed, rather than simply replicating existing research. Essentially the problem of practice existed in creating such a curriculum as previously described in conjunction with the expectation that as pre-AP students it was also expected they be taught from the canon. Most canonical texts that were considered age appropriate tended to lack any real diversity. I was also conscious of my audience, and I wanted them to feel safe holding conversations about a very sensitive topic, made

more so because they were primarily White students who were privileged, and “guilt and shame are also common reactions of White individuals to societal inequality and White privilege,” so I chose my multicultural pieces in such a way as to allow the expression of any guilt or tension, but which would not prevent them from moving past these emotions which could inhibit honest conversation and true growth. (Torino, 2015, p. 297).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research and this literature review was based on Freirean critical pedagogy (1971). On the one hand it was important to acknowledge the relationship between oppressor and oppressed in the creation and perpetuation of the status quo hegemony that existed. On the other hand it was also important to acknowledge the role of educator and student in perpetuating that status quo, or in the case of this study the role of student and educator working together in recognizing the status quo for what it is in an attempt to affect revolutionary change.

Developing a social consciousness as a first step to taking action, or as Freire (1971) called it, *conscientização*, was literally the crux of this study (p. 35). Freire’s claim was that “one of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness,” which insinuated that the maintenance of the status quo is actually maintained through our implicit aptitudes leading our overt actions (p. 51). This study intended to have students recognize these implicit aptitudes to begin developing their social awareness. Although Freire focused his theories on the people he terms the oppressed, and these White students were arguably more akin to the people he terms the

oppressors, he does note their intertwined condition in the maintenance of this status quo. Also, although these were White students, as children, it could also be argued that they could be considered oppressed in a loose interpretation of the term as a result of their age. Either way, Freire cautioned us that “discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish...[and] rationalizing [of] his guilt,” which meant for this study to be successful these White students had to be brought into social consciousness purposefully with caring and understanding (p. 49).

Unfortunately, the United States schooling system, with its focus on standards-based instruction and high stakes evaluation of the acquisition of those standards by the students, was very similar to Freire’s (1971) analogy of education as a “banking” system in which teachers “deposit” information into student “receptacles,” which did not readily allow for purposeful curriculum that led to social consciousness (p. 72). In spite of best intentions, teachers are, in part, required to follow these guidelines else their pupils fall behind their peers and thus fail to access further educational opportunities. However, teachers may also, in part, follow the constructivist teaching for which Freire advocates. With constructivist teaching and learning, or what Freire (1971) terms problem-posing education, “people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves” (p. 83). Purposeful curriculum could cover required standards as well as pose problems that teachers and students muddle through together in an effort to discover the derivation of the problem suggested so both teacher and student can move toward social consciousness.

Implicit Aptitudes

Blink by Malcolm Gladwell (2005) should be mentioned here. The overall premise of this book dealt with how the subconscious can often drive conscious actions when faced with fight or flight scenarios, and that people were not always aware of what those subconscious biases might be. Chapter three of this book introduced the reader to the Implicit Aptitude Tests, which were the tests I used to establish the biases of my students. IATs were computer-based speed tests developed by Harvard researchers through Project Implicit “whose research produced new ways of understanding attitudes, stereotypes and other hidden biases that influence perception, judgment, and action (Project Implicit, 2011). Not only did this book explain the IATs in a simplistic way appropriate for high school age children, but it also provided several examples of when implicit aptitudes affected the fight or flight responses of individuals in ways that were detrimental.

A study conducted by Rudman, Phelan, and Heppen (2007) discussed exactly how implicit aptitudes were developed and how they affected explicit, yet subconscious, behaviors. Although this particular article dealt with smoking and eating habits, the concept of implicit bias could be transferred from this particular topic to any unconscious belief. A key conclusion drawn during this research by Rudman, Phelan, and Heppen (2007) is “that implicit attitudes [are] informed by early (and likely affective experiences) more so than recent events...thus, implicit measures can reveal aspects of an attitude object that are likely to be overlooked when self-reports are the sole means of assessment” which was an important reason to utilize the IATs in addition to self-reporting in order to tap into the subconscious aptitudes of the subjects (p. 1711). While

this study provided an explanation of how implicit aptitudes were formed, it did little to explain how to combat them once acknowledged.

Another study conducted by Greenwald and Rudman (2002) discussed the integration of cognitive constructs with affective constructs, which were both concepts that have been studied often in isolation but rarely as coexisting theories at this time. In Greenwald and Rudman's (2002) assessment "this article set out to develop a theoretical integration of social psychology's most important cognitive constructs (stereotype and self-concept) with its most important affective constructs (attitude and self-esteem)" (p. 21). Greenwald and Rudman attempted here to create one theoretical framework using several existing theories in both camps and update them to reflect a growing interest in social cognition and balanced identity. Although this was not a research study in and of itself, it was a discussion close to one of my own theories, which was that these concepts must be examined in coordination with one another rather than in isolation from one another. A person's explicit beliefs and actions along with her implicit aptitudes must both be taken into account when attempting to create a curriculum that would affect any type of lasting impact.

For an example of how subconscious biases could affect an individual's perception one could reference the work of Claude Steele, specifically his theory of stereotype threat. "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans" by Steele and Aronson (1995) explored how stereotypes could have a negative impact on the people who had been stereotyped beyond the obvious. Specifically, Steele and Aronson (1995) evaluated the vulnerability of Black students when they lived the self-fulfilling prophesy of being subconsciously conditioned to

believe they were going to underperform due to their racial identity. Steele and Aronson (1995) state “the present experiments show that making African American participants vulnerable to judgment by negative stereotypes about their group's intellectual ability depressed their standardized test performance relative to White participants, while conditions designed to alleviate this threat, improved their performance, equating the two groups once their differences in SATs were controlled” which only serves to further Peggy McIntosh’s (1990) converse notion of White Privilege (p. 808). In theory, White students would face no discernable stereotype threat in regard to demographic information regarding race in these testing scenarios.

Culturally Sensitive Curriculum

Lauren Leigh Kelly (2013) described how she incorporated hip-hop lyrics into her classroom and why this was an important genre of literature to explore with today’s youth. Kelly (2013) stated “the absence of hip-hop literacy in education does not only harm minority students [, but] it also deprives white students of the opportunity to learn about others” (p. 53). Her theory was that not only does including hip-hop as its own form of literature validate the students for whom hip-hop is a way of life, typically children who are African American but not necessarily, but it could also shed some light on these same children for the students who do not listen to hip-hop or for whom hip-hop lifestyles felt foreign. This genre of literature is for her a safe way to both validate and expose within the context of an English classroom.

Kelly (2013) was very careful to point out though that because there was a distinct disconnect between formal education and the cultural awareness of the vast majority of

the students it was imperative that if hip-hop music was used in the classroom it must be used as its own form of literature and not used as a springboard to interest students in another piece of classical literature. The connection between the themes of contemporary music, including hip-hop, and canonical literature was slim at best, but pairing the two often had a detrimental effect in terms of validating the culture as seen in the music because it was juxtaposed as less than the classic text which was still viewed as superior in this type of lesson.

One specific lesson Kelly described was the use of “Homecoming” by Kanye West and “I Used to Love H.E.R.” by Common to teach extended metaphor. In order to understand the metaphor in the songs the students would need to understand what the songs themselves were saying. Kelly (2013) revealed that this conversation about “Homecoming” in particular “led to a discussion of family structure, abandonment, role models, and expectations” (p. 52). While this same conversation could have been had using any piece of poetry, the fact that it was being had surrounding a hip-hop song led to a focus on those topics as seen in the song which was arguably more emblematic of the students in general. The overarching point in this lesson though was that Kelly did not teach these songs as part of a lesson on hip-hop, but rather used them as part of a lesson on extended metaphor therefore integrating them organically. This organic integration helped to validate the legitimacy of hip-hop as a genre worthy of actual study using the English standards themselves as a springboard, yet also having the ancillary effect of promoting conversations about the lyrics of the songs as well.

In addition to hip-hop lyrics many teachers were also attempting to incorporate more young adult fiction with racially and ethnically diverse protagonists. While this in

and of itself was not a bad attempt at fostering multicultural awareness, a study conducted by Groenke, Haddix, Glenn, Kirkland, Price-Dennis, and Coleman-King (2015) cautioned teachers to be careful of their inclusion of certain pieces of young adult literature with protagonists of color because they could perpetuate certain social constructs and false stereotypes if not handled properly in the educational environment thus having an ironically detrimental effect. Groenke, Haddix, Glenn, Kirkland, Price-Dennis, and Coleman-King (2015) note after much conversation and contemplation on the issue “that if we are to disrupt commonly held assumptions about adolescence/ts, we must both trouble the adolescent label and examine raced understandings and representations of adolescence [and a] failure to do both can result in the continued normalization and privileging of White constructions of adolescence, both in YAL and in life” (p. 38).

Their point was specifically about the notion of typical adolescent behavior in direct juxtaposition with the social constructs of what is seen as the typical behavior of youth of color and how this apex was more problematic for youth of color than the typical White adolescent. In other words, the adolescent experience was supposed to be, according to our social construct of such in the United States, a time marked by “storm and stress” as articulated by Stanley Hall in the early 1900s, and a time where one begins to assert one’s independence in order to grow from “savage to human” through the use of appropriate outlets.

This was accepted as the norm for adolescents, but when the social constructs typically associated with individuals of color, especially young men, were considered these traditionally accepted norms were no longer accepted. Groenke, Haddix, Glenn,

Kirkland, Price-Dennis, and Coleman-King (2015) expressed this best by saying, “when youth of color ‘resist’ or ‘rebel against’ the status quo in or outside of school, they become criminals – “public enemies,” “menaces to society.” Similarly youth of color do not have “normal” curiosities about sex or natural sex drives; instead they are “hypersexual,” oversexed, their desires base and carnal” (p. 36). While this was a problem in society’s thinking and not an actual representation of how these young people were in reality, the point here was that it was best to use caution when choosing texts such as Sapphire’s *Push* (1996) or Walter Dean Myers’s *Monster* (1999) to create multicultural awareness so that stereotypical social constructs were not inadvertently perpetuated instead. Conversely, teachers could also choose such texts for the purpose of having students, especially White students, deconstruct negative images and stereotypes that perpetuate in regard to people of color. Another option would be to include texts that have characters of color, or other non-normative, characters who were not emblematic of perpetuated stereotypes at all, but rather simply were. Nicola Yoon, author of *Everything, Everything*, a young adult text in which the protagonist was mixed race, but not for the purpose of the plot line, states in regard to young adult fiction that “issue books are important...but there’s another kind of book too: the *non-issue* book” (2015).

The same caution Groenke, Haddix, Glenn, Kirkland, Price-Dennis, and Coleman-King (2015) explain was also reiterated by Metzger, Box, and Blasingame (2013) in regard to choosing literature that appropriately portrays Native Americans. In response to parent concerns that Native American culture was being vastly unrepresented at Westwood High School in Mesa, Arizona, Andrea Box collaborated with a local university in an attempt to rectify this problem. Metzger, Box, and Blasingame (2013)

stated specifically that “one way we can integrate students’ culture into the curriculum is through literature; however, we must be aware that some authors, through ignorance or neglect, overlook important cultural aspects of a tribe and misrepresent them” (p. 57). Because of the dearth of Native American literature in general – at one point in the study a student noted “her 2,000-page literature textbook only had two Native American stories in it, and they were both abridged versions of creation stories” (Metzger, Box, and Blasingame, 2013, p. 59) – the secondary classroom teacher ultimately turned this reading assignment into a research assignment first. Many of the students, themselves Native Americans, were surprised to realize how little actual history they knew about their own tribes, so ultimately this particular lesson was of especial importance to these young people in particular. Eventually the instructor opted to teach *Code Talker* by Joseph Bruchac once the necessary prior knowledge was established.

This research project eventually became its own Native American studies course which incorporated a variety of carefully selected pieces of literature in which both Native Americans and non-Native Americans said “they could relate to the topics and issues, including the school mascot (Westwood’s mascot is a Native American warrior), substance abuse, death, friendship, and coming of age today” (Metzger, Box, and Blasingame, 2013, p. 60).

