If Not Me, Then Who? A Study of Racial and Cultural Competence in a High School English Department

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IF NOT ME, THEN WHO? A STUDY OF RACIAL AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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DEDICATION

To the students who have come before, I feel an apology is in order. I’m sorry my tendency toward colormuteness overrode my ability to provide you with a diverse and inclusive educational experience.

To the students who are to come, I will work to embrace my agency and heed the lessons learned from this study so that together we become more culturally competent.

To my life’s greatest work, my children, you fill our days with unending chaos and our hearts with unceasing joy! You make us so proud. I hope one day, when you’re old enough to understand, you will be proud of the work we’ve done, too. In the meantime, we will try to instill in you a love of learning and a desire to go after your goals. Thank you for your patience as mom and dad went after theirs. Above all, I hope you develop the courage to use your voice for equity and justice. Thank you for your unconditional love—I hope it lasts through your teenage years!

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ABSTRACT

While the student population in U.S. public schools is diversifying, the teacher population and curriculum remain monochromatic. This action research study grew from the observation that racial and cultural content and discourse were absent from the English classrooms in my suburban high school due to a perceived lack of teacher cultural competence. Through this convergent mixed-method study, grounded in critical race theory, whiteness, and cultural competence, I sought to examine the factors that contribute to racial silence and improve teacher cultural competence in order to transform our classrooms into more racially and culturally just spaces. Surveys, independent reflections, focus group discussions, and field notes yielded data in three phases over the course of 8 weeks, suggesting (a) targeted intervention can impact teacher cultural competence; (b) teachers desire more inclusive classroom practices; (c) yet that desire does not equate to action; because (d) the prevalence of fear engenders colormuteness and inhibits change. Recommended actions include committing to cultural proficiency alongside others; critically examining policies, practices, and support systems at the school and classroom level; engaging in intentional racial discourse; and providing prolonged antiracist professional development as teachers work toward dismantling racial and cultural inequities within the school.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCAI .................................................. Cultural Competence Assessment Instrument
CCC .......................................................... Cultural Competence Continuum
CoBRAS .................................................. Color-Blind Racial Attitude Scale
CRT .................................................................. critical race theory
NCES .......................................................... National Center for Education Statistics
SAE .................................................................. Standard American English
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I entered my predominantly White\(^1\) classroom 15 years ago as a young, naïve teacher ready to introduce my senior students to such notable greats as Beowulf, Hamlet, Winston Smith, and Elizabeth Bennett. I was so proud of the work I was doing, bringing British literary giants into the classroom, where students could embrace their stories, their struggles, and their ideals. They were familiar. My students and I found ourselves in the characters and in the plotlines: their challenges, their feelings, their love stories, their revenge, and their rebellion. We were enthralled as the characters’ written experiences could have been our lived experiences. Their stories were essentially our stories. Fast-forward 15 years. Despite countless opportunities to broaden this curriculum, additional teaching experience, further knowledge and implementation of new strategies, sociocultural movements reshaping our communities, Common Core’s shift from the curriculum’s sole focus being British literature, and increased contemporary literary contributions, my syllabus still lists the works of Shakespeare, Orwell, and Austen. My focus is, as it was 15 years ago, on teaching those classic works, which are familiar, comfortable, and safe.

\(^1\) In accordance with APA guidelines on race and ethnicity, White and Black are capitalized throughout this dissertation. Because whiteness and blackness are socially constructed phenomena based on race (Green et al., 2007; McMahon, 2015), they remain lowercase. However, I have preserved the original capitalization of each word in quotations.
The impetus for this study came from the realization and belief that our English department is doing our students a disservice by not challenging the normative White curriculum by way of exposing students to literary texts that are atypical, countercultural, and, quite frankly, uncomfortable because of their lack of familiarity. Our White teachers and White students are comfortable with the typical curriculum because no matter the grade level, the literary focus is on the White experience. Racial walls blockade the extent of students’ knowledge. The information they receive is White, from White teachers, and involves an overall prevalence of whiteness. The curriculum has solely been a continuation of the environment in which our teachers and students have developed—and that is skewed knowledge. If our department seeks to balance the social justice scales within our classrooms, we must address the lack of representation of minorities in the curriculum as well as our facilitation of a diverse curriculum.

**Problem of Practice**

The problem plaguing my classroom exists in innumerable English Language Arts classrooms throughout the country but particularly in the southeastern corner of the United States, where I teach. Most notably and relevantly, it extends throughout our all-White department. Our lack of a culturally and racially diverse curriculum means cultural and racial dialogue is relatively nonexistent. Given that culturally diverse curriculum is necessary and essential (Banks, 1993; Goo, 2018; Howard & Gay, 2010), its absence within an entire English department is problematic. Thus, the problem begins with White teachers’ lacking racial and cultural competence, resulting in continuous
implementation of monochromatic curriculum and a failure to engage in racial and cultural dialogue. As Figure 1.1 illustrates, this trifecta of problems works in a symbiotic fashion to preserve a White elitist education for students and defend cultural incompetence in teachers.

Figure 1.1 Problems Within the Problem of Practice

The Problem With White Teachers

As West and Williams (1973) asserted, teachers are directly—even if partially—responsible for problematic curriculum:

What must be dealt with before something is done about teaching black literature is the teacher himself . . . You must not simply give lip service to
the fact that black students need literature that is relevant, and white students need to know more about their black brothers. (p. 455)

The fact that most teachers are White often serves to excuse an oversight on their behalf of not incorporating diverse perspectives in their curriculum. As a product of their own White discourses (Gee, 1989), teachers have developed a White identity and find comfort in teaching curricular content to which they can relate. This approach is safe and standard, whereas the prospect of informing students about unfamiliar cultures and social experiences is daunting (Tinney, 1969). Thus, White teachers may unintentionally reinforce racism in the classroom (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Haviland, 2008; McIntyre, 1997), prompting calls to advance teachers toward cultural proficiency (Gorski, 2016), the ultimate level of cultural competence (Cross et al., 1989). Because cultural competence has implications for teachers’ “ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than [their] own” (Moule, 2012, p. 5), White teachers’ lack thereof is problematic. To combat the racial inequity in the classroom, White teachers must become more culturally competent.

The Problem With Implementing Monochromatic Curriculum

A curriculum with a singular, monochromatic point of view that reflects a White perspective and excludes ethnic perspectives creates a “culturally deprived curriculum” (Alexander, 1970, p. 99). The content in a literature course is usually pre-determined and rarely challenged by those it represents, yet Curricula in schools are far from neutral. Rather, the curriculum is always part of a selective tradition: someone’s selection or some group’s vision of
legitimate knowledge. School knowledge most often manifests itself as a particular representation of the dominant (read as white, middle class) culture. (Glazier & Seo, 2005, p. 689)

In essence, someone from the outside has made the generalized decision about what should be taught, and therefore learned, on the inside. By the time students reach their junior and senior years of high school (i.e., when they are beginning to drive, becoming politically aware, challenging parental guidance, and forming their own constructs), they are deeply familiar with a curriculum that centers the White experience. Sparse examples of Black literature include slave narratives or other depictions of Black oppression; rarely do students encounter literature celebrating Black contributions or culture. This singular presentation of predominantly White literature reinforces the social constructs and racial hierarchy associated with White elitist ideology, preserving the cultural imbalance of power and undermining any potential for improved democracy and equality (Christensen, 1994). Moreover, my curriculum’s disproportionate attention to the works of White authors, negating the contributions, voices, and stories of marginalized individuals, provides an “erroneous image of the ability and achievement of Black Americans” (Alexander, 1970, p. 97). Without a challenge to the status quo, this preferential and discriminatory curriculum will continue to maintain its stronghold.

**The Problem With Disengaging From Racial and Cultural Discourse**

A challenge White teachers face is forfeiting authority to facilitate dialogue with teenagers on potentially tenuous topics, from which feelings of guilt and
discomfort “can manifest as anger, frustration, and/or withdrawal, all of which are counterproductive to meaningful conversations about race” (Peek et al., 2020, p. S14). This heightened sense of discomfort in White people is known as “White fragility,” a term coined by DiAngelo (2011) to refer to how the “insulated environment of racial protection builds White expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress” (p. 54). Teacher oversight and avoidance of teaching anything other than White literature because it may prove too uncomfortable has prompted this never-ending cycle of whiteness and perpetuated a repeated assertion of White dominance and White fragility (Howard, 1993).

Scholars recognize numerous barriers to teaching about race and racism as “discussions about race are always potentially high-stakes conversations with long-standing consequences for the climate in the room and for future interpersonal relationships of those engaged” (Peek et al., 2020, p. S140). The propensity to ignore topics of race and diversity and instead actively implement racial silence is referred to as colormuteness (Castagno, 2008; Pollock, 2009). Employing this strategy in the classroom often has the opposite intended effect, whereby deleting race words actually draws attention to them and makes them matter even more.

Milner (2010) found that teachers feel more effectual in the classroom discussing any topic other than race and turn to colormute and colorblind ideologies to ignore how race permeates student learning, pedagogy, and the entire education system. Despite such coping strategies, race is inescapable, in
and beyond schools. The last 10 years alone have seen a rise of the Black Lives Matter movement; the unwarranted death of Black Americans at the hands of White law enforcement; a heated, national debate regarding critical race theory (CRT) in K–12 schools; protests—both civil and violent; racially motivated mass murders; and hate crimes. For teachers like me, refusing to talk about race and claiming colorblindness instead of tackling what is right in front of us should no longer be an option. Instead, educators owe themselves and students of all colors an effort to engender sensitive conversations about those topics and thus give rise to cultural awareness and empathy in all students.

The Problem With the Preservation of White Elitism

Examining a curriculum devoid of minoritized perspectives and voices and taught by a White teacher reveals how the classroom can perpetuate the idea of White elitism. Furthermore, “If classrooms use materials that do not portray diverse groups realistically, students are likely to develop, maintain, and strengthen the stereotypes and distortions in the traditional curriculum” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). By carrying the torch of predetermined curriculum to which we became inculcated, educators are teaching a false narrative of the literary contributions of marginalized voices. In this manner, what we choose not to teach can be as potent as what we teach, operating as a null curriculum (Eisner, 1985). The curricular absence of Black literature teaches students they do not need to understand Black culture and the Black experience, inducing dire consequences. Unfortunately, according to Forsgren (2017), higher education perpetuates “dangerous lessons” through classroom practices like “othering minorities,
reaffirming White privilege, and encouraging color-blindness” if no one steps in to enact change (p. 155). In fact, many who benefit from White privilege “remain committed to their position of dominance; they are willing to defend it and legitimize it, even in the face of overwhelming evidence that our world is changing” (Howard, 1993, p. 37). The onus of preventing this perpetuation of implicitly normative values falls on the teacher, and “changing behavior begins with awareness of our intersectionality, standpoints, biases, and privilege, as well as the language and tone we use when communicating with others” (Forsgren, 2017, p. 156). White teachers must suppress the prevailing perspective of White superiority. This problem of practice, perpetually supported by a White curriculum, a White teacher, and racial silence, lent itself to an action research study to “transform practice, participants . . . [and] even society” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 10).

Rationale for the Study

From 2009 to 2018, student enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools increased from 49.4 million to 50.7 million (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021b). During this same period, the racial composition of students shifted as the percentage of White public school students decreased from 54% to 47% (NCES, 2019a). NCES projected these compounding trends will continue, yet the racial composition of teachers has seen little change, as White teachers have roughly made up 80% of the teacher work force for nearly 4 decades (NCES, 2019b; Schaeffer, 2021). White teachers have predominantly been teaching a White curriculum to White students, but the
educational system should be dynamic, not static. The anatomy of the classroom is changing, and with it, so must the curriculum and teachers’ presentation of it.