Unlike Groenke, Haddix, Glenn, Kirkland, Price-Dennis, and Coleman-King (2015) and Metzger, Box, and Blasingame (2013), Melissa Schieble (2014) discussed how purposefully choosing literature that does misrepresent cultures using stereotypical social constructs of people of color and teaching these pieces of literature intentionally with the purpose of confronting head-on the misrepresentations can also be a very

powerful tool. Schieble (2014) specifically begins her discussion with a graphic novel written by Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*, which was written by the author to intentionally include a character named Cousin Chin-Kee who was to embody all of the erroneous stereotypes of Chinese culture as perpetuated in the United States. As Scheible (2014) relates Yang's position on the character "it's ok for you to find him funny, but I want you to laugh with a knot in your stomach. Without at least a passing knowledge of Chin-Kee's historical roots, a young reader might not develop that knot" (p. 47).

According to both Scheible (2014) and Yang, the book's author, these were the cultural stereotypes that existed, for better or for worse, and it was therefore best to not shy away from them as though they did not exist, but rather embrace them for what they were and use them against themselves as a means to dispel the myths and stereotypes that surround people of color and their culture – in this case Asian Americans, or even more to the point Chinese Americans. She explained that teaching by non-example could be just as powerful as teaching by example when the lesson was conducted sympathetically and purposefully by a skilled practitioner.

Key Concepts

The key concepts covered in this review of the literature involved implicit bias, the need to understand implicit bias, and what was currently being employed in a culturally sensitive English curriculum to attempt to overcome bias. The theoretical framework of Freire helped to establish context for the inclusion of instruction about implicit bias and a culturally sensitive curriculum for primarily White students into an English Language Arts curriculum at a public high school.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to highlight studies that establish implicit bias as a reality in the formation of world-views and what was currently being showcased in secondary English Language Arts classrooms to combat this implicit bias. Much of the literature reviewed corroborated the phenomena of implicit bias as relevant in creating personal schemas, and much of the literature established the ways in which implicit bias is created, but many of the studies of ELA lesson plans skirted the issue of implicit bias as a talking point when creating a culturally sensitive curriculum. The overarching framework was adopted from Friere's notion that students should be co-creators with the teacher in the development of their knowledge and understanding. In order for White students to be co-creators of culturally sensitive curriculum they need to understand the implicit aptitudes they have acquired from being White members of a society in which Whiteness has been normalized.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Although a lack of cultural awareness spans age groups, because of my role as a secondary educator, I chose to focus on high school students. I intended to work with primarily White children on exploring their own biases and how these biases affected their given roles in society as established by factors often outside of their realms of control. While these White children are not victims of the establishment in the same way the Black children were, they were inherently victims of the structure. Viewing White as a privileged color “not only damages members of non-White groups, but can also negatively impact the healthy social development of members of White communities. Besides breeding a culture of imagined superiority, conceiving White as spotless erases the real imprint of life experience (Jenkins, 2014, p. 146).

Teaching children how to determine their own subconscious biases based on years of media saturation, parental and societal influence, and friend and school influence can create an environment where purposeful conversations can be held. As Harro (2000) indicates in *The Cycle of Socialization*, there is a way out of this cycle but only “if we operate from a strong moral base and vision, and if we work together with our targeted brothers and sisters,” but before this can happen we must be made aware (p. 20). Essentially, this research will determine the impact that is had on high school students

when they are provided with the means to recognize and confront their own subconscious biases in regard to race and ethnic identity for the first time

We have had a difficult time discussing race relations in this country. This was, in part, due to the lack of focus on explaining to our children their role in the larger conversation. As Peggy McIntosh (1990) states, “My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture,” and it is just this schooling, which can be provided by examining implicit biases (p. 1). All of the above mentioned components should be present in order to have a productive and lasting effect.

Research Design and Measurement of Perception

As an educator, I conduct informal action research on a regular basis. For this dissertation in practice, the action research was necessarily more formalized, but still based on a problem noted within my professional practice. This particular action research used a mixed methodology that weighed heavily toward qualitative analysis of student responses. The quantitative nature of this research was a metric of growth between the initial IAT and the IAT that followed the initiatives.

The participants in this study consisted of 23 English 2 Honors students enrolled in the Academic Leadership Academy at Chapin High School. Of these 23 students, 20 are freshmen and three are sophomores. They ranged in age from 14 to 16 by the end of the first academic semester. 11 of them were male and 12 were female, so the class was almost equally divided by sex. However, of these children 20 of them self-identified as White, one self-identified as Black, one self-identified as Asian, and one self-identified as

Native-American, making the class 87% White and 13% students of color. The percentage of White children in this class was similar to the overall student body population which was 90% White.

I compiled baseline data on the children by asking them to answer survey questions about their racial and ethnic identities, and because part of my goal here was to make them understand the subconscious biases of which they may not have been aware, I also asked them to take Implicit Aptitude Tests (IATs). These tests were created by a group of university researchers who were interested in “implicit social cognition - thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control” (Project Implicit, 2011). These tests were essentially computer based speed association tests of both pictures and words. Unfortunately, as Blanton, Jaccard, Strauts, Mitchell, and Tetlock (2015) point out, the IAT uses “arbitrary metrics,” and is therefore not currently reliable in terms of quantitative information (para. 4). This would have little effect on my research question however, as my purpose was not to determine how much bias existed, but rather if one existed at all and how it affected conscious thought. IATs exist to determine a wide variety of biases, but for the purpose of this study I only intended to have them take the Race IAT and the Skin-tone IAT. As a part of the survey, they uploaded their IAT results and provided an initial written reaction to them as part of the survey mentioned earlier.

I anticipate from previous courses in which I have used IATs informally that many of the children will be confused and perhaps incensed by their results, so I planned to discuss the tests and their potential results before actually beginning them. Because the IATs were speed based there was no way to “cheat” on an IAT, so I was not concerned

about this foreknowledge affecting the results. In other words, because the students were expected to make associations quickly, and the program takes into account any delay in response, if they attempted to create an intentional bias through purposeful thought rather than going with their instinctual response the system would know. Once these data were compiled and analyzed, I conducted a whole group conversation about the results. While each class was certainly different, again, I have found in the past that they were actually anxious to have this discussion, so I ensured a quick turnaround in the results, so I could discuss them the class period after they actually took the IATs. I opted not to record the class discussions because students tend to become uncomfortable when they have a camera trained on them, and this was already likely to be an uncomfortable conversation.

I had access to their original written reactions, the group conversation, and after the group conversation I intended to have them provide me with another individual written response to both their own individual results now that we have had the group conversation in addition to providing me with how they felt about their classmates' reactions also. Sadly, there is no real metric for "impact" here, so I was looking for key words and phrases that could be interpreting as indicative of acknowledgement of internal biases, such as "I didn't realize..." or "I was surprised by..."

Purpose of the Study

I firmly believed it was my job as an educator to prepare these students not just for the world that existed, but the world they were going to create. They were all a product of their society, for better or for worse, and it was of paramount importance that these children understood this. I especially believed this to be important of these students

who were predominately White, and thus had the privilege and ability to be effective change agents in the elimination of the racial hegemony that continued to be prevalent in the United States. At that moment though, I did not believe these children understood that they even had implicit bias and were therefore unaware of their privilege. My ultimate goal with this study was to create a classroom where they could be introduced to their implicit bias and have conversations about racial hegemony in a safe environment.

The purpose of this study then was to determine the impact that a realization of implicit bias may have on White students in an Academic Leadership Academy and whether or not that impact could be amplified through a carefully planned curriculum that allowed for fruitful conversation. These were children who were identified as gifted and talented, and were therefore typically better equipped to handle conversations that take them out of their comfort zones. This having been said though, there had to be intentional scaffolding toward those conversations that involved a slow build from the familiar to the unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable.

Statement of the Problem of Practice

The problem of practice was that in the traditional pre-AP program the literature was expected to be canonical in nature. Most canonized pieces tended to lack diversity. Compounding this problem was the age of these children. I also taught Advanced Placement Literature and Composition, which was typically a senior class, meaning the children were 17 or 18 years old, and my school still made me have parents sign a release form to teach *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (1970). This is not to insinuate that all African American literature contains themes that were too advanced for high school

children, but due to the experiences many of these authors were trying to relate to their audiences many of them did.

The children I was studying for my research were only in English 2 and were typically 14 or 15 years old, which made them far too young for canonical texts such as *Invisible Man*, *Kite Runner*, *The Color Purple*, and other such titles according to the community in which I taught. For more context in regard to this problem of practice, several years ago I chose to have my English 2 Honors students read *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines for summer reading. Parents complained because of the word ‘nipple.’ Prior to that I selected *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, and parents complained about the notion of a Black Jesus as portrayed in the book as well as an interracial relationship in the book, in spite of the fact that it was a very innocent relationship between teens.

It was difficult to seamlessly embed culturally diverse literary pieces into a Pre-AP curriculum when so many of the pieces were considered age-inappropriate by the parents in the community. With this particular group of students though, as members in the Academic Leadership Academy, they and their families expected that leadership components be embedded into the curriculum in addition to the more traditional canonical pieces, so there was greater leeway to choose nonfiction texts that were multicultural in nature either due to their content, their authorship, or both. It was also considered acceptable to create ancillary lessons with these texts that also grew leadership through personal introspection. The key though was to create the proper continuum of lessons that would enhance their understanding of the racial hegemony that existed in order to encourage these children to be change agents.

Text Dependent and Center for Creative Leadership Initiatives

My choices for initiatives were purposeful in that I was not necessarily interested in creating a multicultural curriculum simply for the sake of creating multicultural curriculum. I was of the belief that often these curriculums, if not well planned, caused more harm than good when dealing with a homogenous group of White students. I did not want my students to be overwhelmed by guilt because of their privileged status, and I believed if I was not careful in choosing my lessons this could occur. To be clear, I anticipate my students will feel negative emotions, and I want to create a space where they can be expressed in such a way as to move past them into a place where capacity for understanding can be achieved. I have heard on more than one occasion from a student that they were “tired of learning about slavery all of the time.” Slavery was an unfortunate reality, and they needed to learn about it, but ultimately they are not even talking about slavery, not really, but that is a safe way for them to say they are tired of learning about Black people. I believed their frustration was not so much about “learning about Black people” as it was about being made to feel guilty for occurrences before their time and out of their realm of control. Guilt could turn into anger, which was counterproductive in creating agents of change. As Harro (2000) states, when change agents, in this case my White students, act out of guilt they were “doomed to fail,” so I was interested in developing a “strong moral base” for my students instead (p. 20).

Therefore, I created my units thematically, with the themes as paramount, yet also multicultural in an introspective way that dealt with current concepts and moving forward. These units contained core texts, TED talks, guest speakers, Center for Creative Leadership lessons, and other ancillary activities including reflections. The first theme

involved understanding self and one's place in the world. This unit contained *Blink*, Social Identity, "Danger of a Single Story," the Drawbridge Exercise, Mental Models, and Deputy Catoe as a guest speaker. My second theme involved the power of language. This unit contained *1984*, *Animal Farm*, "Learning to Read and Write," and "The Politics of Fiction." The third and final unit of the semester regarded decision-making. This unit involved Values and Actions, *A Doll's House*, My Vision, *The Other Wes Moore*, and Dr. Ross as a guest speaker.

The first text I planned to teach was *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell. This book essentially detailed how the subconscious worked to enhance or inhibit our conscious decisions as was mentioned earlier in the section on scholarly literature. Another compelling reason to use this particular book was that Gladwell identifies as mixed race with one of those races being Black, and he acknowledged his own bias against Black and dark skinned faces as presented in the IATs, in spite of being Black himself, which helped to further explain to the students how ubiquitous racial bias is.

I also conducted lessons from the Center for Creative Leadership that were created purposefully to help high school students explore who they were in an effort to begin building leadership skills. The first of these lessons was called Social Identity (see Appendix C). There were three circles all embedded in one another. The center circle asked students to list their core values such as honesty or timeliness; the next circle asked students to list their chosen attributes such as soccer player or Christian; and the outer circle asked students to list their given attributes such as female or African American. The discussion that followed involved how we often judge and are judged by our given attributes, which were typically outside of our realm of control rather than considering

core values which actually made up who we were as people. All CCL units cycled through the other text dependent units as well.

During this unit, I also included several other activities. The first of these activities was the TED talk “Danger of a Single Story” by Chimamanda Adichie (2009). Adichie was a Nigerian author who advocated for racial and sexual equality in much of her work. In this TED talk she explained how dangerous it was for people to develop their interpretation of others through a “single story,” or more specifically for her as a child her interpretation of the world outside of Nigeria through British and American literature. Adichie (2009) found no representation of herself in the books to which she was exposed as a child, and believes “what this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story ...but because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature.” She later related a similar story about a roommate who “asked if she could listen to what she called my ‘tribal music,’ and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey” (Adichie, 2009). Her roommate had developed a “single story” based on her limited media exposure to Africa. This powerful TED talk helped the students to recognize that bias exists ubiquitously.

Another activity I had the students do as part of the unit was the Drawbridge Exercise (see Appendix D). This activity was designed by Judith Katz in 1978 in order to explain racism through an allegory. Essentially the story is of a Baroness who is forbidden to leave the castle by the Baron as he himself leaves the castle. She chose to

leave anyway, so she could visit her Lover. Upon returning home, she realized that the drawbridge was guarded by a Gateman who threatened to kill her upon orders of the Baron if she attempted to cross. She is refused help from her Lover, her Friend, and ultimately a Boatman whom she cannot afford to pay. She attempted to cross anyway, and was indeed slain by the Gateman. The students were then asked to create a list of characters from most culpable in the Baroness's death to the least culpable. After a lively discussion about guilt and responsibility, I then explained that each character was representative of a different aspect of society. While all characters were important, it was the Baron who was representative of the White men who made the rules and the Baroness who was representative of the Black people who were expected to follow the rules even though they had no say in creating the rules that typically elicited the most conversation in that almost always the participants believed the Baron is guilt-free and the Baroness got what she deserved.

The second CCL lesson used involved Mental Models. This unit began with a puzzle. Pictures of numbers found naturally in rural or urban landscapes were placed face down in no particular order in a roped off circle. The students had to follow a specific set of rules – only one person in the circle at a time, no talking while anyone is in the circle, you can only remain in the circle as long as you can hold your breath, and etc. – in order to solve the puzzle. Initially many students did not “see” the numbers, and they were attempting to group the pictures together in other ways. Most students eventually saw the numbers and began the process of placing them in sequential order. The point of this activity was to show the children that often our brains were trained to see the world in one way, but there may exist other ways in which we should be viewing the world.

The conversations that surrounded the Mental Model activity reinforced what the students were learning about implicit bias while reading *Blink* and enhanced their understanding of their own IAT results. Up to this point, the conversation had been composed of what implicit bias was. Now the conversations shifted to the acquisition of implicit bias. Inevitably the students began relating the concept of Mental Models and how we come to see the world to what they knew as teenagers, which typically involved current songs, movies, TV shows, and social media celebrities. This lesson was conducted toward the end of the *Blink* unit.

As a final activity in the *Blink* unit, I had our resource officer come speak to the students. Deputy Catoe served in Iraq both as a Marine and as a privately contracted employee during and just following Desert Storm. The purpose of having him speak to the students was to talk about his own biased American view of Islam and Middle Eastern culture in general prior to his service and how he was forced into a situation where learning the culture and being able to understand the religion could often mean the difference between life and death. One of the most impactful parts of this message was when he projected a picture of several men who served along side him in the Iraqi military. These men were all dark-skinned and wore turbans. He asked the students to “tell them apart.” The students were unable to see them as anything other than “Muslims” or “Middle Eastern men.” He then explained the different ethnic backgrounds of each man, and why understanding those backgrounds was important. His discussion with the students reinforced the Mental Models Center for Creative Leadership activity that was discussed earlier in the unit.

After spending a great deal of time working on the *Blink* unit with its many sub-initiatives, I moved into a more traditional unit for pre-AP students. I created this particular unit around the concept of the power of language, and the key umbrella texts were *Animal Farm* and *1984* both by George Orwell. *Animal Farm* was an allegory of the Russian and Bolshevik Revolutions and *1984* was about a dystopian future where England was under the rule of a totalitarian regime popularly known as Big Brother. In both of these texts the individuals who wielded control used the manipulation of language to acquire their positions in addition to limiting the use of language by the general populace, so they could maintain their control. I also used the Social Identity chart from the previous unit to identify the character traits of the fictional Orwell characters, particularly those who are not portrayed in a positive light. Often the children claimed the character had core values of being evil or the like. We followed this with the conversation that rarely do people consider themselves to have negative core values and that in these instances we were judging the characters based on their actions.

In an effort to make the Orwell unit a bit more ethnically balanced, while maintaining a clear focus on language and not diversity in and of itself, I also had the students read “Learning to Read and Write” from Frederick Douglass’s slave narrative (1845) and view a TED talk from Elif Shafak (2010) called “The Politics of Fiction.” Frederick Douglass was an enslaved African who eventually found freedom and Elif Shafak was a modern novelist who is Turkish. Both individuals discussed the importance of language as a means by which to acquire knowledge and understanding.

In “Learning to Read and Write” from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave* by Douglass (1845), he both praised and lamented the

knowledge he acquired by learning to read and write. As an enslaved person, his master eventually forbade his mistress from teaching him to read and write, but as Douglass was resourceful he eventually gained this ability through other means. He knew that language was a direct route to understanding his situation, which could prove powerful, but at the same time learning that he was enslaved and considered a lesser man because of the color of his skin also caused him great distress. As Douglass (1845) described “As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity (p. 35).

In “The Politics of Fiction,” Shafak (2010) recounted the story of a local grocer, who ordinarily “didn’t speak to marginals” sitting next to a transvestite sharing a pack of cigarettes just after the Istanbul earthquake of 1999. Shafak’s (2010) point here was “in the face of death and destruction, our mundane differences evaporated, and we all became one even if for a few hours. But I’ve always believed that stories, too, have a similar effect on us. I’m not saying that fiction has the magnitude of an earthquake, but when we are reading a good novel, we leave our small, cozy apartments behind, go out into the night alone and start getting to know people we had never met before and perhaps had even been biased against.” While not perhaps as obvious as either Orwell or Douglass, Shafak relayed the importance of language to shape our view of the world around us, and how we can be a part of something greater than ourselves just through the power of words. Ultimately the students were asked to write an essay that compared the four texts. The prompt was as follows: “George Orwell, Frederick Douglass, and Elif

Shafak all write about how language can be powerful in the lives of people. Consider what you have read and viewed from these authors. What are their messages about the importance of language? What does each author have to say about thought and power? Are their messages more alike or different? You must include textual evidence from *1984*, *Animal Farm*, "Learning to Read and Write," and "The Politics of Fiction" to prove your assertions about the authors' viewpoints."

The second activity involving Mental Models, which was discussed previously, involved a timed word association game with the terms 'mother' and 'doll' in preparation to read *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen (1879). The purpose of this activity was to establish and discuss that implicit bias affects our mental models in a variety of ways not previously discussed in the prior unit. At this point we discussed as a whole group both activities. As one would predict, often the students associated words like 'caring' and 'food' with the word mother and words such as 'girls' and 'playing house' with the word doll. Gender roles tended to be a safer place to begin exploring Mental Models of behavior in preparation for *The Other Wes Moore* later in the unit where we will explore mental models of racial stereotypes.

I also introduced the class to the Center for Creative Leadership Values and Actions activity before beginning *A Doll's House* and *The Other Wes Moore*. The first part of this lesson involved having the student write 'time' at the top of a sheet of paper. I then gave them a moment to write down where they typically spend their time in a week, excluding the time spent at rest, at school, and on hygiene practices. They noted things like homework, athletics, band, church, and etc. I then asked them to develop a pie chart indicating which of these activities took up the most time and the least time. As a class

we discussed these pie charts and where the bulk of their time was spent each week. Then I had them flip the paper over and write ‘values’ at the top. I then gave them a moment to list the things or people they value in order of importance. Most of the students wrote things like family/parents, God, education, and etc. I then asked them to reconcile their values with where they spend their time. This was often an a-ha moment for these children. For example, they listed as most valuable something such as family, but then realized family was not even present on their pie chart they created earlier. We then spent a great deal of time discussing the importance of how our actions should either reflect our values or they end up becoming our values.

A Doll’s House (1879) was a play by Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian author, which was a canonized piece and therefore appropriate for pre-AP students. The matriarch and protagonist of the play, Nora, fulfilled the role of the ideal wife and mother until the end when she opted to find herself instead of adhering to society’s interpretation of who a wife and mother should be. Discussions surrounding this play involved stereotypes and how they are developed and why society clings to them in regard to gender roles. We also discussed decision-making and how decision-making can be all the more difficult when your decisions go against the grain of societal expectations. This related directly back to the Values and Actions lesson, but these discussions were, at this point, related either directly to the play, related to the personal experience of the primarily White teenagers in the room, or, for the braver students, related to breaking out of gender roles. Again, these conversations were preparing us for more difficult race-based conversations later in the unit.

The last Center for Creative Leadership lesson of the semester was My Vision (see Appendix E). I gave them a picture of a tree, and I explained that the roots were the things that make them strong – family, experience, church, etc. The trunk of the tree represented different skills or abilities they either possessed or intended to acquire. The branches were the goals they had. The short branches were short-term goals that lead to the long-term goals on the longer branches. The sun and the rain were the external resources they would need to acquire skills and abilities in order to reach their goals. Finally, the lightning represented threats or obstacles they needed to overcome to reach their goals. The first purpose of this lesson was to have them consider, really consider, how to go about achieving their goals. I paired this with a college research unit, but as that was somewhat superfluous to the purpose of my study I excluded it from the methodology. The second purpose of this activity was for them to consider goal setting from the perspective of others in preparation for *The Other Wes Moore*. As we read the text and used this same tree analogy, the students realized that especially their roots and their lightning looked very different than that of the men in *The Other Wes Moore*. This was a means to introduce the concept of privilege, especially White privilege, in a way that was non-threatening.

While at first glance it may not appear that *The Other Wes Moore* had much in common with *A Doll's House*, at the root of both texts were protagonists who were very much the product of their societies and who had the power to make decisions that would alter the outcome of the rest of their lives. In *A Doll's House*, the play ended with the decision to no longer adhere to a given gender role, but the audience was not privy to how this actually worked out for Nora. In *The Other Wes Moore* the reader was able to

see the cumulative result of decisions made along the way for both Wes Moore the author and Wes Moore the incarcerated. *The Other Wes Moore* (2010) was written by a man named Wes Moore who was struck by the fact that another young man, with the same name and from the same town who had the same initial setbacks in life, could take such a different path that led not to success, as in the case of the author, but of incarceration for murder. Both Wes Moore the incarcerated and Wes Moore the author were Black, which leads to discussions similar to that which occurred with *A Doll's House* except we discussed the decisions made by both men in regard to the stereotypes they faced as Black men. As mentioned with the My Vision unit we also discussed the idea of different threats to goals based on race and socioeconomics more specifically.

Finally, I invited Dr. Akil Ross to speak to my students about challenges, planning, and goal setting. Dr. Ross is my principal, and as a Black man who has much in common with Wes Moore the author, he was a tangible example of having to overcome obstacles that many of my students will never face because of their intersecting privileges. He is very well-respected among both the faculty and the students, and as a result he had a great deal of impact. Often, because he was successful – he was, in fact, the 2018 national principal of the year – it was easy to forget the struggles he faced growing up as a Black youth in the D.C. area to a poor, single mother. Often, because he has his EdD, students assumed he always excelled in school; he did not. Therefore, it was a very powerful experience to hear him speak about his achievements, especially knowing how far he had to come in order to reach his goals.

After the completion of these units, I had them take the Race IAT one final time as the only actual metric of implicit bias to determine if their biases in regard to African American and European American features had shifted in any way.

Positionality

Because these were my students, and because I intended to be involved in the research personally as a means to improve the educational environment, this methodology was best defined as action research. “The first step in the teacher research process is to identify a meaningful area of interest,” and this is absolutely a meaningful area for me (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p.13). Much like the Ann of Efron and Ravid’s (2013) first chapter in *Action Research in Education: A Practical Guide*, I too was frustrated by an element of my students’ education that was not necessarily academic in nature, but nonetheless affected their ability to succeed academically (p. 1). In *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Student and Faculty* by Herr and Anderson (2015), they stated that “action research has enjoyed widespread success...as a collaborative route to professional and institutional change” in addition to having other benefits, and this aspect of action research best fit my particular problem as I wanted to change my own practice, but I also wanted to ultimately affect change institutionally in how teachers and students converse about hegemony. According to Herr and Anderson (2015) I was an initiativeist and the initiatives I used included “develop[ing] a plan of action...act[ing] to implement the plan...[and] observ[ing] the effects of actions” (p. 5). The prescribed organization and background research involved with action research afforded me the opportunity to intervene in a much more focused way, so not only did my own educational environment

improve, but I can also share my findings with others so they could, in turn, improve their practice.