However, many teachers feel ill-equipped, uncomfortable, or even pressured to avoid discussing topics of race, culture, or diversity in the classroom (Almarza & Fehn, 1998; Castagno, 2008; Crowley & Smith, 2015; DiAngelo, 2011; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; Godfrey, 2004; Goodman, 1998; Haviland, 2008; Joyner & Casey, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Leonardo & Gamez-Djokic, 2019; Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Matias, 2013; Tatum, 2003). Disengaging from tenuous topics altogether is easier than engaging in racially and culturally meaningful discourse, and teachers often use their position of authority in the classroom to excuse this avoidance (Pollock, 2009). As White educators represent an overwhelming majority of classroom teachers, most classrooms across the country dodge or deter racial and cultural dialogue. This practice may have been acceptable when cultural representation in the classroom was also limited, but as student populations become more diverse, societal expectations and students’ needs are also evolving. To keep pace with classrooms’ rapidly changing racial composition, focusing on race and teacher cultural competence is not only necessary but perhaps unavoidable. As Gay (2002) emphasized, “explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students” (p. 106). Becoming more culturally competent affords teachers like me more knowledge, comfort, and motivation to incorporate diversity into their curriculums and classroom discourses. Therefore, examining and improving teacher cultural competence
through action research was my first step toward a classroom that engages in cultural and racial inclusivity and diversity.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding this study emerged from the overlap of CRT, whiteness, and cultural competence. As a critical, foundational piece of the framework, CRT revealed the existence and systemic reproduction of whiteness within the classroom, whereas cultural competence suggested a path my colleagues and I could take to challenge and dismantle the current curriculum.

**CRT**

Originating in the field of law, CRT includes six generally accepted tenets: (a) the permanence of racism and White culture as the standard by which all other races are compared; (b) whiteness as property; (c) the importance of counter-narratives or storytelling from victims of racial oppression; (d) the critique of liberalism; (e) the importance of interest convergence; and (f) intersectionality of social categorizations (Amiot et al., 2020; Capper, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2013; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Moreover, CRT positions “eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression” (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6). In a groundbreaking article, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) transferred this legal framework into the educational sphere, where the tenets continue to resound, as CRT repeatedly proves its power to deconstruct systemic inequities.

When applied to education, CRT’s tenets reveal racial inequity within the larger educational institution (as opposed to individual beliefs) and stress racial
equity through a transformation of teaching practices (Milner & Laughter, 2015). In my case, applying CRT to curriculum and instruction could catalyze racial and cultural equity within the English department. If teachers claim to teach all students, the lens of CRT should apply to their classroom; otherwise, inaction in response to the identification of systemic racism will only serve to reproduce it (Khalifa et al., 2013).

**Whiteness**

In the United States, being White primarily means having White or pale skin. Whiteness, however, is an ideology dependent upon social constructs and influences (Green et al., 2007; McMahon, 2015). Beginning in the early 1990s, theories of whiteness equated the term with privilege, dominance, and social status, as White people had unearned benefits unavailable to people of color (Green & Sonn, 2005; Green et al., 2007; McMahon, 2015). These benefits constitute and perpetuate whiteness, which in turn ensures “the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 236). Despite this widely accepted view, whiteness remains a debated concept and takes on various identities throughout scholarly literature. In fact, it may be more easily and readily defined by what it is *not* (Green et al., 2007). Scholars initially assumed race meant “blackness;” therefore, being White equated to an empty category of people devoid of race (Bander Rasmussen et al., 2001; Green et al., 2007; McMahon, 2015). Debunking those initial assumptions did not entirely loosen their foothold in people’s perceptions of race. Wherever White people
appear to have no cultural or racial identity—they just exist as being White, simply because they are not Black—whiteness becomes normative and superior while other races are marked as different and inferior. Whiteness is thus a social construct with implications for other racial and social constructs, warranting “a greater degree of clarity . . . concerning what Whiteness is and how it functions in the reproduction of the system of racial oppression” (Owen, 2007, p. 205).

Whiteness may be semantically fluid, but a culture of White privilege—whether conscious or unconscious—undeniably breeds more White privilege. If a White person develops in a predominantly White environment, based on Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, their ideologies, lenses, actions, and interactions will reflect that White, privileged society. White people’s multi-level segregated lives exacerbate this hegemony because, as DiAngelo (2011) explained, with “little or no authentic information about racism,” White people are “unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity” (p. 58). As a result, White culture, interests, and perspectives take elitist precedence, affording White people the ability to see themselves as representatives of all humanity—and devaluing any cultural differences (DiAngelo, 2011).

**Cultural Competence**

Cultural competence, the “incorporation of one’s cultural diversity experience (fact), awareness (knowledge), and sensitivity (attitude) into everyday practice behaviors” (Schim et al., 2003, p. 31), refers to an individual’s ability to recognize and accept others’ cultural characteristics, such as appearance, behavior, education, actions, attitudes, and policies (Cross et al., 1989). An
individual’s level of cultural competence reflects their view of other cultures. Becoming more culturally sensitive to others suggests an individual’s progress along a continuum.

According to Vande Berg et al. (2012), students cannot be expected to glean or increase their cultural sensitivity toward others without specific, guided instruction from teachers or mentors. However, teachers cannot lead students in developing an intercultural sensitivity unless they first understand their own cultural competence and develop a critical consciousness toward cultural constructs (Vavrus, 2002). For the sake of improved cultural competence, sensitivity, and acceptance throughout society, all teachers, regardless of ethnicity, must become culturally competent (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Because an increased level of cultural competence in teachers can breed further cultural sensitivity in students as they are learning how to make meaning of their cultural experiences, this lens aligned with the aim of my research.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

Consistent with the goal of social justice education, to develop an awareness of existing oppression and one’s role in it, I sought to promote acceptance, tolerance, and equity through targeted interventions leading to curricular changes. White individuals have had the privilege of cultural comfort with few, if any, provocations requiring them to “build tolerance for racial discomfort” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 60). At my school, that comfort contributed to a curriculum and classroom dialogue devoid of diversity. Social justice education aims to disrupt that comfort and challenge monochromatic, monocultural
education so students “develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and in the institutions and communities of which they are a part” (Adams et al., 2007, p. 2). Likewise, the goals for action research include: “the generation of new knowledge, the achievement of action-oriented outcomes, and the education of both [the] researcher and the participants” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 67).

Through action research (Johnson, 2005), I challenged my English department’s predominantly White curriculum by seeking to improve my colleagues’ and my cultural competence. Studies on culturally diverse literature primarily focus on the benefits for minoritized students and promoting cultural awareness in all students (Banks, 1993; Glazier & Seo, 2005), whereas I examined the relationship between a teacher’s level of cultural competence and the inclusion of diverse literature, discourse, and classroom practices by asking the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?
2. How does targeted intervention impact our cultural competence?
3. How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms?

As an action researcher, I explored these questions as my colleagues and I committed to targeted racial and cultural classroom intervention, thus cultivating a change within my own knowledge, practice, and curriculum as well as in the cultural awareness and empathy of my English department colleagues, with the potential to change their own knowledge, practice, and curriculum.
Overview of Methodology

For a teacher seeking to address a problem of practice within my classroom and my colleagues’ classrooms, action research, being cyclical in nature, was optimal (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Ivankova, 2015). Teachers naturally partake in action research as they develop a plan or intervention, execute it, observe the effects, and reflect on new questions and needs (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Under the umbrella of action research, I designed a three-phase convergent mixed-method study to glean quantitative and qualitative data from volunteer participants within my English department. Due to the heaviness of my topic and my aim to challenge and transform racial and cultural biases as well as classroom practices, enlisting willing participants was necessary.

Highlighting mixed methods and action research as complementary in their design and implementation, Ivankova (2015) explained how the former can “provide more comprehensive answers to study research questions” and the latter “more comprehensive solutions to practical problems” (p. 53). Searching for new understandings of my problem of practice, I generated questions that warranted quantitative and qualitative data. In Phase 1 and 3, participants completed a mixed-method survey aligned with Questions 1 and 2. During Phase 2, participants completed three independent assignments, corresponding with three focus group sessions, all of which aligned with Questions 1 and 3. Data from the assignments and focus group transcripts, coupled with my field notes, rounded out the qualitative component of the research. Chapter 3 elaborates on the study’s ethical measures, design, procedures, and timeline.
Positionality

For this action research study, I took an insider–outsider stance as I sought to influence my colleagues’ and my cultural competence and curricular diversity (Herr & Anderson, 2015). My approach to this topic and this study hinged on the embarrassingly recent self-realization and transformation of my understanding of social justice issues and the role I play within them, owing to an upbringing that was noticeably devoid of diverse people and perspectives.

I grew up in a White, middle-class household and was decidedly influenced by my environment. I lived in a predominantly White neighborhood, worshipped at a predominantly White church, attended a predominantly White high school, participated in predominantly White extracurricular activities, and associated predominantly with White people. This monochromatic experience, even from a young age, inhibited my understanding of racial biases, White privilege, and empathy for the lives and experiences of marginalized individuals.

Since obtaining a bachelor’s in English and a master’s in teaching, I have been teaching at the same large, suburban high school in South Carolina. The school comprises Grades 9–12, with 10% of the population being students of color and 10% of the population considered economically disadvantaged (NCES, 2021a). The school’s diversity score, or the chance of two random students’ being of different races, is .18, about one-third of the state’s .62 average (Data USA, 2018; NCES, 2021a). The 21-person English department to which I belong is 76% female and 100% White. The school is situated in a community where the median property value is just over $400,000 with the median household income
just under $100,000 (Data USA, 2018). The community’s lack of diversity is reflected in the school community and often makes me feel like I am one among many of the same “type” of teacher, teaching the same “type” of student year after year: White, gifted, affluent, and privileged. In essence, I am teaching replicas of the student I was 2 decades prior.

Enrolling in a doctoral program precipitated a reshaping of my worldview, making me aware of social injustices, especially those playing out in my classroom. With this new, yet developing, understanding, I approached this action research study with the intent of transforming my racial perceptions and biases alongside my colleagues. A greater understanding of the dissimilar individuals who make up our neighborhoods, churches, schools, and associations can breed common ground on which empathy can stand, and a more empathetic world has immeasurable implications and benefits for all.

Although eager to focus on cultural competence and curriculum diversity, I acknowledged that all teachers within my department may not share my interests. A perceived lack of engagement in the study could be the result of disinterestedness, time, disagreement, or any other number of reasons. I anticipated not everyone would be willing to participate; and while I was, as Wheatley (2002) put it, “willing to be disturbed” and challenged in my thinking and teaching practices, I recognized not all teachers feel the same way. Navigating the delicate situation of gathering participants who were also my colleagues could prove arduous, prompting the ethical considerations provided in Chapter 3. I would also be remiss if I did not acknowledge my major assumptions
about my colleagues’ backgrounds, cultural sensitivities, and knowledge of conscious and unconscious biases or lack thereof. Our department may have been more culturally aware and more empathetic about racial and social injustices than I realized. However, discrepancies between the representation of multicultural literature in the curriculum and teachers’ dereliction of duty in challenging the status quo in the literature selection and in classroom discourse (i.e., where teachers “should” be vs. where they are in terms of social justice education) constituted a problem of practice I could no longer ignore.

**Significance**

This action research study promised several layers of significance, one being the unique lenses through which I, the insider–outsider researcher, approached the study alongside my participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As an insider, I intended to participate and examine the changes within myself, my curriculum, and my teaching practices. As an outsider, I also hoped to investigate my colleagues’ examination of changes within their classrooms and teaching practices. Whereas most research involving cultural competence associates the continuum with the healthcare industry outside the educational arena (Cross et al., 1989) or preservice teachers within the educational arena (Cormier, 2021), my focus on veteran teachers, including myself, as we engaged in dialogue designed to move us up the cultural competence scale was unique.