Because I was invested in the critical consciousness development of my students, it was imperative I explained my positionality, and that I was reflexive during my results narrative of the study once it was conducted. It was even more important in my particular study, since I was concerned specifically with implicit aptitudes, which as a White woman, I also possess. As Efron and Ravid (2013) aptly state, “as an autonomous practitioner [I] want to become aware of the tacit assumptions that undergird [my] perspectives on school reality and implicitly shape [my] decisions throughout the research project” (pp. 49-50). In the context of my study, I was very aware that I was not much different than my students in terms of family structure, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, so I had to be conscientious about acknowledging my own biases with them in an effort to foster open discussions about difficult topics involving hegemony. This was difficult for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the notion that often these biases are not conscious.

This awareness of bias was important for a variety of reasons including my own personal transformation as a result of my awareness of implicit aptitudes; a desire to create an environment and a culture where people, in this case White people, can discuss hegemony and racism openly and honestly; and a belief that I could positively affect these children in such a way that they could in turn progressively affect their environments in the future. Because I was so intimately involved in the outcome of this research it was imperative that, as Herr and Anderson (2015) suggest, I keep “a research journal in which [I] can monitor [my] own change process and consequent changes in the

dynamics of the setting” (p. 69). I obviously wanted my results to reflect what I believed should happen, but most important I wanted my results to reflect what actually did happen, so I knew how to spiral my subsequent research, and only honest reflexivity in light of my positionality could ensure my results were not skewed by my perceptions.

While I had limited ethos in regard to some of the particulars involved in this study, I have been an English teacher for nineteen years. I have always opted to include texts that were thematically complex in my instruction in order to foster deeper discussions among my students. While these class discussions were often housed in the safe world of fictitious characters and plotlines, I have been very effective over the years at stretching these students past this comfort zone.

That having been said, I have no specific training in how to facilitate conversations such as the ones I planned to attempt. I was working though an EdD program in Curriculum and Instruction that focused heavily on the education of marginalized students, so along those lines I had participated in conversations about bias and attitude, but there was a distinct difference between participation and facilitation. There was also the inherent difference presented by age, experience, and level of education between my students and my fellow classmates. I also selected as my district required professional development to attend group sessions with Dr. Donna Elam of the Elam Leadership Institute (Elam Leadership Institute, 2013). I attended these sessions for two years, as I hoped to continue to develop my ethos through these sessions as well as other social justice professional development opportunities I was exploring.

Conclusion

Ideally these initiatives would, over the course of the semester, create in these students a deeper understanding of the White privilege they had inherited, their own bias as a result of being a part of the societal hegemony that exists, and the very important role they play in creating a shifting attitude in regard to this hegemony. A semester's worth of initiatives was perhaps not enough to make wholly systemic changes in their thinking, but it should be enough to begin the conversation that needs to be had by everyone, including these White students, about race relations in the United States. I would consistently monitor their perceptions throughout the course of the semester through whole class discussions and written feedback.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETATION AND RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The overarching goal with this study was to determine what, if any, reactions were had by gifted high school students who were predominately White attending a predominantly White high school when they were introduced to their own implicit aptitudes in regard to race. While there were several problems of practice in implementing such a study, I also had a distinct advantage with this group of students. As White students who are homogenously grouped, I wanted to ease them into an awareness of their bias and what that means for them in the larger structure of racial hegemony. One problem of practice is to ensure the initiatives were handled delicately but firmly to foster honest discussion and not instill guilt and shame as a place to stay, but rather as emotions to experience and then move toward acceptance. Another problem of practice was that as gifted children in a pre-AP class, I was expected to expose them to age appropriate canonical texts. Unfortunately, many of these texts were not multicultural. An advantage I did have with this group of students though was that they were enrolled in an Academic Leadership Academy, so while I was still held accountable for canonical texts and other such ELA standards, I was also responsible for embedding leadership components into the curriculum. It was these leadership components I used as the vehicle for introducing the students to their own implicit bias and teaching them what that implies. Again, my

goal was simply to determine reactions to this new knowledge and the initiatives I use, so much of my findings will be narrative and anecdotal. However, I also included the IAT results from prior to teaching the initiatives and the IAT results from after the initiatives have been taught to provide some quantitative data to corroborate the qualitative data.

Findings of the Study

The participants in my study consisted of 23 English 2 Honors students enrolled in the Academic Leadership Academy at Chapin High School. Of these 23 students, 20 are freshmen and three are sophomores. They range in age from 14 to 16 by the end of the first academic semester. 11 of them were male and 12 were female, so the class was almost equally divided by sex. However, of these children 20 of them self-identified as White, one self-identified as Black, one self-identified as Asian, and one self identified as Native-American, making the class 87% White and 13% students of color. The percentage of White children in this class was similar to the overall student body population which was 90% White.

Ultimately I found that these children did overwhelmingly have implicit aptitudes towards European Americans, which, based on their reactions to this knowledge, likely affected their cultural sensitivity toward people of color and their own role in social hegemony. However, as will be further discussed over this chapter, these primarily White students were able to experience the guilt and frustration at their results, but also eventually become convinced at the legitimacy of their biases in such a way that fostered more culturally sensitive awareness.

Toward the beginning of the *Blink* unit, which was the first unit of the semester, I asked these students to take the Race IAT. This was in August before any other initiatives

or real introductions had occurred, so this data was essentially my baseline data. The Race IAT had seven categories which created a continuum of preference: strong preference toward African American, moderate preference toward African American, slight preference toward African American, no preference toward African American or European American, slight preference toward European American, moderate preference toward European American, strong preference toward European American.

No students showed a strong preference toward African American. Two students showed a moderate preference toward African Americans and two students showed a slight preference toward African Americans. Of these four students two were female, two were male, and they were all White. In all 17% of the class showed some preference toward African American.

Two students in the class, both female, one White and one Black, showed no or little to no preference toward African American or European American. 12% of the class showed no particular preference.

Of the remaining students, six showed a slight preference toward European American, one Asian, five White, four female, and two male; another seven showed a moderate preference for European American, one Native American, six White, six males, and one female; and finally, four of the students showed a strong preference toward European American, all White, three females, and one male for a total of seventeen students who showed a preference for European Americans. 71% of the class showed some preference toward European American.

The reactions of three of my four students who showed preference for African American lacked any real surprise at their results. One female student stated

“For me the results were as expected that I prefer African Americans over European Americans slightly. My best friend is an African American and I love her the same as my other friends that are white. I think the reason I am a little bias is because of my friendship. I have never met an African American that I didn't like in my lifetime. I had an African American best friend in elementary school also. However I have had some European Americans that I have strongly disagreed with so I think I am a little bias that way because of these experiences.”

For her it boiled down to the context of her friends, and in spite of the overwhelming Whiteness of CHS, she was friends or friendly with more African Americans than European Americans. The other White female who showed a preference for African Americans gave credit to her family stating, “I think that growing up in a politically liberal household probably had something to do with [the results].” Both of these young ladies credited societal influence specifically and by name, so to speak, for their results. One of the White boys, who was also not surprised, was very succinct in saying “I wasn't really surprised by my results,” however, the other White male was surprised. His response was “I am somewhat surprised about these results. I support all races equality, but this really changed my perspective on things. I am not a racist and never will be, but I think this shows how much of a non-racist I really am. It shows that I support my own race of course, but also the African American race as well.”

As previously stated, one of the two students who showed no preference for either was a Black female. Her response, “I was surprised to see that my results are what I hoped they would be and not what I thought they would be. I thought that my results would be negative because of the influences around me that force me to see things in a

different perspective against the opposite race but I am content with my results” indicated that she was pleased that her response was, in theory, bias free, but it also showed an awareness that there was bias ever present in her world as a Black student at a predominately White school. The other child who showed no preference was a White female, and she stated, “I was not surprised because I feel like I’d never judge another person just for their skin color or backgrounds.” Again there was no surprise that her results were what they were.

It was not until the results showed a preference for European American that the students became surprised or dismayed at their results. One White male stated “I was surprised because I am not a racist and I love blacks and whites the same yet it said I was strongly against Blacks,” which was an assumption which in and of itself shows just how deeply rooted the bias is. His perception is that if he shows a strong preference toward European Americans then his brain is telling him by default he must therefore have a strong preference against African Americans. Another White male showed grave disappointment by saying

“I was somewhat surprised when I saw my results. As a person who stands for equality for all, I felt disappointed in myself for having a urge to chose European children over African American children. I always go on rants on how it isn't fair for certain people to get jobs or get a different pay because of their gender. I do the same things in situations with race. I didn't think of myself who would associate good and pleasant words with white children, and unpleasant and demeaning words with African American children.”

I always have to have a long talk with my students during the class discussion part of this assignment to differentiate between implicit bias and overt action.

Just as the girls from earlier were quick to credit society close to them for their results, many of these students were just as quick to blame societal influences for their biases except these societal influences were distant ones such as media or movies. A White female stated, “I was a little surprised at how the subconscious can completely trick you, but coming from today's media and the stuff politics feeds us, I am not surprised too much.” Another White female had a similar response by saying,

“No, I was not surprised, just a little disappointed. I am aware of all the things that are put into my mind regarding race and violence. I know that the news coverage on violence is normally when African Americans are the ones who commit the crime but when whites commit a crime it doesn't get as much coverage.”

Along a similar thread another White female said, “I was sort of surprised. After reading the section in Blink about the test, and hearing how people did on it, I didn't have high standards on doing well. I however, did get many wrong. I didn't get as many right as I had hoped and am kinda ashamed that I got what I did. I guess I should blame it all on media for portraying African Americans to be horrible people and white people for always being the victims. It seems like since that's all I see now-a-days, that my mind has been programmed to distinguish words like tragedy and crime to African Americans.”

One young man was surprisingly candid and attributed influence directly to family by saying, “I wasn't too surprised because I grew up with a few influential family members that were somewhat racist.”

Some of these students even blamed the perceived inaccuracy of the IAT for what they believed were skewed results rather than simply acknowledging a bias. In fact, one White male said, “I was surprised that I had a preference. But this test did not seem to me like an accurate test for race to me just how good you were at remembering the side to click.” This young man is sloughing off blame for his bias on the test. His statement is unknowingly contradictory, however, because in a speed test you are not supposed to “remember” which side to click, rather you are supposed to allow your subconscious to guide you.

These statements were all recorded digitally immediately after finishing the IAT through a Google Form, so these individual reflections were not influenced by whole class discussion. Just after the individual activity, and before I facilitated the whole group discussion, as mentioned earlier, I explained that the IAT results are not necessarily correlated to or indicative of racism. Establishing rapport was paramount with any group of students, but even more so with a group of White students who were largely under the impression that I have just called 71% of them racist, and with whom I now want to have a candid discussion about social hegemony and societal influence in regard to implicit bias, or as they saw it – racism.

Because these were children in an academically advanced class, they cognitively understood the difference, although I cannot say for certain they were able to actually internalize the difference. We were able to have a thoughtful conversation about what bias is and why they may have a bias toward European Americans though. The conversation generally concentrated itself around three primary topics: the news media’s portrayal of Black people; the segregation that existed causing their immediate

environment to be almost exclusively White; and their geographic location, the South, which was the primary home of American Slavery.

The initial talking point, the media, was really only a talking point for a small handful of the class because although they were gifted academically, many of these individuals were also young teenagers who did not often spend time watching the news. Although many students were not able to actively contribute to this conversation, most students were nodding in agreement that the news media was influential in creating our bias on a variety of issues, not the least of which was how we feel about people who were people of color, non-heteronormative, non-Christian, and non-middle class. While this conversation deviated away from the root topic, racial hegemony, I did not rein it in because truly acknowledging implicit bias against any kind of “other” was still productive in acknowledging bias against Black people, and I felt it made the conversation safer for the students. Safe is not necessarily I place I want them to stay, but for an initial conversation I felt safe would foster more honest conversations down the road.

They were all quick to acknowledge the lack of diversity Chapin and Chapin High School had. With the exception of a small handful, these children have been attending school together since elementary school, so they were comfortable enough around each other, even my minority students, to make light of the Whiteness of their immediate surroundings, so this was not an uncomfortable conversation to have. This perhaps was the part of the conversation that most drove home the point about societal influence in regard to implicit bias in that they could completely understand how people who were only around one race or ethnicity of people could show a preference toward that group of

people. We also brought up Malcolm Gladwell at this point since he also had the same epiphany as a Black man who showed a biased preference for European Americans when he himself took the IAT.

The conversation about living in the South was in itself a biased conversation because the assumption was that racism exists predominately in the South. As previously stated, most of these students have never lived anywhere else, and as White children they would likely not have experienced negative bias while traveling to popular vacation spots both in the United States and abroad. I allowed them to make their points, many of them salient points, such as slavery existing predominately in the South, before stating details about several high profile events regarding race and police brutality which occurred in areas of the United States outside of the South. The ah-ha moment was realizing that it may indeed be worse in the South, or it may not be, but they could not make a judgment call based on their personal experience, so they were therefore dependent on the news media to inform their opinion if they chose not to research events themselves. This led to another epiphany that if they relied on the news media and the news media was biased, they in turn may become biased in their views. The conversation had come full circle. At this stage in the year, understanding that implicit bias was real, and that it can sometimes affect our overt actions if we were unaware of it was my purpose, so I allowed the conversation to end naturally without any further probing into how this affected race relations.

While the IAT is the first activity in the unit the students had already been assigned *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* by Malcolm Gladwell to read. Essentially the entire book was about how and in what ways our conscious thought was

driven by our unconscious mind. Implicit bias as a result of societal influence was a large conversation point within the text, but so was fight or flight instinct, non-verbal communication, and other such subconscious responses. Periodically during this unit the students had chunks of the text due for discussion. While these discussions were based primarily in the text itself, the content of the book lent itself well to discussing current events as well. Often the conversations would also come back to the IAT conversations from earlier in the unit. No real new ground was made in regard to understanding how bias affects race relations at this point, but the fact that they keep coming back to it is a good start.

A large part of my research was studying not just what these students were able to gain as a result of acknowledging their bias, but also what they can gain as a result of learning leadership skills. As freshmen, leadership was defined as having them understand themselves and their place in the world as a result of who they were, which in many ways goes hand in hand with understanding their bias. The two leadership lessons that correspond with the *Blink* unit were Social Identity and Mental Models.

The Social Identity activity began with a graphic that has three circles embedded in one another. The innermost circle was where students list their core values. While these values could be myriad, many of these students list things such as ambition, kindness, and family. The students had a difficult time understanding what core values even were, much less how to articulate their own core values, so often the values listed here were simply reflections of their chosen traits. The middle circle was where students listed their chosen traits. Chosen traits were qualities or activities these students get to select that helped to define their likes and dislikes, which also helped to define who they

were as people. Because these were high school students, many of their chosen traits dealt with extracurricular activities such as marching band, football, and in many instances church affiliation. The outermost circle was where they were to list their given traits. Perhaps because we had previously been discussing race, many of them did list their race here, but they also went on to add other physical characteristics such as hair and eye color, sex, and height. These traits are literally the traits they are either born with, or, in some instances, have to adhere to based on the fact that they are teenagers and under their parents' rules. For example, a student could have listed "lives in Chapin" for a given trait because they lived where their parents lived and have little say so in the geographic location.

Part of the rationale behind this activity was to force the students to consider who they were and what they valued. The ancillary discussion, and more in line with my research, however, was in regard to how we were viewed and how we viewed others. Often we were judged by our given characteristics, which were the traits we literally had little to no control over, such as race. By the same token, we were often guilty of judging others based on their given characteristics as well. I gave an example of a time when I was both judged and when I judged another as a jumping off point to have them consider a time when they had both judged another and were judged by others. None of their examples dealt with race, except for my Black student, who was very candid in describing a time she and a female cousin were followed around a store by a White employee who apparently feared they were going to steal inventory. In fairness to my White students though, because of their Whiteness it was unlikely they were ever judged because of their race, and it could be rather embarrassing for even adults to admit that

they had indeed judged others based on theirs. The class did appear sympathetic toward the Black female, thereby acknowledging that racism existed even if they were still unwilling to admit their complicity in its existence. Otherwise, the examples were primarily about misjudgments based on other characteristics such as athletic talent or intellectual capacity. Again, although the conversation was not race specific, it was still in line with what I want them to understand about judgment at this point in the semester.

The second Center for Creative Leadership activity dealt with Mental Models. Mental Models were how we form our views of the world and people around us. The conversation that resulted from the mental models activity was perhaps the first real step to truly understanding how our implicit bias was formed. This activity began with the students solving a puzzle. Essentially the students had to follow very strict rules to put a series of pictures in order. At first the order was unclear though, as the pictures appear to be random urban and rural landscape photos. Eventually the students began to see that the pictures are actually numbers that occur “naturally” in our environment, and then they were able to place the photos in numeric order. The point of this activity was to show them that their brains were predisposed to see the world in one way based on the environmental stimuli to which they have been exposed, but upon careful consideration they saw that there was more than one way to view any given object or scenario.

For many of the students, it was during this Mental Models activity when the IAT, *Blink*, and Social Identity, specifically how we view others and are viewed by others based on Social Identity, finally clicked into place. There was no denying that they could not initially see the numbers in the pictures because their brains had no reason to look for numbers in natural and urban landscapes. Their implicit bias was to only see the pictures

at face value without looking deeper until they were forced to look deeper because there was a puzzle that needed to be solved. It was not so much that the students were freer to discuss race relations, but they finally accepted that implicit bias is not only a real thing, but that it affects their overt actions more than they realized. They could not blame their implicit bias on an “inaccurate speed test” or “the media” this time. Rather, they accepted the fact that their own implicit bias had initially prevented them from finding success solving this puzzle.

As a part of the Mental Models activity, I also showed Chimamanda Adichie’s TED talk, “Danger of a Single Story.” The purpose in showing this video was to reinforce the danger of only having one perspective of a place or group of people based on what we had seen through secondary sources rather than through firsthand experience. Adichie is a Nigerian author who recounted her childhood love of literature, which consisted primarily of British literature. The damage, of course, was twofold in that she did not see herself represented in the stories and she formed her worldview outside of Nigeria based primarily on what she had read in these texts. The class was able to understand to a point in that many of them have not traveled outside of the United States, and they could acknowledge that their interpretation of other cultures was heavily influenced by what they saw on TV, in movies, or on the Internet. What they cannot relate to, through no real fault of their own, was a lack of representation in the media, especially books. A Black student was especially able relate to this though. In her written reflection she stated, “I’ve never been assigned a book with a Black character who wasn’t a slave or going to trial or something like that.” I wish she had felt comfortable enough to

say this out loud during the whole class discussion because I felt like it could have made a difference in the White student's understanding to have heard it put so bluntly.

The next activity in the unit was the Drawbridge exercise. Judith Katz designed this activity specifically to show racial inequality in the form of an allegory. The Baroness, who is the protagonist of the story, does not follow the specific orders of her husband, the Baron, to stay home while he is away. As she attempted to reenter the castle by crossing the drawbridge the Gateman calmly explained that he, upon orders of the Baron, would kill her if she continued to head toward the castle. She attempted to find help elsewhere, but was turned away by her Lover, her Friend, and the Ferryman. In desperation she tried one final time to enter the castle when the Gateman, true to his word, killed the Baroness. The students are then asked to create a list of most guilty to least guilty in the death of the Baronesses. As anticipated, the vast majority of the students placed the Baroness as either the most guilty or the second most guilty just after the Gateman. The Baron was typically among the least guilty.

The discussion that followed this activity was about why the students created the culpability order they did. Initially we simply talked about the people in their roles from the story. The students felt very strongly that the Baroness got what she deserved because she did not follow the rules and she was an amoral person (she left to visit her lover). The Gateman, on the other hand, was not guilty of "murder" because he was only following the rules, in this case the order to kill the Baroness if she attempted to reenter the castle. At this stage in the conversation, I explained the allegory. Although all of the characters are important and represented some factor of society, we focused on the Baron, who represented the White people who make the rules, and the Baroness, who represented the

Black people who were expected to follow the rules, although they did not get to help make them, or else they would face devastating consequences.

When I explained the allegory to them they were incredulous at first. It helped them to understand better when I was able to make it analogous to their lives. For example, they, as teenagers, did not get to help make the dress code at Chapin High School, yet they were held accountable for following the dress code. While this was admittedly a trite example, it does help them to understand that the Baroness did not get a say in the rule, yet she pays with her life for breaking it. More to the point, it helped them to understand that many of the rules over the history of this country were not made by people of color, yet people of color were expected to adhere to them or face whatever consequences got doled out by the rule-makers.

While this was a difficult concept to accept, it was also a difficult concept to refute with so much historical knowledge about Jim Crow laws, “separate but equal” Supreme Court rulings, and Civil Rights Amendments, which had to be added in order to grant Black people basic freedoms. The difficulty, however, was in getting the students to understand that although we have come a long way since Jim Crow, the same racial hegemony still exists, and was in many ways kept in place through “unwritten rules,” which were often more powerful than any written legislation. Ironically, they seemed to understand the concept of unwritten rules and how they can keep all people, but especially Black people, in a certain state of oppression. The conversation was awkward and stilted, and it was not long in duration, but it was real and honest, and it was the step forward I had been hoping for. The written reaction that summed up the bulk of the

written reactions said, very succinctly, “I feel as if this completely relates to the society we’re in right now, and I think it is sad.”

The final activity in the *Blink* unit was listening to Deputy Catoe speak about his time in Iraq. As our school’s resource officer, he had developed a rapport with many of these students, and the school in general had a great deal of respect for him and his ability to be fair in following the law and the rules of the school. While his talk was about a variety of things, my purpose for having him speak was to discuss the literal life or death consequences of not understanding another culture in regard to his position as security advisor to a newly elected Iraqi Government just after the Iraq war. He showed the students a picture with several Iraqi men and asked them to identify the Shiite Muslim. Of course, they could not. He then asked them to identify the Kurdish man. Again, they could not. For my students, all of the men in the picture simply looked “Arab.” Catoe was able to sympathize with them in that when he first went to Iraq he would also not have been able to identify any of these men by their ethnic or religious background, nor did he understand the importance of being able to do so. He explained though that most of the violence that still existed in Iraq after the end of the war was Sectarian violence, or violence based on ethnic and religious differences, so it was of utmost importance that he learn these differences. Again, this was not about racial hegemony in regard to White people and Black people, but as with some of my other units, this unit helped to continue building ethos with my students about bias in a way that would lead to more focused discussions about racial hegemony later.

As a culminating assessment for this unit, I had the students write reflections about what they had learned about leadership as a result of reading *Blink*. I focused on

leadership here as a way to assess if they had internalized how implicit bias had affected their ability to affect positive change. Most of the students indicated that they discovered the importance of understanding their own implicit bias in order to better lead. One White male stated, “this reading opened up my mindsets and some of my biased stereotypes, all of which, could have detained me from becoming a better leader before reading this.”

Another White female echoed this sentiment by stating, “After reading *Blink*, I was more aware of the thought process that I go through when interacting with others. This book was chosen for our class to make us question the way we think and to eventually change the way we treat people.” Not to belabor the point, but one final quote from another White female who stated, “I think this book has been eye opening for me in the sense that I am now aware of the boxes that I put people in and how I view others in the split second that I see them for the first times. Now that I have been made aware of how my judgments can affect my actions, I will try to consciously battle these stereotypical thoughts that cloud my vision” sums up the bulk of what the students were able to take away from the unit. Essentially these White students gained what I wanted them to gain from this unit in regard to a better understanding of themselves and their own implicit biases that could inhibit them from interacting equally with people who were different than them.