The potential to build teachers’ acceptance and comfort with multicultural texts and discourse promised a shift from a monochromatic curriculum underscoring White dominance to a more diverse and inclusive curriculum
underscoring racial equity. Therefore, my study carries implications for other English teachers, especially those within my own department or those teaching in a demographically analogous school. As this research is grounded in CRT, whiteness, and cultural competence, teachers interested in improving their cultural competence, acquiring practical tools for discussing race, and/or increasing diversity in their curriculum, may also benefit from the module materials and the results of the study. Furthermore, my findings can contribute to existing scholarship on cultural competence and colormuteness as they apply to the secondary English classroom.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of practice introduced in Chapter 1 centers on teacher cultural incompetence, which leads to the continued implementation of monochromatic curriculum, which inhibits racial discourse. This trifecta perpetuates whiteness within the classroom, as curricular decisions strategically avoid uncomfortable and potentially contentious conversations. Such racial silence demands bold action (Hackman, 2005; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Martell, 2013), whereas inaction only fortifies the racial status quo (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Therefore, I sought a comprehensive understanding of the factors that have contributed to racial silence within the English classrooms at my southeastern high school and aimed for more equitable representation within the classroom by increasing teachers’ cultural competence. The following questions guided this research:

1. What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?
2. How does targeted intervention impact our cultural competence?
3. How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms?

To demonstrate how my pursuit of these questions aligned with and built on existing literature (Machi & McEvoy, 2016), this chapter examines the theoretical framework, current and historical perspectives, and thematic connections.
surrounding my problem of practice. After describing my approach, I elaborate on the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 1. From there, I discuss historical perspectives on my topic and connect it to social justice by articulating the need for multicultural education. Thereafter, a discussion of teacher racial silence and the requisite response for racial discourse follows. Finally, I discuss related research before closing with a summary of my justification for the current study based on the existing body of knowledge.

**Literature Review Methodology**

I took prodigious care to find literature that speaks to cultural competence, racial silence, whiteness, and majority dominance in the classroom, using search engines like JSTOR, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ERIC, and the University of South Carolina’s online academic network to identify primary sources, books, published dissertations, and empirical research from peer-reviewed journals. Keywords and search terms included whiteness, whiteness in/and education, White dominance, whiteness studies, critical race theory, critical race theory in/and education, cultural competence, cultural competence in/and education, cultural competence model, cultural competence continuum, racial silence, diversity, White saviorism, colorblindness, colormuteness, White fragility, White privilege, and White supremacy/hegemony to benefit citation tracing and to reach concept saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Theoretical Framework**

As I explained in Chapter 1, given my aim to improve my colleagues’ and my cultural competence to suppress whiteness and promote racial justice in our
classrooms, the triumvirate of CRT, whiteness, and cultural competence served as a blueprint and foundation for this dissertation (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

**CRT**

This study rested on the backbone of CRT to elucidate the intersection between race and the classroom, much like CRT originally examined the intersection between race and the law in the pursuit of racial justice (Ansell, 2008). Arising in the 1970s as a reaction to the ostensibly stalled civil rights movement (Cummings, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), CRT united legal scholars and activists of color in their determination to transform the role race plays in institutionalized settings (Ansell, 2008). Critical race theorists sought to target the very laws that supported racial inequities (Tate, 1997) and challenge the systemic roles race and racial dominance play within the legal system and society writ large (Crenshaw, 1995). According to Khalifa et al. (2013), CRT enables scholars to understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America; it seeks to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideas such as the rule of law and ‘equal protection.’ (p. 491)

Indeed, the problem of the color line seems to be as significant in the 21st century as it was in Du Bois’s (1903) estimation of the 20th.

**CRT in Education**

Rooted in the legal system, CRT has ramified into other fields and disciplines such as health care, economics, sociology, history, and—most
important to this study—education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) brought CRT into the educational arena in the mid-1990s in an “attempt to theorize race and use it as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity” (p. 48). Despite the salient and conspicuous nature of race in society, in their view, it remained untheorized in academic inquiry and deserving of a theoretical stronghold in the educational sphere. Their groundbreaking article thus continuously highlighted race as the single most important construct for determining inequality in education and in society. Nearly 30 years later, as innumerable inequities persist, critical examination of racial constructs in the classroom through the lens of CRT remains necessary.

The depth and breadth of literature on CRT in education over the past few decades speaks to the necessity of examining the educational sinkholes that have resulted in racial stratification. Ledesma and Calderón (2015) cited CRT as “an increasingly permanent fixture in the toolkit of education researchers seeking to critically examine educational opportunities, school climate, representation, and pedagogy, to name a few” (p. 206). However, some scholars believe any progress to date is insufficient, given ubiquitous educational inequities (Amiot et al., 2020; Howard & Navarro, 2016). Until educators adopt an action mindset to prioritize, address, and meet the needs of marginalized students and the pipeline of inequities they face within the educational arena, CRT will remain in the realm of theory, hence my willingness to answer the call for educators to examine and challenge existing racial practices.
Achieving social justice and racial equity in education requires using “a CRT lens to address racial inequity, from admissions and tracking to curriculum and instruction, from achievement standards to disciplinary practices” (Eisele, 2021). The education field is rife with the overrepresentation and normalization of White culture (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). From leadership to teachers to curriculum, the central focus is monochromatic and Eurocentric, and “as the baseline, the standard, white people are very special people, the uniquely standard people” (Altman, 2006, p. 49). In society, White people have the power to “view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 59), and in the classroom, White culture, history, and interests dominate (Dixson et al., 2018; Lynn & Dixson, 2013). According to Khalifa et al. (2013), identifying inequities is not enough; rather, “if school leaders find systemic racial bigotry, then they must challenge it or they will—intentionally or not—reproduce it” (p. 501). One means of shifting from awareness to the action required to create a more equitable classroom is storytelling.

**Storytelling**

As a key tenet of CRT, storytelling can prove particularly helpful in critiquing and deconstructing racist structures and practices in the classroom. Defined as “methodology and practice that allows marginalized peoples to articulate their own realities in dignified, wholesome, and culturally nuanced ways” (Khalifa et al., 2013, p. 494), storytelling is also known as counter-storytelling or counter-narrative because it is contrary to that which is traditionally told or taught. Calmore (1995) described storytelling as
a very personal expression that allows our experiences and lessons, learned as people of color, to convey the knowledge we possess in a way that is empowering to us, and, it is hoped, ultimately empowering to those on whose behalf we act. (p. 321)

Ladson-Billings (2005) deemed storytelling an effective practice, yet cautioned against the beguiling element of narrative, noting how the feelings evoked with a story may overshadow its purpose. Nevertheless, research has shown that storytelling can be a non-threatening way to examine implicit biases, counteract dominant constructs, challenge racist ideology, and thwart negative stereotypes of marginalized students (Khalifa et al., 2013; Martin, 2014; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). In the classroom, storytelling can combat the dominant story and mitigate colorblindness because it validates marginalized experiences with racial inequity and oppression (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2013). In this way, “the teacher is not the ultimate authority for knowledge production; rather, the students, along with their teacher, work together, using their own stories and experiences to develop a critical consciousness” (Martin, 2014, p. 247).

The Activist Dimension

Grounding this action research study in CRT, I aimed to deconstruct systemic racist structures, practices, and polices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Applying CRT in my educational setting highlighted whiteness and demonstrated a need for teachers to become more culturally competent, the other two constructs within my framework. CRT calls for educators to implement change with the end goal being social justice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). For Martin (2014),
this requires “anti-racist pedagogy [that] involves selecting culturally responsive curriculum, problematizing the curriculum, engaging in conversations about students’ lived experiences, engaging in social and political critique, problematizing one’s privilege and standpoint, and facilitating critical thinking” (pp. 246–247). As I explain in Chapter 3, applying a derivative of storytelling through the lens of CRT could facilitate collection and analysis of qualitative data to identify themes in teacher responses to colormuteness, Eurocentric curriculum, and racial discourse in the classroom.

**Whiteness**

According to bell hooks (St. Norbert College, 2015), “you’re either free or slave; you’re either oppressor or oppressed” (51:26). The field of whiteness studies credits one word for delineating these identities: race (Frankenberg, 1993). The relationships between oppressed/oppressor, White/Black, and minority/majority only make sense when examining one side of the dichotomy against the other. As interconnected opposites, each one corroborates and validates the other, with blackness defined in relation to whiteness and vice versa (Fanon, 1967; Matias, 2016). At the same time, this binary “limits understandings of the multiple ways in which African Americans, Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Chicanas/os, and Latinas/os continue to experience, respond to, and resist racism and other forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 72). Nevertheless, whiteness is clearly understood in relation to the “other,” meaning any non-White race (Bander Rasmussen et al., 2001; Bonnett, 1996; Helms, 1994; Moreton-Robinson, 1998; Stephenson, 1997; Weis et al., 1997).
With race comes racism, a term I must address before moving forward. The typical White response to such topics can be hysterical (Gonsalves, 2008; Lewis, 2016), resistant (Ringrose, 2007; Rodriguez, 2009; Schick, 2000), defensive (Pohan & Mathison, 1998; Ukpokodu, 2002), or denialist (Solomona et al., 2005). However, these reactions reflect the assumption that independent individuals commit racism, whereas “Whiteness scholars define racism as structures (economic, political, social, and/or cultural), actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between white people and people of color” (Hilliard, 1992, as cited in DiAngelo, 2011, p. 56). My study positioned whiteness, rather than racism, as a focal point because whiteness is illuminated through the application of CRT in the classroom and is a determinant of racial silence in the classroom. In this way, I aligned with Giroux’s (1997a) belief that White identity and the responsibility White people have for confronting racism demand a focus on whiteness.

As a concept, whiteness has CRT roots (Matias et al., 2014) and “begin[s] with the premise that racism and white privilege exist in both traditional and modern forms” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 56). Frankenberg (1997) suggested three components for defining and understanding whiteness:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege.

Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which white people look at themselves and others, and at society. Third and most importantly, ‘whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 1)
More simply, whiteness is institutionalized power and privilege (Chubbuck, 2004; Giroux, 1997b; Howard, 2006; Kincheloe et al., 2000; Skattebol, 2005; Sleeter, 2001, 2008). This definition engages White audiences more audaciously by challenging them to consider and evaluate their identities. As Matias and Mackey (2016) wrote, "If racism is the symptom, then enactments of whiteness that uphold white supremacy is the disease; to cure such a disease we cannot simply apply antiracist approaches without thoroughly understanding the disease itself" (p. 34). Thus, my study also warranted exploration of associated terminology.

**White Privilege**

White privilege refers to the advantages bestowed on White people on account of their race (Bridges, 2019; Dunham & Lawford-Smith, 2017). These advantages can be economic, material, political, cultural, and/or psychological (Wray, 2006), but are always unearned (Brodkin, 1999; Harris, 2016; McIntosh 1990) and rarely perceived by the White people who benefit from them (Espin, 1995; Hartmann et al., 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 1998). McIntosh (1990) went so far as to say that “whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege” (p. 31). As a result, White people are unable to acknowledge this privilege (Hartmann et al., 2009), perhaps because they only consider race in relation to others (Lewis, 2001, 2004). Whiteness affords the ability to see all as the majority and therefore the ability to carry the assumption that all receive the same basic rights, freedoms, and advantages.

In a widely cited article on White privilege, McIntosh (1990) provided a list of 26 taken-for-granted revelations constituting White privilege, including:
• I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

• I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

• I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

• I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.

• I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race. (p. 33)

McIntosh (1990) concluded that White privilege is:

an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it [one] must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one’s life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own. (p. 33)

For White people, recognizing their unmerited, hegemonic privilege is hard, but accounting for it, reacting to it, and doing something about it may be even more difficult (Hartmann et al., 2009; McIntosh, 1990).

**White Fragility**

Coined by DiAngelo (2011), White fragility refers to the deflection, discomfort, and/or denial exhibited by White people when confronted with White privilege. In North America especially, White privilege includes not having to build
up racial tolerance because the “social environment . . . insulates [White people] from race-based stress . . . through institutions, cultural representation, media, school texts, movies, advertising, dominant discourses, etc.” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 55). However, when that barrier fractures due to “even a minimum amount of racial stress,” White people may respond with “the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54). Such disengagement manifests in protective language, dismissive tools, defensive tactics, blaming the transgressor, colormuteness, and claims of colorblindness (DiAngelo, 2011; Eisele, 2021; Picower, 2009), which inhibit necessary conversations about race, racism, and whiteness. Without discourse, the battle against racism is analogous to unarmed combat, deterring any real gains toward racial equity if fragile White people continue to extricate themselves from racial dialogue, fail to own their whiteness and privilege, and ignore their role in the fight for social justice (Eisele, 2021).

**White Hegemony**

Scholars have argued that White hegemony is the source of race and racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Gillborn, 2005; Jung et al., 2011; Matias & Newlove, 2017). For example, Matias and Newlove’s (2017) definition of White supremacy looks beyond “popular notions of the Ku Klux Klan or Neo-Nazis,” in other words, “beyond the prejudiced belief of one individual and into large-scale institutional and systemic benefits that are given to Whites over People of Color” (p. 317).
Expounding on the ubiquity of White dominance, DiAngelo (2011) also exposed its irony:

White superiority also remains unnamed and explicitly denied by most Whites. If White children become adults who explicitly oppose racism, as do many, they often organize their identity around a denial of the racially based privileges they hold that reinforce racist disadvantage for others. What is particularly problematic about this contradiction is that White moral objection to racism increases White resistance to acknowledging complicity with it. (p. 64)

Undeniably, the iteration of White supremacy has been systemically upheld (Coates, 2017) and is evidenced by its costs to people of color in the form of unequal wages, disproportionate incarceration, and less access to affordable and safe housing (Joyner & Casey, 2015). White people have used privilege to maintain supremacy, which perpetuates privilege (Allen, 2001; Daniels, 1997; Gillborn, 2006; Matias, 2016; Roediger, 2005). Thus, “the normalcy of whiteness then becomes commonplace, a breeding ground of recycled hegemonic whiteness” (Matias, 2016, p. 231).

Breaking this cycle, in my context, required critical examination of race, racism, and whiteness as represented within the classroom and collaboration with fellow teachers who were willing to pursue “racial justice” by dismantling White supremacy in its many forms: “ideological, praxes, resistance, educational, etc.” (Matias & Newlove, 2017, p. 317). To disrupt whiteness and attain justice and equity in a meaningful way, White individuals must engage with and
interrogate whiteness (Green & Sonn, 2005; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2004; Thompson, 2003). CRT facilitates this process at the classroom level by surfacing and attempting to explain the permanence and systematic nature of race, racism, and White supremacy (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor et al., 2009; Yamamoto, 1999; Zamudio et al., 2011).

**Whiteness in Education**

CRT highlights the persistent dominance of whiteness in education. White hegemony has become so ingrained and embedded in the educational arena that it often goes undetected despite palpable racial inequities (Leonardo, 2009; Sleeter, 2001; Solomona et al., 2005). Matias and Newlove (2017) argued:

If education is, as Horace Mann suggested, the great equalizer, then one must acknowledge that the only way to best address such racial disparity is to engage whiteness directly. Simply noting that there are racial disparities in achievement gaps, discipline policies, over-representation of Students of Color in special education and under-representation of Students of Color in gifted and talented education, or lack of teachers of color only addresses the symptoms of a white supremacist educational system. (p. 326)

Interrogating whiteness in pedagogies, curriculum, and classroom dialogues is imperative to “unveil that which has been strategically invisible for generations” (Matias & Newlove, 2017, p. 326). As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) asserted, a “key aspect of [antiracist education] is to ‘raise the consciousness’ of White
people about what racism is and how it works” (p. 119). Applying a CRT lens to all aspects of the classroom can increase teachers’ consciousness of racism and whiteness, thereby improving their cultural competence.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross et al., 1989, p. 28). Developing along a continuum between destructiveness and proficiency, cultural competence serves as a “model for individual transformation” (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 4) that institutions “can use to assess the readiness and willingness of faculty members . . . to move toward culturally proficient practices” (Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019, p. 190).

Even if teachers aspire to teach tolerance, until they engage in cultural and racial conversations that move them along the continuum, stereotypes within the classroom will continue (Ward, 2013). Failure to combat such stereotypes can lead to retaliation and fulfillment of the stereotypes at worst or enduring the indifference and prejudice that accompany the stereotypes at best (Ward, 2013).

As student populations diversify, schools need “increased cultural competence on behalf of educators to effectively teach students” (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008, p. 255). Achieving this aim requires establishing teachers’ baseline level of cultural competence and moving them along a continuum originally proposed by Cross and colleagues in 1989. The six levels of the Cultural Competence Continuum (CCC) are:
1. **Cultural Destructiveness**: attitudes, policies, and practices that are destructive and even attempt to eradicate nondominant cultures.

2. **Cultural Incapacity**: individuals’ or systems’ extreme bias, attempt to show other cultures they are wrong, lacking the capacity to help minoritized cultures, and/or believing in the superiority of the dominant culture.

3. **Cultural Blindness**: refusal to acknowledge nondominant cultures; assuming there is no color or culture as all individuals are the same.

4. **Cultural Pre-Competence**: realization of individual limitations and a working awareness of one’s knowledge of diverse cultures.

5. **Cultural Competence**: accepting and respecting differences, engaging in self-assessment, and seeking to expand one’s cultural knowledge beyond the dominant culture.

6. **Cultural Proficiency**: celebrating, including, and advocating for all cultures in the school community (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2009; Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019; Ward, 2013).

As shown in Figure 2.1, moving along the continuum equates to a paradigm shift from tolerating diversity to transformation for equity (Campbell-Jones et al., 2010), which is only possible through reflection and dialogue (Ward, 2013).

![Figure 2.1 Continuum of Cultural Competence](image)

Figure 2.1 *Continuum of Cultural Competence*
First, educators must address their biases, prejudices, and preferences for one culture over another (Lindsey et al., 2009). For classroom curriculum and discourse to achieve inclusion and antiracism, teachers must “understand the powerful impact of stereotypes and how to move to higher levels of understanding about culture” (Ward, 2013, p. 27). As teachers move toward proficiency, their willingness to work with students of diverse backgrounds increases, and their ability to do so effectively and successfully improves their understanding of cultural diversity in the classroom (Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019). Breaking down long-standing cultural, stereotypical, and racial barriers within the school setting can contribute to bridging the social justice gaps systemically entrenched in society.

**Historical Perspectives**

In a post-civil rights era, to many White individuals, racism and any measures to mitigate it are (or should be) nonexistent (Brown et al., 2003). Such a view overlooks the “historical dimension, that is, the ways in which past discrimination set processes in motion that continue today, putting blacks at a disadvantage in comparison to whites” (Altman, 2006, p. 46). Long-standing inequities have perpetually placed people of color and White people on different sides of a chasm that is not so easy to reconcile, bridge, or dismiss.

Race has always delimited educational opportunities in the United States. From refusing to educate to refusing to educate equitably (Turner & Parsons, 2014) and from slave codes to Black codes to Jim Crow laws (Mutegi, 2013), White Americans have systemically and systematically sought to control their
dominance over African Americans. Prior to the Civil War, literacy was illegal for slaves because of its weapon-like potential to disrupt the social order of enslavement (Valant & Newark, 2016). Du Bois (1903) reflected on this certitude:

The South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent. (p. 8)

During this time, “science” corroborated racial lines based on phenotype, designating groups as superior and inferior (Smedley, 2001). Consequently, the idea of whiteness as property took root:

The hyper-exploitation of Black labor was accomplished by treating Black people themselves as objects of property. Race and property were thus conflated by establishing a form of property contingent on race . . . Because whites could not be enslaved or held as slaves, the racial line between white and Black was extremely critical; it became a line of protection and demarcation from the potential threat of commodification, and it determined the allocation of the benefits and burdens of this form of property. White identity and whiteness were sources of privilege and protection; their absence meant being the object of property. (Harris, 1995, pp. 1716–1721)

Thus, race became a way to delineate White people from others and the line of demarcation for exclusive White territory.
Biological definitions of race have since been discredited, giving way to an understanding of race as a social construct (Bonham et al., 2005), yet the idea of whiteness as property, entrenched as an educational right, persists, manifest in the status quo of underserving and underrepresenting marginalized school populations. Sleeter (2017) applied the construct of whiteness as property to describe teachers’ possession of knowledge, pedagogy, assessment, and the right to determine how students, both White and of color, can procure academic property in the classroom. Similarly, Leonardo and Broderick (2011) claimed whiteness as property determines who is considered smart in schools and which students are seen as having special needs. Likewise, Amiot et al. (2020) attributed “the belief in meritocracy in admissions and acceptance into elite colleges and universities” as an outgrowth of whiteness as property (p. 201). Along with these broader implications, racial microaggressions openly assert the hegemony of whiteness as property in secondary and post-secondary settings (Yosso et al., 2009). Further, across all educational settings, “Curriculum represents a form of ‘intellectual property.’ The quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the ‘property values’ of the school” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 54). A deeper understanding of the web of institutionalized racism by way of whiteness as property underscores the need for a curriculum and classroom dialogue to confront it. Thus the potential for an action research study derived whereby I could begin to dismantle the predominance of whiteness and the idea of whiteness as property within my department’s curriculum by improving my fellow English teachers’ and my cultural competence.
Inequities in the Curriculum

When Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) brought CRT into the education field, they drew from Harris’s (1995) construct of whiteness as property. Extending the benefit of property to the privilege of excluding, they argued,

In schooling, the absolute right to exclude was demonstrated initially by denying blacks access to school altogether. Later, it was demonstrated by the creation and maintenance of separate schools. More recently it has been demonstrated by white flight and the growing insistence on vouchers, public funding of private schools, and schools of choice. Within schools, absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by re-segregation via tracking. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60)

The absolute right to exclude also manifests in classroom decisions, such as emphasizing a Eurocentric curriculum rather than a diverse one and avoiding racial discussions. Exclusivity perpetuates White hegemony and inhibits social justice education because it does not “lead toward: (1) the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty; and (2) the empowerment of under-represented minority groups” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 473).

The need for a diverse curriculum and pedagogy to achieve social justice education is axiomatic. According to Glazier and Seo (2005), creating a more culturally-positive society requires instruction that “create[s] new space for dialogic discourse, rewrite[s] cultural narratives, and allow[ ]s for discussion of multiple literatures and perspectives” (p. 688). Including voices traditionally left unspoken in the classroom can “positively affirm student identities, empower
students, and challenge popular stereotypes in the larger society” (Bigler, 1996, p. 4). One means of accomplishing this aim is multicultural education, which seeks to “extend to all people the ideals that were meant only for an elite few at the nation’s birth” (Banks, 1993, p. 23). A diverse, multicultural curriculum promotes racial truths and realities, acknowledges discrepancies and inequities, and recognizes cultural debts (Banks, 1993). However, simply including diverse texts will not yield transformative action and thinking. Instead, teachers must facilitate cross-examination of biases, perspectives, and discourses through open and honest dialogue that seeks to reconstruct normative ideals in more equitable ways. Thus, the diverse text becomes the focus for learning across cultures rather than about one culture (Glazier & Seo, 2005).

Multicultural education includes and benefits everyone in the classroom, including the teacher (Banks, 1993). If teachers are expected to develop new curriculum and pedagogy (Glazier & Seo, 2005), they must first develop a new, culturally competent way of thinking about the curriculum and their pedagogy, or as Howard (2006) succinctly stated: we can’t teach what we don’t know. White educators especially must undertake the processes of recognizing racism and whiteness in the classroom and in our own personal identities; only then can we collectively work to improve our cultural competence, diversify curriculum and pedagogy, and enact meaningful social justice education.

The Prevalence of Colormuteness

Decades ago, Cose (1993) identified two approaches to racial discussions: “The shouters are generally so twisted by pain or ignorance that
spectators tune them out. The whisperers are so afraid of the sting of truth that they avoid saying much of anything at all” (p. 9). Wary of reverberation, teachers may silence or circumvent controversial topics such as social class, culture, gender, and race rather than confronting them (Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Weis & Fine, 1993). Thomas (2015) pointedly cited a dearth of scholarship on how English teachers specifically handle the racial dialogue that emerges from classroom content and discussions. As a result, classroom teachers are left to their own devices, which may reinforce the avoidance tactic of colormuteness.