The next two units were more traditional pre-AP English units. The first of which consisted of *1984* and *Animal Farm*, both by George Orwell, “Learning to Read and Write,” which are chapters from a longer narrative by Frederick Douglass, and a TED talk by Elif Shafak entitled “The Politics of Fiction.” My purpose in including this unit here was twofold. First, I did not want to overwhelm any of my students, whether White

or children of color, by pushing too hard and too fast for discussions that could be uncomfortable. We had just spent several weeks discussing implicit bias, who we were, how we viewed the world, and racial hegemony through an allegory, and I did not want my students to shut down because I had expected too much from them in too short a time. Secondly, I also had an obligation to teach age appropriate canonized texts. Unfortunately, many of these canonical texts were written by White authors, however, I had also opted to include two authors who were not White, so that the unit was still somewhat multicultural in nature. I chose to teach this unit using the umbrella topic of the importance of language. Their final assignment for this unit was to write an essay comparing and contrasting how all three authors discussed how language can be powerful in the lives of people. The students overall did well with the topic, but none of the students related the authors' races or ethnicities to the importance of language specifically.

The second of these two more traditional units consisted of reinforcement of Mental Models and the introduction of the Center for Creative Leadership's Values and Actions lesson as they applied to *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen. This unit, unlike the Orwell language unit, although it was also pre-AP in nature and the author is a White male, was directly preparing them for a unit involving *The Other Wes Moore*, which brought them back to the concept of racial hegemony in the United States.

Before explaining what the play was about, I had the students perform a word association with the words 'mother' and 'doll.' As predicted many of the students associated mother with words such as caring, kind, cleaning, food, and etc. Ironically, most of the students did not associate the word doll with young girls primarily. In fact,

most of their words associated with doll were words like scary, creepy, and evil. While using the word doll did not help me to achieve my purpose the word mother did, and this led into a conversation about stereotypes, which began our reading of the play. In *A Doll's House*, Nora, the main protagonist, was fulfilling a role. Because of her upbringing and the society in which she lived, she believed a wife and mother must be a certain type of persona, and for most of the play she fulfilled this role, or so she believed. This was the point at which I introduced the Values and Actions lesson.

The Values and Actions lesson asked the students to compare what they said they valued versus where they actually spent the bulk of their time. Initially they listed where they spent their time, going so far as to build a pie chart to visually represent how much time they spent in these different areas, without knowing that was going to be compared to their values later. After completing the first task, I then asked them to list the people, things, or attributes they valued the most. Again, they did this not realizing they were going to be comparing this to their previously established list of how they spent their time. When I asked them to compare the two lists, they often realized there was a discrepancy between the two. We then looked deeper at the character of Nora to determine what her lists would have likely looked like. The conversation that results was powerful in that the students learned that actions could often speak louder than words. At this point we wrapped up *A Doll's House* and moved into *The Other Wes Moore*.

While it may not initially appear that these two texts had much in common, the protagonists in both texts were products of their society who were given the opportunity to make sacrifices in order to change the social structure or status quo in their lives. The lead protagonist in *A Doll's House* was a female, specifically a wife and mother, who

chose at the end of the play to break free from the societal expectations of who a wife and mother should be. In *The Other Wes Moore*, the two main protagonists, confusingly both named Wes Moore, were both Black men who were also products of their society who had the opportunity to change the trajectory of their lives. Sadly, one young man, the other Wes Moore, made poor decisions that led to incarceration, while Wes Moore the author made decisions, or in many cases had decisions made for him, that led to his success. Because we were able to have conversations about support systems, friends, societal influences, stereotypes, and decision making with *A Doll's House* in regard to gender roles, the segue way into having these same conversations in regard to race was a natural one.

The final Center for Creative Leadership activity I had them perform was My Vision. This was a picture of a tree where each aspect represents a different component of what they would need to consider when setting and achieving goals. The roots were the things that make them strong – family, experience, church, etc. The trunk of the tree represented different skills or abilities they either possess or intend to acquire. The branches were the goals they have. The short branches were short-term goals that led to the long-term goals on the longer branches. The sun and the rain were the external resources they would need to acquire skills and abilities in order to reach their goals. Finally the lightning represented threats or obstacles they may need to overcome to reach their goals. We referred to this tree often while reading *The Other Wes Moore* to compare their My Vision sheets to the visions of both Wes Moore the author and Wes Moore the incarcerated. They began to realize, without my ever having to state it, that they were privileged in a variety of ways, and one of those ways is that they were White.

Although I have already stated the racial make-up of the class is 87% White and almost evenly divided by sex, it would also be relevant to state here that all of these students qualified as middle class or higher socioeconomically and most of these students come from two parent families. Those who did not come from two parent families still had two parent support systems with the exception of one male student whose mother passed away two years ago. In terms of support systems outside of family, all of these students attended a school that regularly is in the top ten schools in South Carolina and well above most national average academic rankings, and most of the children attended church regularly. They were all also academically gifted and part of an elite leadership program within an already elite school. In addition, Chapin High School also had a program called MAST (mentor and student teams) where each teacher was assigned between 20-25 students with whom they met weekly for all four years they were students at CHS. All of this was privilege although for these students it was a given.

Over the course of reading and discussing *The Other Wes Moore*, we talked often about the importance of support systems, implementable goals, and cyclical societal hegemonic structure. We discussed, of course, the two Wes Moores, but we also discussed their own situations, which were patently dissimilar to the two men in the book. Again this reinforced their White privilege along with their other privileges in such a way as to be relevant to them without encouraging them to feel guilty about being White. My goal was not to instill guilt, but to instill understanding with the purpose of encouraging them to think more globally beyond their own situations.

In a final attempt to create an open atmosphere for discussing this racial hegemony, I invited our school's principal to come speak. He was very well liked among

the student body and faculty. He was a very successful Black man, and perhaps for this reason the students, and to be honest most of this White community, rarely considered what he has had to overcome because of his lack of privilege. His race is obvious, but he began the talk by explaining that he grew up in a deeply segregated area of D.C. with a poor, single mother. This was a very similar beginning to the lives of both Wes Moores. Because he was such a sharp dresser, the students' faces were in disbelief when he described alternating between the only two pairs of pants he owned and hiding the holes in the soles of the only pair of shoes he owned when he was in junior high school. At one point, early in the speech, he was discussing the segregation in D.C. in the 1980s due to redlining policies. One of my brave young men raised his hand to ask what redlining means. Again, because of the rapport between the children and their principal, and I would like to think because I had primed them for this unit well, they were unafraid to ask questions about segregation practices that intentionally created the racial hegemony that existed. Dr. Ross, to his credit, was very patient in explaining what to him was a normal childhood to a group of primarily White affluent teens who could not possibly relate.

While the conversations about their personal journeys and the journeys of the two Wes Moores had been very open and honest in regard to racial hegemony, I invited Dr. Ross to speak because no matter how much they "understood" the struggles of the men in the book, it would be more profound to have a conversation with an individual they knew personally. In the written reflection the students turned in on *The Other Wes Moore* unit, it was clear that Dr. Ross's conversation with them had the intended impact. My Black student wrote, "I'm thankful to have a black role model even if I don't want to be a

teacher when I grow up.” Another student, a White female, stated, “I never really thought about how lucky I am, but after reading this book and hearing Dr. Ross, I’m even more determined to make good decisions even when my life does get hard so I can reach my goals.” While she does not come out and directly say that she was privileged because she was White, the implication was that she recognized her intersectional privileges. A White male said, “I didn’t know that red lining was a thing, and I think it’s sad that they used to do that. People shouldn’t be separated by banks like that.” His understanding of redlining is obviously elementary, but the takeaway from his sentiment was that segregation was wrong. After reading his particular reflection, I realized that I missed a great opportunity to reintroduce the Drawbridge activity in that “banks” in his view are representative of the Baron from the allegory. Ultimately, all of the responses were candid in acknowledging that their lives were advantageous.

In an effort to provide a more meaningful metric to this study than just simply observing student revelations through conversations and written reflections, I had them take the Race IAT a second time at the end of *The Other Wes Moore* unit. As previously stated, in the first IAT results shown in Figure 1 below, four of 23 or 17% of the students showed a preference toward African Americans; two of 23 or 12% showed no preference; and 17 of 23 or 71% showed a preference toward European Americans. Of those 17, four showed a strong preference for European Americans. However, as can be seen in Figure 2 below, the results shifted significantly when the students took the same IAT after the initiatives. Only one of 23 or 5% showed a preference for African Americans; nine of 23 or 41% showed no preference; and 12 of 23 or 55% showed a preference for European Americans. Of those 12, six showed only a slight preference for European Americans.

Ideally, no preference was what I was hoping to achieve, and although my initiatives did not eliminate bias from my students completely, those students showing no preference moved from two students or 12% to nine students or 41% in one semester. Additionally, the student's level of European American preference had shifted toward no preference also. Initially four of 23 or 17% showed a strong preference for European Americans, but the post IAT shows only 3 of 23 or 14% still hold this preference after the initiatives. More telling was the students who showed moderate and slight preference for European Americans. Many of the students who initially only held a slight preference for European Americans initially moved into the no preference category, and many of the students who initially showed a moderate preference moved into the slight preference category, which was positive movement even if they were not there yet.

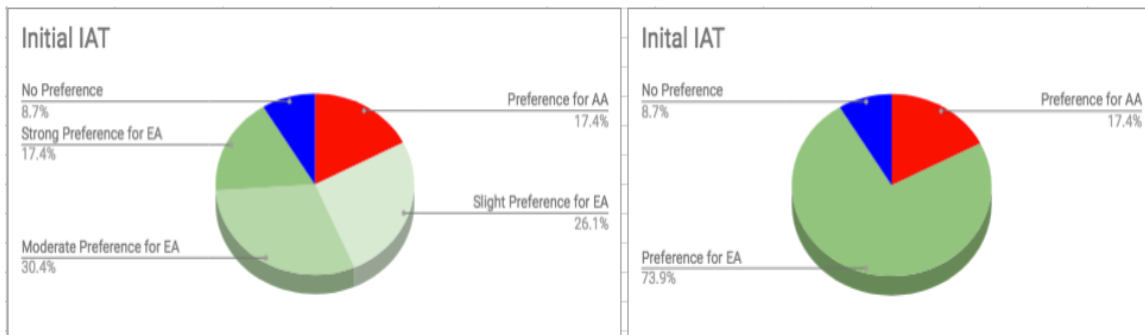


Figure 4.1. Initial IAT Results. These were the results from the original IAT. On the left there was a shade change among slight, moderate, and strong preferences for European American. On the right these preferences were grouped together to visually represent the large number of students who showed a preference for European American students. As you can see the number of children who showed no preference (blue) is very slight by comparison to the children who showed a preference toward European Americans (green).

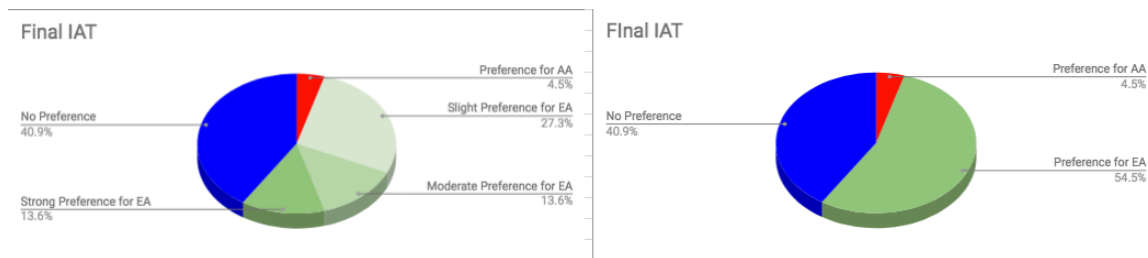


Figure 4.2. Final IAT Results. These were the results from the IAT that was taken after the semester's worth of initiatives. Again, on the left there was a shade change among slight, moderate, and strong preferences for European American. On the right these preferences are grouped together to visually represent the number of students who showed a preference for European American students. As you can see the number of students who showed no preference (in blue) increased, and the number of students who showed a preference toward European Americans (in green) decreased.

Interpretations of the Results of the Study

The initial phase of this study involved introducing these White students to the concept of implicit bias and that we all have bias that we may not even be aware of. While ultimately they all were able to acknowledge that bias exists, they were initially reticent to admit to theirs although most of the class showed a preference toward European Americans. These students fell into two primary categories: shame at their results or blaming the perceived inaccuracy of the IAT for their results. By the end of the semester, not only did many of the students show movement toward either no preference or only a slight preference toward European Americans, but they were far more accepting of their results even if they still showed bias. Fortunately, I have used IATs before, so I knew to not be discouraged at their initial reticence to admit to culpability. I also knew from past experience that teaching *Blink* at the same time would help to better explain the concept of implicit aptitudes, which would eventually set the minds of the students at ease regarding the factualness of implicit aptitudes.