Silence manifests in several ways, such as “coded language among educators [and] the conflating of culture and race, equality and equity, and difference and deficit” (Castagno, 2008); the utilization of White talk (Borsheim-Black, 2015); or using teacher authority to offer superficial or shallow comments that gloss over potentially contentious topics (Haviland, 2008). Rebuking this behavior, Sleeter and Grant (1994) asserted that “asides in conversation, strategic eye contact, or jokes” among White people contribute to a racial bonding that produces an adversarial environment (p. 8). However, as I explained earlier, the persistent racial comfort enjoyed by White people motivates their efforts to protect and maintain that level of comfort (DiAngelo, 2011). For those who wish to disrupt this imbalanced dynamic, a plethora of reasons may stand in the way:

Isolation from friends and family, ostracism for speaking of things that generate discomfort, rejection by those who may be offended by what we
have to say, the loss of privilege or status for speaking in support of those marginalized by society, [or] physical harm caused by the irrational wrath of those who disagree. (Tatum, 2003, p. 149)

Moreover, some teachers pursue colormuteness to maintain the established order (Castagno, 2008), and the presence and reactions of other students with no reprisal may also discourage anyone from speaking out (Ladson-Billings, 1996). Additionally, teachers may feel too inexperienced to participate in constructive racial dialogues, whether leading students in the classroom or engaging with colleagues (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Consequently, silence, whether intentional or not, does not validate race or diversity on any level but legitimizes whiteness on every level and, therefore, comes at a great cost.

Despite teachers’ race, class, or gender, their position of authority in the classroom may silence students as well as subject matter (Ellsworth, 1989). Thus, Castagno (2008) distinguished between silence, an absence, and silencing, an act done to someone else. In the classroom, both forces support “a norm of silence around certain topics” (Castagno, 2008, p. 318), including race, which has “major implications for what students do and do not learn about racism” (Berchini, 2019, p. 153). As a result of this whitewashing, both teachers and students forego significant opportunities to combat racism in one of the largest institutions where it exists: the school system (Haviland, 2008). Therefore, White teachers can be instrumental and complicit in maintaining, perpetuating, and legitimizing racist curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom dialogue. As an action researcher, I owned this role and attempted to vanquish it.
The Need for Racial Dialogue

Racism’s constant presence can be mitigated, if not negated, through social discourse, understanding and empathy, and action (Adams et al., 2007; DiAngelo, 2011; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; McIntosh, 1990). Talk is the crux of a classroom; teaching and learning depend on it (Nystrand, 1997), yet antiracist conversations that seek to pivot individual understanding toward collective action and equitable schools are conspicuously absent (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2017). As talking about race is essential to understanding educational injustices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), a lack of open and specific dialogue on race and racism reinforces White talk, which “serves to insulate White people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 45). Students and educators need opportunities to engage in racial discourse and deserve conversations that are not superficial or whitewashed. However, before teachers can engage with students or colleagues about issues of race, they must first choose to develop a racial consciousness rather than partake in racial silence (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2017; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Racial conversations may elicit discomfort, particularly in White individuals who have been safeguarded from the realities of racial injustice. According to Gee (1989), actions and ideologies—one’s behavioral existence—reflect one’s primary discourse, a means of “using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or a social network” (p. 18). Discourse thus shapes identity, along with views of race,
racism, and whiteness. Through a counteractive measure, discourse also restricts self-understanding and understanding of and relationships with others (Burman et al., 1997; Parker, 1992), determining and validating the relationships among power, dominance, and oppression (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001; Mama, 1995), especially as they exist within and between discourses. Therefore, confronting, reshaping, and deconstructing racial ideologies may require “unlearning the misinformation and stereotypes we have internalized not only about others, but also about ourselves” (Tatum, 2001, p. 53).

Discussions about race, although uncomfortable and potentially controversial, can result in “long-standing consequences for the climate in the room and for future interpersonal relationships of those engaged” ( Peek et al., 2020, p. S140). Ideally, these conversations can resonate and imbue within each participant the desire to create more racially and culturally conscious individuals. Therefore, teachers should undertake this discourse among themselves and with their students rather than shy away from it, given the high stakes. Today’s headlines and public discourse are rife with racism, sexism, and classism, and the classroom should prepare students to understand, engage, and act upon their knowledge of these contentious topics (Boyd & Glazier, 2017). If not, how can students ever “grapple effectively with the ongoing racial tensions” (Bolgatz, 2005, p. 28) or become knowledgeable, “active participants in society” (Boyd & Glazier, 2017)? Hence, teachers must be equipped to engage in racial discourse by developing and maintaining their own cultural competence. As Darden (2009)
asked, “If teachers can’t have the race talk with each other, how can schools effectively educate their students about difference?” (para. 8).

Discourses typically reflect the same color lines by which we identify (Gee, 1989), but diversity is increasingly inescapable in schools. Therefore, teachers like me must engage in conversations about topics that are right in front of us. Incorporating race into the curriculum can fortify teachers and students to interrogate the institutionalized systems that engender racism (Bolgatz, 2005). By using racial discourse and racial consciousness to launch racial responsiveness, in students and colleagues alike, teachers can pursue the goal of social justice within the classroom (Milner & Laughter, 2015; Pollock, 2009).

**Related Research**

Seeking to engender more frequent and more comfortable racial discourse in the classroom, I intentionally consulted recent empirical literature related to teacher cultural competence, racism, and whiteness.

Boyd and Glazier (2017) examined how a specific model of professional development for induction teachers created a “space for critical colleagueship” (p. 131). The researchers were interested in the development of teacher dialogue on controversial subject matters, given the difficulty teachers have with engaging in racial discourse with their students. To investigate what racial discourse among the teachers was like in the absence of students, administrators, or same-school colleagues, they recruited 23 primarily White, female teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience to participate in small-group conversations, which were facilitated by a graduate student, audiotaped, and transcribed. Using a
qualitative approach, the researchers employed discourse analysis and positioning theory to determine the professional development sessions were helpful in general but also yielded “comfortable collaboration rather than the [anticipated] critical colleagueship” (Boyd & Glazier, 2017, p. 135). Participants rarely expanded on others’ ideas, avoided precise language, rarely challenged or questioned one another, deferred to external resources as suggestions for teaching controversial subjects, and encouraged one another to avoid heated classroom discussion. Overall, the study found teachers were willing to bring up controversial topics, but the discourse remained at the surface level. This hesitation to critically engage with colleagues about difficult topics echoes preexisting literature on how surface-level conversations sustain a façade of politeness (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Grossman et al., 2001; McIntyre, 1997) and the silence teachers espouse in lieu of engaging in racial conversations (Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997; Pollock, 2009).

Complementing Boyd and Glazier’s (2017) focus on how teachers engage in racial discourse among colleagues, Thomas (2015) looked at how teachers engage in such discourse with students while teaching controversial literature, extending Thomas’s (2010) earlier work on two teacher researchers who both taught 10th-grade English at a Midwestern high school. Using appraisal analysis, Thomas (2015) coded two classroom videos (i.e., one from each teacher), transcripts of teachers’ discussions about the lessons with colleagues, and transcripts of interviews Thomas conducted with the teachers. The coded discourse highlighted racial judgments evident during instructional or regulative
talk—“in other words, whether the teachers and students were talking about the book, about students’ behavior, or about the larger society” (Thomas, 2015, p. 159). Comparison of the two teachers’ navigation of “race talk dilemmas” in the classroom showed similar results by way of different methods. Both teachers referred to authority figures outside of school “to regulate the social implications of teaching novels about race and to negotiate solidarity with their students,” had well-established procedures in place for classroom dialogue, and valued and encouraged student participation (Thomas, 2015, p. 171). However, whereas one teacher directly addressed a racial issue by attributing students’ choice not to read a controversial book to their personal experiences, the other teacher disengaged from the direct use and discussion of a racial term within a novel. Thus, both classrooms still circumvented topics of race, prompting Thomas (2015) to reflect on the complexity of racial identity in the United States and how “race matters for teachers as much as it does for students” (p. 171). Thomas’s study aligns with other scholarship to emphasize that racial discourse is difficult and often avoided but necessary for more equitable classrooms (Castagno, 2008; Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Weis & Fine, 1993).

With cultural competence models primarily designed for and applied to the healthcare field, few studies have applied these models to education and specifically to teachers. In one such qualitative study, Nelson and Guerra (2014) explored the practical application of teachers’ cultural knowledge. The study engaged 111 participants from two suburban school districts in Texas and Michigan that varied in size but were similar in demographics and school culture.
Prior to a year-long diversity training program, the researchers administered an instrument consisting of nine scenarios that “depicted a culture clash and was designed to generate data related to educator beliefs about diverse students, educator knowledge of culture, and application of cultural knowledge in practice” (Nelson & Guerra, 2014, p. 74). After reading the scenarios, participants described them and shared how they would respond. The researchers independently coded the responses, using a constructivist grounded theory approach and constant comparative analysis to identify categories of cultural awareness, which they positioned along a scale. After holistically analyzing each participant response along the continuum, the researchers determined > 1% of participants were culturally responsive; 3% were culturally aware; 44% were generally aware of culture, 39% had little cultural awareness, and 14% were culturally unaware. The reportedly aware participant insightfully assessed the scenarios but did not always apply cultural awareness to practice because she felt incapable and/or reluctant. Nelson and Guerra (2014) concluded,

The fact that the educator in this case did not indicate she would address deficit beliefs although she recognized them suggests that even a culturally responsive educator may not enact culturally responsive practice at every opportunity and underscores the difficulty of consistently practicing cultural responsiveness. (p. 80)

Practicing cultural responsiveness can be heavy and problematic for teachers because it requires open dialogues about race, culture, class, and gender—topics frequently avoided in the classroom (Bolgatz, 2005; Boyd & Glazier, 2017).
Chapter Summary

This chapter provided insights into the theoretical, historical, ethical, and empirical body of knowledge surrounding the need to improve teacher cultural competence and combat the whitewashed curriculum and discourse at my school. A systematic and thorough analysis of current scholarship and related topics highlighted the need for an action research study among English teachers to examine their use of racial discourse in the curriculum and seek to improve their cultural competence to ensure more diverse and equitable classrooms. The increasingly diverse populations within the educational system and the evidence of racial injustice within that same system demand deconstructing existing racial barriers to make room for racial dialogue in the classroom. This process begins with developing teacher awareness and cultural competence.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

In response to my problem of practice, this action research study critically examined the colormuteness and culturally uniform curriculum in my English department with the goal of creating more culturally enriched, diverse, and inclusive classrooms. Achieving this aim necessitated the following research questions:

1. What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?
2. How does targeted intervention impact our cultural competence?
3. How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms?

This chapter describes the methods I employed to answer these questions and provides further details concerning the research design, setting and participants, data collection instruments, procedure, data analysis, and validity.

Research Design

Inspired by a context-dependent problem of practice, an action researcher uses insider perspectives to design and implement a course of action to address the problem (Osterman et al., 2014). Action research specifically enables researchers to participate in the inquiry process to promote social change (Efron & Ravid, 2013). To challenge White elitism, critical action research was an appropriate design for my study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); it allowed me,
alongside my colleagues, to become involved with finding solutions that can transform our individual and collective teaching practice, benefitting our current and future students.