The conversations that we were able to hold as a class also increased in their level of overall participation, awareness of the issues being discussed, and ownership of the problems over the course of the initiatives. Part of this resulted from the class simply getting to know one another over the course of time, but part of this resulted from purposeful instruction to help the class get to know each other in a very specific way to promote honesty in the conversations. Having Catoe and Ross speak to the students along with having them read *The Other Wes Moore* helped them to realize that they were not alone in their biases, which eventually fostered their ability to speak more openly about their own biases and how these biases affected who they were. Unfortunately this was a much more difficult observation to quantify.

While it was also difficult to quantify the growth in their written reflections, it was easier to be certain that there was growth and not simply a perception of growth on my part. For example, after the first IAT many students felt shame at their results or blamed the test for their results. After the final IAT, however, not a single student placed the blame for their bias on the test, and many of them wrote that while the results still were not what they wanted them to be, they stated they would actively continue to improve their understanding through their newly acquired awareness of themselves through the leadership lessons that we did as a class. Their written reactions to *The Other Wes Moore* unit also showed a depth of understanding in regard to racial hegemony that they had not previously exhibited.

Conclusion

Ultimately, introducing these White students to their implicit bias and providing initiatives that helped improve their understanding of themselves and their place in the

social structure because of their privilege had a positive impact and fostered open and honest conversations about social hegemony. While the IAT was an admittedly unreliable metric, it did show movement toward no preference or slight preference toward European Americans, which was promising, especially considering this research was only conducted over the course of one semester, and some of the texts were still European canonical texts. I also saw promise in their ability to openly discuss their privilege in a way that was productive. I was also excited about the fact that many of my ELA colleagues were aware of my study and they were also invested in creating sustainable change in their own curriculums. While this exceeded the scope of my research, I was hopeful that a combined curricular effort could shift these students from simple awareness and acceptance to being able to affective positive change within their own community.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact that is exhibited by White students enrolled in an Academic Leadership Academy when they were exposed to their own implicit aptitudes and then taught leadership strategies combined with a multicultural curricular focus. I hypothesized that there would be a positive impact, which would lead to more introspective conversations about race relations within the United States.

There were several problems of practice to overcome in testing this theory. The first of which was that I needed to handle the content in such a way as to promote honest conversations rather than creating an overwhelming scenario that fostered guilt. While I wanted these students to be aware of the privilege that being White affords, I wanted to encourage them to use this privilege as a change agent. Another problem was choosing age-appropriate and level-appropriate content. As pre-AP students, I was expected to expose them to canonical fiction texts, which limits the amount of nonfiction and young adult fiction I was allowed to use. However, as students in an Academic Leadership Academy, I was also expected to embed leadership components. Therefore, I opted to use the looser standards of the leadership components to create a multicultural curriculum

through nonfiction that corresponded directly with the leadership instruction in order to build an environment conducive to fostering conversations about racism and privilege.

Focus of the Study

This study focused primarily on three separate components: the implicit aptitudes held by a subset of predominately White children at a predominately White school, how these attitudes affected their cultural sensitivity, and whether or not leadership activities and a multicultural curriculum would change their implicit aptitudes and allow them to be more culturally sensitive as shown through class discussions, written reflections, and IAT metrics.

The initial focus was to determine if these students were indeed biased toward European Americans. My hypothesis was that they would have this implicit aptitude because they were White students who live in a predominately white community, so all other factors aside, I believed they would be primed to be biased towards what was familiar to them. They did show a remarkable bias toward European Americans. Based on their reactions to the initial IAT, it was clear that they lacked cultural sensitivity in that they blamed media and the test itself rather than to simply accept their own bias. They were not yet self-aware enough to realize that yes, they were influenced by society, but they have also internalized that influence, and that this bias can affect how they view others.

The final phase of this study was to determine if leadership instruction and purposefully implemented multicultural literature would help to increase their self-awareness enough to have an effect on their implicit aptitude and thus foster mature

conversation about race relations. Another hypothesis I had was that their bias was indeed formed because these White children are so homogenously grouped, and their ELA curriculum tended to lack lessons that created introspection or involved texts written by or about other cultures. Typically when they were exposed to books that were written by authors of color generally the purpose was because the author is a part of a multicultural unit rather than because the text has merit in and of itself, which often created more cultural compartmentalization. My goal was to eliminate, insofar as I was able, this cultural compartmentalization by including multicultural texts in a more organic way through thematic inclusion.

Overview of the Study

My initial goal was to determine if this group of 23 primarily White English 2 Honors students in an Academic Leadership Academy held a bias toward European Americans, and if learning about this bias along with a multicultural curriculum infused with leadership strategies would help them to begin to eliminate their bias and learn to hold fruitful conversations about racial hegemony.

Before beginning this study, I conducted a review of the literature available. While I am certain that my study was not a new concept, I found it difficult to find other studies that have been conducted in quite this way with this population of students, so I researched the constituent parts of my study instead. I first researched implicit aptitudes, followed by multicultural curriculums, and finally used Friere's pedagogy as a theoretical framework for this study.

This study consisted of three primary units of study. The first unit of study dealt with bias and worldview and used *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell as the umbrella text. The second unit dealt with the power of language and used *1984* as its umbrella text. The third and final unit dealt with decision making and planning and used *The Other Wes Moore* as its primary text. Each unit consisted of several subtexts such as TED talks, excerpts from larger works, speakers, and etc. Each unit was also comprised of leadership activities which consisted of understanding given traits versus core values, time management to reflect our core values, understanding the importance of support systems in planning for the future, how who we are affects how we view the world, and etc.

Overall the study showed that these students did move away from a bias toward European Americans and toward having no apparent bias after being exposed to their own implicit aptitudes, multicultural literature, and leadership lessons.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of bias discovery in conjunction with purposeful multicultural curriculum and leadership lessons in White students enrolled in the English 2 Honors course within the Academic Leadership Academy at Chapin High School. I theorized that these initiatives would lead to a better understanding of self and other, which would lead to more productive class conversations in regard to privilege and racial hegemony.

The initial initiatives were part of a unit on bias with *Blink* as the umbrella text. Along with the core text, *Blink*, which was an initiative in and of itself, the students also had several ancillary activities. These consisted of the students taking the Race IAT,

viewing “The Danger of a Single Story,” participating in the Drawbridge activity, listening to Deputy Catoe as a guest speaker, and identifying their Social Identity and Mental Models.

The second sets of initiatives were part of a unit about the power of language and a unit about values and actions. The core texts for these units were *1984* and *Animal Farm* and *A Doll’s House* respectively. The power of language unit also consisted of reading “Learning to Read and Write” and viewing “The Politics of Fiction.” *A Doll’s House* was taught primarily in isolation along with a Values and Actions lesson, which led directly into the fourth and final unit in the study.

This final unit also consists of a consideration of Values and Actions in addition to a My Vision leadership lesson. These are taught as part of a decision-making unit with *The Other Wes Moore* as its core text. They also listened to our principal, Dr. Ross, as a guest speaker and took the Race IAT a second time.

All units were comprised of written reflections and course discussions along with other more standards-based assignments that were not included in this study. Over the course of the semester, the IATs, the class discussions, and the written reflections were evaluated for growth of self-awareness, growth towards removing bias, and growth towards an increased multicultural world-view. Overall there was growth by the group as a whole in self-awareness and a multi-cultural world-view based on the class discussions and written reflections. There was also growth toward no preference as indicated by the second Race IAT as compared to the first Race IAT.

Discussion of Major Points of the Study

Perhaps one of the most honest revelations about societal influences came from my Asian female who said in regard to her second racial bias IAT, “I honestly wasn't surprised about my results. In school, most of my friends are white rather than black or African American. The majority of people that surround me are white and I feel like that somehow primed me to prefer them more. However, I don't like that about myself and I wish my results could have been different.” Although the focus of the study was on exposing bias specifically in regard to White students and their views of the societal hegemony regarding their relationship with Black people, my heart goes out to this student who also faced some of the same distancing my Black students faced in regard to not being surrounded by people who looked like her. This also helped to show why this study and its implications were so important. I could not make my school reflect demographics at the national, regional, or even state level; therefore, I made my curriculum emblematic of the demographics to which these children would otherwise not have been exposed. My Black student was especially appreciative of this effort stating in her *The Other Wes Moore* unit reflection, “Bravo, Mrs. Weathersbee. Thanks for choosing Black American literature. We need more of that in a school where diversity is almost nonexistent.” However, a personal reflection post-study is that perhaps I focused too heavily on the awareness of my White students and therefore, ironically, neglected the equally important awareness of my students of color. Truly I should have been focused on the awareness of the oppressed and the oppressor.

Another revelatory moment was the discovery that creating a multicultural classroom does not necessarily mean having a multicultural unit. Inherently I knew

simply including multicultural literature for the sake of including multicultural literature was not an ideal plan, but before this study I do not know if I would have been able to articulate why this was inadequate and in many cases counterproductive to the goals of actual inclusion. One of my goals was to remove the racial compartmentalizing that has been occurring in the ELA classroom, thus the inclusion of multicultural texts needed to be for the sake of the texts themselves as inherently valuable and not simply because they were about or by a marginalized people.

This plan appeared to have made an impact on my students in that over the course of the semester they were able to better converse about the issues of privilege and marginalization as important but ancillary to the core text itself. In other words, because we were not doing a multicultural unit, but rather a unit on decision making and using a nonfiction text, *The Other Wes Moore*, with protagonists who happened to be Black, the conversations were more organic and less intimidating for White students who were generally unable to empathize with the plights of Black individuals. They can, however, empathize with having to make decisions and plan, so through this connection we were able to extend the conversation into less comfortable areas through the safety of the text we were reading. One White male in his written reflection on *The Other Wes Moore* decision making unit said, in addition to discussing support systems and decision making, that “this book can let people who have not experienced racism, poverty, or crime see the lives of people who live through it everyday” which was a profound revelation.

The introspection created as a result of the leadership lessons was beneficial in giving the students the self-awareness necessary to understand the context of the texts. We all viewed the world around us through our own preconceived mental model of the

way things should be, but often students this age have never considered what that “should be” was through their own eyes and not the mental model of the world created for them by their parents and other societal influences. These activities were tailored specifically to help them understand themselves and what they believe, which was an integral aspect to forming cogent thoughts about their relationship with the world. Because I was able to conduct these lessons simultaneously with texts that forced them to shift their worldview, even if only slightly, they were better able to articulate this understanding and these shifts. A White female expressed this mental model shift in her *The Other Wes Moore* decision making unit reflection by saying, “Moore’s writing truly compelled me to show compassion to those who have a different lifestyle than mine, so we all end down the same successful path.” Another White female stated this mental model shift a bit differently by saying “This book was really an eye opener for me. We get so sucked into our perfect little worlds that we forget people go through some rough stuff.”

Action Plan: Implications of the Findings

While my study did not conclude that a semester’s worth of leadership lessons and a multicultural curriculum would enable these students to affect positive change in their communities, it did conclude that with limited initiatives this particular group of students moved closer to having no preference between African American and European American according to the IATs they took and closer to having meaningful discourse about race relations in this country according to their class discussions and written reflections. The implication of this conclusion was that purposeful curriculum could make a difference in how our White children view the world around them. As explained with the Mental Models lesson, they simply have not yet been trained to see the world

through eyes other than their own, but with careful planning we could shift their perspectives.

All students could benefit from an ELA curriculum rich with authors from a variety of backgrounds. Often instructors chose to include certain texts or authors, so their students will see themselves in the text, and I completely agreed that this was important, but I also believe it was equally important to create a curriculum that was well-rounded. While I believed there was distinct merit in teaching certain texts simply because they represent certain groups of people, I also believed that there was merit in simply teaching texts that were representative without necessarily focusing on that representation. For example, I included “Learning to Read and Write” by Frederick Douglass with a focus on his perspective of the power and importance of language. Obviously, you could not discuss Douglass or any of Douglass’s work without discussing his enslaved condition, but that was not the focus of the unit. In other words, a lot of cultural sensitivity could be gained by purposefully including multicultural texts and authors of color without making the unit specifically about multicultural inclusion.