More specifically, improving our racial and cultural competence in an effort to reduce the racial silence in our classrooms necessitated a convergent mixed-method approach, using various pre-planned data collection measures, protocols, and artifacts to address each research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). CRT scholars often take a qualitative approach (Glesne, 2015), which allows multiple voices and perspectives to shape the exploration of the problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). On the other hand, quantitative data can provide a more succinct understanding and visualization of the relationships between variables (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), which facilitated my ability to demonstrate any change in participants’ cultural competence.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods have limitations in their own right, whereas amalgamating the two approaches enriched my interpretation of the data in relation to the purpose of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A mixed-method design also permitted triangulation, complementarity between data sets, and enhanced credibility (Bryman, 2006; Greene et al., 1989). My study’s methodological pluralism had the collective strength of blending statistical relationships of quantitative data with the lived experiences provided through qualitative data (Harrison et al., 2020). This merging happened in three phases over 2 months, as shown in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1 Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Intervention module and focus</th>
<th>Data collection instrument(s)</th>
<th>Data type</th>
<th>Research question(s) addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1     | 1     | N/A                                        | baseline survey                | qualitative & quantitative | 1: What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?  
2: How does targeted intervention impact our cultural competence? |
| 2     | 2–3   | 1 – Discovery: Uncovering Bias             | Reflection 1 focus group transcript field notes | qualitative            | 1: What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?  
3: How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms? |
|       |       | 4–5                                        | Reflection 2 focus group transcript field notes | qualitative            | 1: What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?  
3: How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms? |
|       |       | 6–7                                        | Reflection 3 focus group transcript field notes | qualitative            | 1: What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?  
3: How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms? |
| 3     | 8     | N/A                                        | endline survey                 | qualitative & quantitative | 1: What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?  
2: How does targeted intervention impact our cultural competence?  
3: How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms? |
During Phase 1, participants took a baseline survey comprised of demographic questions, Likert-scale statements, and open-ended questions (Appendix A). Summation of responses to the Likert-scale statements yielded a cultural competence score for each participant. Analyzing the qualitative responses in relation to the quantitative score provided a clearer, holistic depiction of each participant’s level and understanding of cultural competence upon entering the study.

During Phase 2, I facilitated three 2-week modules designed to help participants explore issues of race and culture as applied to our classrooms. Each module consisted of an independent assignment and reflection (Appendices B–D) and a targeted focus group session (Appendices E–G) guided by a semi-structured protocol (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants completed the independent work and reflection asynchronously in preparation for each focus group. Participant reflections and transcripts of each focus group served as qualitative data, along with field notes I recorded to capture both descriptive and reflective information throughout the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

During Phase 3, participants took an endline survey comprised of Likert-scale statements identical to those on the baseline survey and different open-ended questions (Appendix H). As in Phase 1, summation of the Likert-scale responses produced a cultural competence score for each participant, which I juxtaposed against their open-ended responses. Analyzing the follow-up survey data against the baseline survey data—both for individual participants and the group—revealed any change in cultural and racial competence.
As Table 3.1 illustrates, each phase yielded data aligned with my research questions. The survey data provided evidence in response to Research Questions 1 and 2, while the independent reflections and transcripts corresponded with Research Questions 1 and 3. The open-ended questions on the endline survey also contributed insight for Research Question 3.

**Setting and Participants**

As action research, this study took place in the setting that gave rise to the problem of practice I introduced in Chapter 1: the English department at a large, public high school in the southeastern United States. The school is situated in a predominantly White (i.e., over 80%), affluent community, and the population of students within the school mirrors that of the community.

**Role of the Researcher**

To improve my cultural competence as well as challenge and change my facilitation of racially charged topics and curriculum, I took an insider approach and served as a participant in the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Looking to enact a change within my colleagues and their classroom practices, I also served as an outsider at times (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This approach afforded a more thorough understanding of the context and group dynamics as well as contributed to an increase in trust between participants and researcher.

**Participants**

After receiving approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board and my school district’s Office of Assessment and Evaluation to conduct the study on my school campus, I commenced recruitment of participants. The target
population was the 21-member English department at the high school where I teach, consistent with the principles of action research (Osterman et al., 2014). The department is 76% female and 100% White, and teachers vary in years of experience and age. All members of the department have at minimum a bachelor’s degree, a South Carolina teaching license, and 2 years of teaching experience. Given their accessibility and alignment with my aims, a non-probability convenience sample was appropriate for recruitment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Intentionally approaching teachers at the beginning of a fresh school year, I presented my aims and rationale to the entire English department during one of our teacher workdays. I wanted to verbally explain the discovery of my problem of practice for several reasons: (a) to determine if my colleagues also experienced the problem of practice, which would make the study more relatable and intriguing; (b) to deter any negative connotations or assumptions that may arise from the topic; and (c) to explain my purpose conversationally before extending a formal request to participate via email. I also endeavored to delineate clear expectations for their participation and invited their questions—all with the goal of increasing participation.

That afternoon, following the presentation, I emailed my English department colleagues a formal invitation to participate (Appendix I). The letter included a Google Forms link to the baseline survey. Clicking on the link to the survey served as my colleagues’ implied consent and ushered participants into Phase 1 of the study.
Including me, seven teachers completed the initial survey—within Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) recommendation of six–10 participants for focus groups. Although Merriam and Tisdell (2016) cautioned against using focus groups to address sensitive topics with strangers, my participants were colleagues and shared a prior level of comfort and familiarity, which I hoped would break through the barrier of any discomfort as we discussed culture, race, and privilege/elitism.

**Ethical Considerations**

My research plan reflects my attention to the ethical guidelines set forth for social and behavioral studies. Especially because of my insider status within the setting, this section elaborates on my efforts to minimize risk, ensure informed consent, and maintain participants’ confidentiality.

**Potential Risks and Benefits**

Potential risks to the participants were minimal. However, as with any discourse on potentially contentious topics, the survey questions, independent work assignments, and focus group discussions could have caused some emotional and mental discomfort, given my explicit aim to challenge the existing culture of our predominantly White English department. As a participant researcher, I took great pains to minimize those risks. I created a warm, welcoming classroom environment to house the focus group sessions and provided snacks; was mindful that participants were observing and interpreting my actions/contributions to the discussion just as much as I was theirs (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018); self-identified with the participants as a White, female teacher; built upon established relationships and rapport with my
colleagues to create a safe atmosphere for discussion; freely admitted my own
colormuteness and discomfort with the topics at hand (Pollock, 2009); and
reminded participants of our shared interest in the study’s outcomes.

Countering potential risks, participants stood to experience benefits,
namely growth in racial and cultural competence skills, which can translate to
greater acceptance of and comfort with multicultural texts and discourse,
prompting a shift toward a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive curriculum.
Such growth can have a positive impact on current and future students. I
considered slight discomfort in challenging one’s racial and cultural worldviews a
small price to pay for the inclusion of and ability to meet a professional obligation
to reach all students.

Consent

All members of my English department received an invitation to participate
(Appendix I), which explained the study’s purpose; how participation was
completely voluntary; and participants’ requirements, risks, and rights if they
accepted. The invitation also assured participants they could withdraw from the
study at any time and that their participation status would not have any bearing
on their professional evaluations or contracts with the school or school district.
Clicking the Google Forms link to the baseline survey embedded in the invitation
served as participants’ implied consent to participate.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality shows researchers’ respect for participants (Herr &
Anderson, 2015); therefore, I kept participant identifiers, survey scores,
independent assignments, and discussion remarks confidential, in accordance with a confidentiality agreement established during the first focus group session, which emphasized that participants were not allowed to disclose any names or information shared during the focus group sessions with anyone outside of the sessions (Appendix E). I collected data through password-protected Google Forms, Google Docs shared only between the participants and me, or on paper subsequently secured in a locked filing cabinet within my classroom where the focus groups occurred. Anonymous surveys may be more likely to elicit honest responses (Efon & Ravid, 2013); however, the need to link survey results with the reflection and discussion data superseded this limitation. Therefore, participants selected pseudonyms, which appear in lieu of names on all artifacts, presentations, and publications related to the study, including this dissertation.

**Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

As Table 3.1 indicated, I used a baseline survey, independent reflections, focus group protocols, an endline survey, and field notes to gather data that directly addressed my research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A description of these instruments and how they were utilized in the study follows.

**Baseline Survey**

Cultural competence is a measure of one’s ability to engage with people of other cultures (Moule, 2012). Beyond the healthcare field, cultural competence can also apply to educational studies (e.g., Brooks, 2018; Cormier, 2021; Gorski, 2016; Grossman & Yuen, 2006; Westrick & Yuen, 2007). However, Gorski (2016) criticized cultural competence models in education that fail to address equity and
justice alongside culture as “empty framing” (p. 222). As race is a social construct that encompasses culture and diversity (Bonham et al., 2005), discussing race and culture is imperative for an educator to claim inclusive discourse. Thus, I sought an instrument that would capture the intersection of racial and cultural constructs and their roles in the classroom.

I considered more than 80 existing instruments, listed in Appendix J, which have undergone scrutiny, psychometric analysis, and validation. However, few instruments apply both racial and cultural awareness in their metrics and even fewer are easily applicable to education, as opposed to healthcare, organizations, or linguistics. Further, given constraints related to accessibility, cost, time, training, and my commitment to a mixed-method approach, I developed my own survey by adapting statements from the Cultural Competence Assessment Instrument (CCAI; Balcazar et al., 2009) and the Color-Blind Racial Attitude Scale (CoBRAS; Neville et al., 2000). Both instruments have undergone psychometric and validation analysis and are accessible for reproduction. Both questionnaires also incorporate a 6-point Likert scale for converting responses into a score indicating participants’ racial and cultural competence, making a commingling of the two instruments straightforward.

The resulting baseline survey (Appendix A) included 30 total statements, borrowing Demographic Question F and Statements 1–15 from the CCAI instrument (Balcazar et al., 2009) and Statements 16–30 from the CoBRAS instrument (Neville et al., 2000). I required participants to answer all questions, some of which I adapted for streamlining purposes or to apply to educators. I
also flipped several statements to align cultural competence level with level of agreement and to reduce the number of questions requiring reverse-coding. For instance, Statement 7 originally read, “I have limited experience working with ethnic minority students” (Balcazar et al., 2009). My survey substituted “ample” for “limited,” so responses of “strongly disagree” indicated lower levels of cultural competence, etc. Flipping Statements 7, 8, and 11 in this manner did not alter the intent, whereas I reverse-coded Statements 16, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27, and 29, which retained the original wording. Despite the complicated scoring process, keeping some statements in their original form ensured participants did not key the same response for all 30 statements.

My survey also incorporated open-ended questions I developed to complement the quantitative scores and align the instrument more directly with my problem of practice, thereby enhancing its validity, consistent with the principles of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015). While race and culture are two independent yet interlinked constructs evaluated in the study, for the sake of brevity, I use cultural competence as an umbrella term when referring to my instruments, particularly through the discussion of data in Chapter 4.

Baseline Survey Procedure

I converted the survey in Appendix A to a Google Form for ease of distribution and scoring; the instrument automatically organized participants’ responses into a spreadsheet. Considering my position as a participant within the study, I also took the survey to integrate my results with those of the other participants. To be as honest as possible with myself and to acquire raw data
from all participants before analysis, I took the survey before looking at, analyzing, or calculating survey results from the other participants.

**Data Produced Through the Baseline Survey**

The baseline survey produced both quantitative and qualitative data for parallel and convergent consideration. I scored participant responses on a Likert scale of 1–6, using the same ordinal number as their response with the exception of the reverse-coded statements. Once calculated, I assigned a baseline score to each participant—a cultural competence score and a level corresponding to the CCC (Cross et al., 1989). Table 3.2 indicates possible cultural competence scores alongside the corresponding level of cultural competence.