All students could also benefit from a curriculum that embeds leadership components that forced introspection. For a variety of reasons, teachers were reticent to deviate from the curriculum guides that had been developed based on the standards. This can be especially true in courses that were accompanied by any high stakes standardized test, which included most of the core ELA courses at the secondary level. The reality was you can do both. It was possible to teach the standards necessary for students to find success on high stakes tests while also teaching them how to be leaders if only leaders of

themselves. It was imperative that these young people began to consider who they were and what that even means.

It is also imperative that we created learning environments where students felt comfortable having conversations that may be difficult to have. Often the humanities classrooms were some of the most fecund environments for conversations about the human experience, but as stated before, much of the curriculum is sanitized for the purpose of standardized testing and, unfortunately, for keeping the conversations safe. Understandably, we wanted to keep our classrooms safe zones for all students, but that should not entail eschewing difficult topics simply because they were difficult. If we could not teach our children how to respectfully hold conversations about uncomfortable topics they would grow into adults who cannot respectfully hold conversations about uncomfortable topics.

Suggestions for Future Research

There were so many options for future research with this study. Because the results were promising in the ability of this particular group of students to use their newfound awareness in a potentially impactful way, there was also the potential for these same types of initiatives to have a similar impact on other student groups and with the focus on other marginalized populations.

One consideration would be to start implementing leadership strategies in middle school rather than waiting until the students are high school freshmen. As a high school teacher, I cannot speak to the overall maturity of younger students in general, but I believed middle school students could be able to internalize at least the introspective

leadership curriculum that was used in this research. The leadership continuum that we had developed for our Academic Leadership Academy students was not only appropriate for younger children, but it could be even more impactful if we could spiral the activities over the course of several years rather than just one year. In other words, if they came into their freshman year of high school already primed to think introspectively about who they were and how that affected their relationships with those around them, then the leadership lessons would only be important as refreshers rather than as pivotal introductory pieces in the study.

In addition to the concept of starting the leadership components at a younger age, these sorts of initiatives could be beneficial to students who were not identified as gifted. All students were capable of learning more about themselves and what that means about how they fit into the greater world. My experience over the course of 20 years as a secondary English instructor was that all students can learn a concept if it was properly scaffolded by the teacher, so the scaffolding would certainly look different for students who learn slower, and the overall process would likely take longer than a semester to complete. This could be especially impactful for our at-risk students who were often at-risk in part because of a lack of positive role models in their personal lives.

I also would like to determine the longitudinal effects of my study on this particular group of students throughout their high school matriculation. This would take not only careful planning, but could not be a study completed in isolation due to different teachers assigned to instruct the students at different levels. The Academic Leadership Academy would be a good place to attempt this longitudinal study, however, as they travel together in either English or AP Capstone courses from freshman year to junior

year. At this stage in my research my goal was simply to determine if the initiatives had any impact, and they did, but the longevity of the impact has not been tested yet.

Although the IAT results said that there was movement toward no preference, perhaps that impact was temporary and the students were only saying and writing what they believed I wanted to hear and read. While I would like to believe these initiatives would have a lasting impact, I also have to face the reality that a semester's worth of anything was unlikely to create a permanent change.

Additionally, I would like to see these same general initiatives applied with the focus on other marginalized populations. As indicated earlier, these students were homogenous in a variety of ways, all of which provided them with privilege – White, middle or upper middle class, Christian, heterosexual, two parent families, and etc. While a great deal of this was touched upon simply as ancillary points to the primary structure of the initiatives, none of these other elements of marginalization was the primary focus.

This would also be a good study to replicate with faculty and staff. Teachers would not tolerate sitting through professional development that looked like a freshman English class, so the initiatives would certainly need to look different. However, I am also aware, at least at my school, the teachers could benefit from lessons that led to multicultural sensitivity. Perhaps if the teachers were asked to be more introspective and have conversations about complex topics such as racial hegemony, they would have not only more sensitivity themselves, but be better equipped to foster these conversations in their own classrooms. Most teachers who were advocates of social equity, have taken it upon themselves to study these topics as they were not readily available through my

school or district as professional development. My district has partnered with Dr. Elam, a proponent of social equity; however, we only had her for three half days per year, if we did not lose a day of professional development due to inclement weather make-up. This was also voluntary professional development, and likely the people who attend were people who were already on the right path toward cultural sensitivity.

Conclusion

While impact on individual student thinking was a difficult thing to measure with any discernable accuracy, I could still say that without a doubt this study had an impact on my students as a whole. Because the overarching purpose was simply to determine impact on these White students when exposed to their own implicit bias, assuming, of course, that an implicit bias toward European Americans and thus against African Americans existed, I believe this study did show impact. As shown through the initial IAT they did indeed hold these biases as a whole, and as shown through the final IAT the class as a whole moved away from bias toward no preference, and the students who did still show bias toward European Americans moved from moderate bias toward slight bias which was movement in the right direction.

Overall, I could not comment as to which initiative held the most value, but none of these initiatives would work as well in isolation. Awareness of bias was the first step, but once aware, introspection and purposeful exposure to carefully selected texts were the keys toward altering their preconceived notions of self and how they fit into the world around them. These White children attending a predominantly White high school living in a predominantly White community had simply never been exposed to their privilege or

their implicit aptitudes before. Fortunately, these Academic Leadership Academy students were self-aware enough to understand they lacked self-awareness and were pliable enough to internalize lessons to that effect. These initiatives were effective, and I was excited about continuing to work with my colleagues to revamp their curriculums and revamping my own curriculum in order to continue to consciously select texts and activities that would continue to teach these children about themselves and give them the power and tools necessary to be effective change agents of the future.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT SURVEY

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IAT Responses

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QUESTIONS

RESPONSES

23

IAT Response

Please take the following survey. These results will not be shared with anyone.

Last Name

Short answer text

First Name *

Short answer text

Grade *

☐ freshman

☐ sophomore

Sex *

- ☐ male
- ☐ female

Ethnicity (as identified on most forms and applications) *

- ☐ White
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Native American or American Indian
- ☐ Asian / Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other

This question will involve the Harvard based Implicit Aptitude Tests. Click on <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>. Click on "I wish to proceed" at the bottom of the page. Click on "Race IAT," and follow the instructions on how to take the test. When you have finished COPY AND PASTE your results into the answer section for this question.

Long answer text

Were you surprised by your results for the "Race IAT"? If so, what in particular surprised you about your results? If the results were as you expected, why were they as you expected? Please be honest and remember that none of these results will be shared.



Long answer text

APPENDIX B

IAT SCREENSHOT

Implicit Association Test

Next, you will use the 'E' and 'I' computer keys to categorize items into groups as fast as you can. These are the four groups and the items that belong to each:

Category	Items
Good	Enjoy, Lovely, Magnificent, Smiling, Fabulous, Beautiful, Delight, Happy
Bad	Detest, Sickening, Dirty, Grief, Pain, Scorn, Gross, Nasty
African Americans	
European Americans	

There are seven parts. The instructions change for each part. Pay attention!

Continue

Debriefing

The sorting test you just took is called the Implicit Association Test (IAT). You categorized good and bad words with images of African Americans and European Americans.

Here is your result:

Your data suggest a slight automatic preference for European Americans over African Americans.

Your result is described as an "Automatic preference for African Americans over European Americans" if you were faster responding when *African Americans* and *Good* are assigned to the same response key than when *European Americans* and *Good* were classified with the same key. Your score is described as an "Automatic preference for European Americans over African Americans" if the opposite occurred.

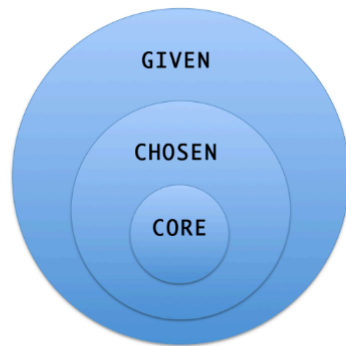
Your automatic preference may be described as "slight", "moderate", "strong", or "no preference". This indicates the *strength* of your automatic preference.

The IAT requires a certain number of correct responses in order to get results. If you made too many errors while completing the test you will get the feedback that there were too many errors to determine a result.

Note that your IAT result is based only on the categorization task and not on the questions that you answered.

APPENDIX C

CCL – SOCIAL IDENTITY



“ Social identity is a theory that helps us understand group dynamics. Your social identity is like a map of the different social groups you belong to. It helps us understand how we understand the world and others and how others might understand us.

GIVEN

- Group memberships or identities that we have no control over - they were given to us. This category could include nationality, gender, religion, race, age, family situation, physical characteristics, etc.

CHOSEN

- These are group memberships or identities that we DO have control over and make choices about. This category could include: education, career, hobbies, religion, nationality, etc.

CORE

- These are group memberships or identities that are so important to who we are that without them, we would not be ourselves. They define us. This category might include: professional or personal interests, skills, traits, behaviors, values, etc.

APPENDIX D

DRAWBRIDGE ACTIVITY

The “Drawbridge” Exercise – Facilitator Notes The “Drawbridge Exercise” is taken from Judith H. Katz’s *White Awareness: Handbook for AntiRacism Training* (1978, pp. 70 – 72). It begins with the instructor, or the class taking turns, reading the story out loud.

First, ask everyone individually to rank-order the degree of responsibility for the baroness’s death of each of the characters. Small groups of five to six students then meet to try to agree about a ranking order and identify a spokesperson to report out. After approximately 30 minutes, the whole class discusses the results of the smaller group debates, the various rankings, and the different perspectives about society and social change the rankings implied. Facilitate the students in identifying contrasting views and the assumptions each view makes about the possibilities and legitimacy of action against oppressive conditions. In particular, ask them to consider differences in the ranking of each character, when they are viewed as individuals acting apart from any societal context or as operating within the confines of imposed social relationships. Debrief

Questions: • What factors influenced your ranking decision? • What feelings were provoked during this activity and your decision making process? Why? • In attempting to reach a group consensus, were you convinced of a different ranking order? Why or why not? • How does this exercise relate to societal values and norms? • What change work would need to be done to effect the outcome of the story? Finally, using the symbolism described by Katz (1978), suggest to the class that the characters in the story can be

equated with social forces in contemporary society: The baron becomes the symbol for White society; the baroness, for people of color; the gateman, the police force and military; the boatman, White institutions; the neighbor, liberals; and the childhood friend, enticements such as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and other American ideals of freedom (p. 70). Then ask students to reconsider ranking the characters in light of the new symbolization and in light of present-day conditions. This part of the discussion deepens the consideration of the responsibility for maintaining or changing oppressive conditions and the power or powerlessness of the victim in self-determination and in effecting social change.

Barron - White society (if appropriate you can also draw out, male, Christian, straight, typically abled, US born, etc. - it sets values, rules)

Baroness - People of Color (have little to say about values, expected to adhere to them)

Gateman - Police force/military, etc. (no say in rules but expected to enforce them)

Boatman - Institutions (service for a cost, if you have resources you have opportunity)

2 Neighbor - Liberals (good intentions, within my values framework, I'll accept you as long as you follow the rules)

Friend - Enticements (things we fall in love with, but in reality or practice they don't do much good, constitution, bill of rights, etc.)

As students argue for their particular view, they become clearer about their own perception of the relationship between the individual and society. For most, this activity is fun and nonthreatening because it centers on a fictitious historical situation. Nevertheless, when contemporary social relationships are discussed during the last part of the activity, some students do experience discomfort. They are faced with the recognition that, from the perspective of the victim, current societal rules and relationships cannot be accepted if

change is to occur for them. (Adapted by Darlene Flynn from, Teaching / Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach, by Louise DermanSparks, Carol Brunson Phillips)

APPENDIX E

CCL – MY VISION

Going through life without a vision is a little like stumbling around blindfolded, trying to find a specific spot - it's possible but it is a lot harder than it needs to be. Vision provides the map, feedback, and support we need to get from our current location to the place we want to be.

Label your tree according to the following components (add those that are not already included in the image):

- **ROOTS:** Things that make you strong - family members, values, experiences, etc.
- **TREE TRUNK:** Represents different skills and abilities you have or need to have
- **BRANCHES:** Represent different goals you have - six months, five years, etc. (Academic goals, leadership goals, personal goals, etc.)
- **SUN and RAIN:** Represent the external resources you will need to help your tree grow
- **LIGHTNING:** Represents threats or obstacles that may threaten the growth or health of your tree

Handout: A. Carter (acarter@lexrich5.org) - 2015