**Table 3.2 Cultural Competence Scores by Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cultural destructiveness</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural incapacity</td>
<td>31–60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural blindness</td>
<td>61–90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural pre-competence</td>
<td>91–120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural competence</td>
<td>121–150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural proficiency</td>
<td>151–180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The open-ended survey questions also provided a baseline profile for each participant as well as evidence and indicators of each participant’s cultural competence level. Table 3.3 provides a basic description of each level in terms of salient characteristics, overall view of culture, and how those qualities manifest in school contexts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Cultural point of view</th>
<th>Examples in educational settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| cultural destructiveness     | seeking to eliminate other cultures in all aspects of the school and in relationship to the community; dehumanizing or sub-humanizing minoritized students | purge; see the difference and stamp it out | “We only speak English in this class.”
                                                                                                           |                                                                                 | “If we could get rid of our special needs students, our scores would improve.” |
| cultural incapacity          | lacking capacity to help minoritized students; trivializing and stereotyping other cultures; seeking to make other cultures appear wrong or inferior to the dominant culture | suppress; see the difference and make it wrong | “You know that those parents never show up to school functions.”
                                                                                                           |                                                                                 | “Asian students come to this country and succeed. Why can’t others do so as well?” |
| cultural blindness           | not noticing or acknowledging other cultures within the school community; color or culture make no difference; teaching approaches are universally applicable | ignore; see the difference and act like you don’t | “I don’t see color. I just see kids.”
                                                                                                           |                                                                                 | “Racism and discrimination don’t exist anymore. There’s no more race card.” |
| cultural pre-competence      | increasing awareness of personal and institutional lack of knowledge about working in diverse settings; initiating training; attempting to improve teaching to a specific population | recognize; see the difference and at times, respond inappropriately | “During Christmas time I display a menorah in my classroom.”
                                                                                                           |                                                                                 | “Make sure you do an activity for Black History Month.” |
| cultural competence          | aligning personal values and behaviors that are inclusive of new/different cultures; continuing self-assessment regarding culture; continuous expansion of cultural knowledge and resources | interact; see the difference and value it | “A student made a derogatory remark and I used it as a teachable moment to remind students of the right thing to do.”
                                                                                                           |                                                                                 | “The co-teach model with the Special Education teacher allows us to have honest conversations about differentiation.” |
| cultural proficiency         | accepting responsibility for creating a socially just democracy; functioning effectively in different cultural settings; advocating for cultural life-long learning to effectively serve all cultural groups | honor; see the difference and esteem it as an advocate for equity | “My job as an educator is not only to teach content. I also openly embrace my role as an advocate for each child and their family.” |

*Note.* Adapted from Cross et al. (1989), Lindsey et al. (2009), Quezada & Alexandrowicz (2019), and Ward (2013).
This guidance, synthesized and adapted from Cross et al. (1989), Lindsey et al. (2009), Quezada and Alexandrowicz (2019), and Ward (2013), enabled me to determine participants’ cultural competence based on their qualitative responses. I compared words and phrases from the open-ended questions against the characteristics on the chart. After deducing an appropriate level, I juxtaposed it with the level derived from the quantitative score.

I considered adjacent levels of cultural competence mutual, determining a participant’s final level based on the qualitative data, which provided a more exact indicator of a participant’s cultural competence than their quantitative responses. Discrepant levels, meaning two or more levels of difference between the quantitative and qualitative cultural competence labels, could indicate a problem in alignment within the instrument or a problem within a participant’s responses. Either situation would warrant additional analysis to determine the root cause of the issue of the discrepant scores.

**Independent Assignments and Reflections**

Drawing inspiration from fellow action researchers (Gunther, 2020; Martin, 2019), I designed three modules of independent activities (Appendices B–D) for participants to complete in preparation for focus group sessions. The independent assignments aligned with a topic I developed for each module (discovery, equipping, and application) and asked participants to read and watch related material, chosen specifically to inform while also drawing on the CRT tenet of storytelling (Khalifa et al., 2013; Martin, 2014; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). Mindful of teachers’ time, I chose manageable texts/videos—no more than an
hour in length and of the sort teachers might digest during a planning period on the day of the focus group session—and allotted 2 weeks to complete each round of independent work. Even cursory reflections were valuable, whereas if participants attended the sessions without any preparation—or worse, did not attend because they did not review the material at all—I would have a harder time achieving my aims.

I labeled each assignment by module and week and provided directions about what to read and watch, along with links for easy access. The same three reflection questions appeared at the end of each assignment: What are your thoughts and feelings in response to the material in this module’s assignment? What impact, if any, would this have on your classroom? What questions do you have after reviewing the material? These questions: (a) enabled me to gauge participant responses prior to the focus group sessions and ensured completion of each assignment; (b) served as conversation starters, especially when participants referred to their copy of their reflections during the focus group sessions; and (c) provided data that yielded new understandings within the study.

**Independent Assignments and Reflections Procedure**

Upon completion of the baseline survey, participants received the independent assignment for the first module by email (Appendix B), along with a reminder of the session date as a deadline for completing the assignment and reflection. Participants accessed the assignment through Google Docs and completed the reflection questions using their pseudonym to ensure secure and confidential data. I made a copy of the assignment for each participant,
exclusively shared between the two of us for accessibility, confidentiality, and ease of review by both parties. As participants completed the reflection, I had instant and automatic access to their responses. Using the instructions at the top of the document, completing the assignment and subsequent reflection took participants approximately 1 hour. In fulfillment of my role as an insider researcher (Herr & Anderson, 2015), I also completed these tasks, intentionally doing so before working with and interpreting the other participants’ reflections.

Procedures for the independent work for Modules 2 and 3 followed suit (Appendices C–D). After each focus group, I shared the independent assignment and reflection for the following module with participants via email, along with a reminder of the date of the next session.

Data Collected Through Independent Assignments and Reflections

The independent assignments guided and supported my colleagues and me in our pursuit of cultural proficiency while producing reflective, qualitative data indicating participants’ self-assessment of their cultural competence, their response to each module’s material, as well as their comfort with cultural and racial topics in their classroom. These qualitative responses facilitated coding and identification of themes and cultural competence characteristics aligned to the levels on the CCC (Cross et al., 1989).

Focus Group Sessions

Given my aim for more racial and cultural classroom discourse, engaging in an open dialogue on race and culture with my colleagues was vital. As I explained in Chapter 2, teachers have to address their own competence with
racial and cultural topics before comfortably discussing them in the classroom (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2017; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Vavrus, 2002; Ward, 2013). To this end and building on the independent reflections, three focus group sessions, each with an opening activity followed by a semi-structured discussion, yielded additional data. The session protocols (Appendices E–G) enabled me to prompt stalled conversation while affording space for more organic and participant-driven discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, I expected a broad scope of reliable, qualitative data in the participants’ own words and amenable to member checking (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Focus Group Sessions Procedures**

Each session, designed to last approximately 1 hour, followed a 2-week period of independent work. Specific procedures and scripts appear in each protocol (Appendices E–G). What follows is a general description of the format for each focus group session.

Participants arrived at my classroom after school and helped themselves to snacks while waiting for everyone to arrive. I began each session by thanking everyone for their participation, reiterating our confidentiality agreement, reminding them of their right to withdraw at any time, and noting my use of a recording device.

The session officially started with an opening activity lasting approximately 10–15 minutes, designed to build off the independent work participants previously completed while broadening the scope of our understanding. The
opening activity was purposeful in engaging all participants in stretching their racial and cultural knowledge without putting anyone in the proverbial hot seat. The opening activity also linked content with discussion in preparation for the discourse that would follow.

When and if needed, I directed participants to review their reactions and responses to the material from the independent assignment through semi-structured questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lulls in conversation were infrequent but enabled participant questions and dialogue to naturally evolve and guide the discourse. While facilitating the discussion by interjecting questions when needed, I also participated as a member of the focus group (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

At the end of each session, I thanked participants for their contributions and their time. Following the session, I recorded field notes to document descriptive and reflective details (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018; Sacred Heart University Library, 2020).

Data Collected Through Focus Group Sessions

The focus group sessions produced two types of qualitative data in the form of transcriptions and field notes. I annotated and coded these for emergent patterns and themes (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

Transcriptions. I initially planned to record the focus group sessions through Zoom to use the program’s automated transcription feature. However, while prepping for the first focus group session, I discovered the Zoom transcript did not provide an accurate account of a test conversation. I considered using
Rev, which boasts 99% accuracy but charges $1.50 per minute of recording (Transcribe speech to text, n.d.). Anticipating three sessions lasting 65–85 minutes each, I determined Rev was neither feasible nor affordable and chose to supplement Zoom recordings with the Voice Memos app on my iPhone. Using the Zoom transcription as a baseline text, I listened to the Zoom recording myself, edited the transcription as needed, and then listened to the recording from my phone and refined the transcription. Between these two recordings, I felt confident in my ability to produce an accurate transcription of each focus group session. Beyond ensuring an authentic representation of the dialogue, spending time with the transcripts prepared me for the intensive analytical work ahead.

I reviewed each recording and transcription multiple times, heavily annotating as a means of open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to denote common themes, competence characteristics, questions, and other similarities and contrasts among participants. I then categorized these annotations into prevalent themes, affording me the opportunity to analyze each data set by theme and examine themes across multiple data sets. Chapter 4 reports the themes with the most significant or unexpected evidence.

Field Notes. The Field Notes Protocol I created (Appendix K), based on recommendations and guidelines from Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), and Sacred Heart University Library (2020), supplemented the transcript data. Following each focus group session, while my observations were fresh, I recorded descriptive and reflective observations by hand on a printed protocol. I denoted the physical setting, expected and unexpected
behaviors, the role participants played in the discussion, non-verbal communication, and other observations that seemed relevant to participants’ understanding, group dynamics, or the topics covered during the session.

To consider the meaning of the descriptive and reflective annotations, I grouped my handwritten notes into categories and coded them for patterns and trends in participant behavior. I then considered these broad categories across all three field notes documents as they were “grouped into larger dimensions . . . [and] linked to each other to form a larger story or model” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 214). The categories with the most notable or unexpected observations are reported in Chapter 4.

**Endline Survey**

The final instrument in this action research study was a follow-up survey that mirrored the baseline survey, using the same Likert-scale statements from the CCAI (Balcazar et al., 2009) and the CoBRAS (Neville et al., 2000) to generate a score indicating each participant’s level of cultural and racial competence. Comparing these scores to participants’ baseline scores revealed any growth throughout the study. The open-ended questions differed from those on the baseline survey to elicit participants’ views after participating in the focus group, providing additional data aligned with the research questions. Researcher-generated instruments may be less reliable but have greater capacity to align with a study’s goals, thereby increasing content validity (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Submitting my proposal to my dissertation chair, as well as the University of
South Carolina’s Institutional Review Board and my district’s Office of Assessment and Evaluation, also provided additional layers of quality control.

**Endline Survey Procedure**

Upon completion of the third and final focus group session, participants received an email with a link to the endline survey (Appendix H). As with the baseline survey, distributing the endline survey as a Google Form facilitated analysis. Once participants clicked submit at the end of the form, their obligations as participants concluded. Fulfilling my obligation as a participant within the study and with the hope of avoiding any bias, I also completed a follow-up survey prior to wading through the responses from other participants.

**Data Collected Through the Endline Survey**

Because the endline survey mirrored the baseline survey, yielding comparable quantitative and qualitative data, I used the same process for deriving cultural competence scores and levels from the quantitative data and applied the same coding process to the open-ended responses.

**Data Analysis**

The study’s qualitative and quantitative data merited distinct methods of analysis, chosen with the research questions and purpose in mind. I converged the results to determine the change effect of the intervention on the participants’ cultural competence.

**Quantitative Analysis**

The Likert-scale statements on the baseline and endline surveys yielded discrete numerical values. For instance, a response of “1 – strongly disagree”
had a point value of “1;” a response of “2 – disagree” had a point value of “2;” etc. Statements 16, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27, and 29 were exceptions and were reverse-coded to align with the level demonstrated within the statement. Translating these scores to the CCC (Cross et al., 1989) enabled me to determine a level of cultural competence as well as a numeric value for each participant as they began and concluded participation in the study. After using descriptive statistics to determine mean and standard deviation of the scores, I conducted a paired t-test for paired samples with a .05 significance level as the study was contingent on determining growth of two mean data sets belonging to the same participant group (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The t-test detected any significant change in levels, which specifically addressed my second research question. Assigning a label to summative scores along the continuum also contributed to a visual representation of this change.

**Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is just as concerned with what happens during a study as how it happened (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, coding similar data sets as a collection enabled me to determine changes in teachers’ perceptions, thoughts, and discourse. For instance, I collected the open-ended baseline survey responses as one set of data and the open-ended follow-up survey responses as another set. Furthermore, coding and analyzing participant reflections, focus group transcripts, and field notes yielded a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the qualitative results. Coding synonymous words leads to categories through which themes and patterns within a data set
can emerge (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Therefore, I compared one data set’s themes to another data set’s themes to present “themes of findings at various stages of the study to show how the process unfolded” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 235).

Interpretation of the qualitative data addressed all three research questions, complementing the quantitative analysis to support and verify the study’s overall results in terms of resolving the problem of practice.

**Validity of the Study**

Addressing validity, “the degree to which the study, the data collection tools, and the interpretation of data accurately represent the issue being investigated” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 70), protects a study’s integrity and is vital for qualitative and quantitative approaches.

To enhance my study’s trustworthiness, I triangulated qualitative data from each participant’s baseline and endline surveys; module reflections from the beginning, middle, and end of the study; and focus session discourse, along with my field notes. As a result, I was able to provide solid evidence for themes I identified during the data analysis stage (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Further, freely admitting my preconceived ideas about the study in Chapters 1–3 and incorporating mechanisms for monitoring my biases by inviting my colleagues into the study conveyed my disciplined subjectivity (Efron & Ravid, 2013). A study examining biased classroom practices with an admittedly racially and culturally incompetent participant who also serves as the researcher may be prone to bias and conflicts of interest, yet my fellow participants’ perspectives mitigated internal threats and heightened credibility. I also implemented thick
description (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Glesne, 2015) and member checking (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Efron & Ravid, 2013) to present participants’ raw perspectives and words as accurately as possible.

Quantitative studies heavily rely on sound instrumentation and analysis for providing meaningful and relevant results. This chapter’s discussion of the study’s instruments thus addressed specific decisions, structures, and processes that contribute to validity. Further analysis of quantitative scores from the baseline and endline surveys reinforced the confidence levels of the instruments.

Ultimately, layering and merging qualitative and quantitative data, along with their respective guidelines for validity, promoted the trustworthiness and accuracy expected of a convergent mixed-method critical action research study.

**Chapter Summary**

As an action researcher, I sought to improve teachers’ racial and cultural competence through independent assignments, reflections, and focus group sessions designed to transform teaching practices. The convergent mixed-method approach described in this chapter yielded qualitative and quantitative data in response to my research questions. In addition to describing important ethical considerations and efforts to ensure validity and reliability, this chapter explained how the study’s three phases unfolded over a 2-month period in which my fellow participants and I confronted our racial and cultural incompetence to combat the prevalence of White elitism in our classrooms.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Viewing the lack of race-related dialogue and literature in the English classrooms at my high school as a missed opportunity for social equity, I sought to increase teacher racial and cultural competence to promote inclusivity. To that end and seeking to "reconstruct not only the practice and the practitioner, but the practical setting as well" (Kinsler, 2010, p. 175), I conducted a mixed-method action research study with the following research questions:

1. What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms?
2. How does targeted intervention impact our cultural competence?
3. How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms?

This chapter presents my interpretation and analysis of the data I collected during the 8-week study. Presenting the findings chronologically by data set, I examine them at the individual and group level to demonstrate change over time. The chapter concludes with a final analysis to address each research question.

Baseline Survey

A total of six colleagues signed up for the study; however, I excluded one participant's data because, due to other demands on her time, she did not complete Module 2 or 3 or the endline survey. Assessing the intervention's impact warranted complete data sets, particularly between the baseline and
endline surveys (Connelly, 2020). I thus derived the results from six English teachers (five colleagues in addition to me) who self-identified as White (100%, \( n = 6 \)) and female (100%, \( n = 6 \)) and represented almost 1/3 of our department.

**Participant Baseline Profiles**

Responses to several of the open-ended questions enabled me to create a baseline profile for each participant. For example, Ariel wrote that she “work[s] hard to understand all sides of any given issue or situation and to keep any potential biases at bay.” Her curriculum includes two race-related anchor texts through which she engages with students in open and safe discussions, indicating a level of comfort with racial discourse. She posited, “If the subject comes up in class, it deserves to be acknowledged in an appropriate manner.”

CoCo described her level of competence as “Moderate, but [she] would love to learn more.” She derived the race-related literature and discussions in her classroom from past experience and curriculum, suggesting avoidance of current racial discourse. If racial topics come up in the classroom, she tries to “ensure the conversation stays on topic with the application to literature and tr[ies] not to let personal bias influence the conversation to go off topic.”

I categorized my own competence as “low to medium” and asserted I was “becoming more aware and knowledgeable and interested in learning more.” Race-related conversations may come up through student-led comments or projects, but the literature in my classroom does not reflect racially diverse authors or topics. I admitted to “divert[ing] racial conversations” before they can take root, indicating the presence of colormuteness in my classroom.
Icarus described her competence as “beginner to intermediate” despite having the highest quantitative baseline score, as a subsequent section demonstrates. This discrepancy could suggest a lack of confidence in her knowledge and awareness of cultural competence. She shared that her class participates in some national and local conversations in which she “mediate[s] the discussion and model[s] appropriate ways to agree with someone.”

Luna described her competence as “still learning” to connect diversity to real-world issues and develop students’ empathy. Indeed, most of her responses revolved around the need to expand students’ knowledge, demonstrating her racial and cultural awareness that she can share with students. Luna wrote that her race-related class discussions center on stereotyping and underrepresented authors who tackle provocative themes. She prioritized honest discussion and “journal writing for encouraging [each student’s] independent voice.”

Opal demonstrated awareness yet insecurity in stating, “I think that I am sensitive to racial disparities, but I do not feel confident saying that I am a highly culturally competent person.” Reportedly, she did not shy away from teaching diverse authors or topics but admitted to not feeling “safe or comfortable,” limiting “the depth of those conversations.” When racial conversations arose in the classroom, she would “tip toe around them and try to make sure that everyone is comfortable and safe, but that often means being very surface level.”

**Qualitative Baseline Cultural Competence Levels**

As discussed in Chapter 3, participant responses from most of the open-ended questions on the baseline survey enabled me to gauge their initial cultural
competence (Appendix L). I highlighted key words and phrases and compared them with the characteristics in Table 3.3 to assign each participant a baseline cultural competence level (Table 4.1). Pink denoted responses indicating cultural pre-competence characteristics, whereas turquoise applied to responses indicating cultural competence characteristics. I highlighted ambiguous responses in gray. Based on this qualitative analysis, 33% (n = 2) of participants were culturally competent, whereas 67% (n = 4) were culturally pre-competent.

Table 4.1 Qualitative Baseline Cultural Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>cultural pre-competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>cultural pre-competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>cultural pre-competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>cultural pre-competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group Baseline Findings

Further analysis of the pre-intervention open-ended responses illuminated findings across participants. Specifically, Question F asked participants to report training they had received on racial or cultural competence. The most common response (83%, n = 5) indicated participants gained knowledge from independent reading. In fact, no participant cited a class or field experience. Coincidentally, neither Icarus nor I had received formal training on racial or cultural competence yet as the subsequent Quantitative Baseline section explains, we had the highest
and lowest scores respectively. Even so, two of the three highest-scoring participants disclosed multiple types of training, which could indicate that any type may contribute to higher racial and cultural competence—a promising possibility, given the targeted focus groups I planned to facilitate.

In response to Question 32 (What race-related literature or discussions come up in your classroom?), one participant mentioned specific literature, three answered in terms of class discussions, and two reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable teaching or talking about race in the classroom. This outcome, 83% (n = 5) of participants not actively teaching race-related literature or sparking race-related discussions, reinforced the need for my study and validated my prediction that our department’s classrooms are not racially inclusive.

Question 34, which asked if participants have ever avoided talking about race, yielded similar findings. The startling results suggest a correlation between a teacher’s comfort in talking about race (Question 34) and course content (Question 32). Only one participant, Ariel, responded in the negative, and—per Question 32—Ariel alone incorporated race-related texts and conversations in class. Responding affirmatively, the other five participants disclosed 13 different reasons, reflected in 15 total instances, for their colormuteness, which Figure 4.1 shows as four major fears: of professional repercussions, external consequences, offending, and showing ignorance. These themes echo literature on teacher racial silence and demonstrate a localized problem in our department, hence the need for intervention (Bolgatz, 2005; Castagno, 2008; hooks, 1994; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Tatum, 2003).
A common theme also emerged from participants’ definitions of cultural competence, prompted by Question 35. Three participants (50%) specifically acknowledged awareness is an important aspect of racial and cultural competence. Luna cited awareness of “the varied history, culture, and contributions minorities have provided our country;” CoCo emphasized awareness of the interplay of cultural dynamics; and my response included awareness of ideologies, histories, and values. Additional definitions included diversity (Ariel), informed respect (Opal), and comfort discussing race (Icarus). In the educational domain, Moule (2012) defined cultural competence as the capacity to teach culturally dissimilar students, which “entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, learning specific bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching” (p. 5). Although participants exhibited the
awareness aspect, the absence of cultural knowledge and skill set within the definitions legitimized my aim to increase our racial and cultural competence.

When asked about what teachers can do to improve their racial or cultural competence (Question 37), participants alluded to five major themes: acknowledge privileges and become vulnerable; listen; discuss; read; and learn through exposure, involvement, and training. The emphasis on communication is interesting in juxtaposition with their responses to Question 34, which found the majority of the participants fearful and stifled in practicing and engaging in that communication in the classroom. These responses support the design and goals of the intervention through independent assignments, reflections, and focus groups with a focus on the communication aspect that participants associated with improving racial and cultural competence.

**Quantitative Baseline Cultural Competence Levels**

As outlined in Chapter 3, the initial survey also included Likert-scale statements that enabled me to determine each participant’s cultural competence. The continuum provides a framework to assess individuals’ words, practices, attitudes, and behaviors from cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency (Cross et al., 1989). Moving toward proficiency requires a pragmatic shift from viewing others as a problem to advocating for equity for all (CampbellJones et al., 2010; Ward, 2013). Therefore, an individual’s placement on the continuum indicated the depth of their cultural competence at the outset of the study.

The CCC traditionally categorizes qualitative data (Cross et al., 1989), but for consistency, I used it to interpret my pre and post qualitative and quantitative
survey data in accordance with my mixed-method design. Arguably, the leap was not large. Neville et al. (2000) suggested higher scores on the CoBRAS, taking reverse-scoring into consideration, indicate higher levels of cultural acceptance and awareness. Likewise, Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2011) tested the validity of the CCAI-UIC instrument (Balcazar et al., 2009) and discerned strong psychometric properties for indicating an individual’s cultural competence and need for training. Thus, the two instruments that informed my surveys align with the CCC (Cross et al., 1989) and justify the levels I assigned to participants. Table 4.2 shows each participant’s baseline score and corresponding level of cultural competence.

Table 4.2 Quantitative Baseline Cultural Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>cultural pre-competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the information from Table 4.2, 83% of participants—all five colleagues—appeared to be culturally competent, whereas I was culturally pre-competent. The mean score was 129.5, with a standard deviation of approximately 9.44, placing me two standard deviations below the mean, Ariel one standard deviation below the mean, three participants (Coco, Luna, and Opal) one standard deviation above the mean, and Icarus two standard deviations above the mean.
The initial quantitative results, based on their level of agreement with survey statements, suggest most of the teachers were culturally competent and engaged in inclusive practices with students of different cultures. In the competent category, teachers display a commitment to self-cultivation of culture, difference, and diversity (Cross et al., 1989). Although their practices and attitudes may not be completely or universally proficient, teachers in this category showcase fidelity to social, racial, and cultural justice. Having 83% of participants performing at the culturally competent level at the outset of the study seemed promising; however, these findings raised two important matters. First, I recognized the levels and continuum characteristics applied to an unassociated survey, reinforcing my decision to conduct a mixed-method study because quantitative data alone may not provide an accurate picture of participants’ competence. Second, the continuum depicts cultural competence as an evolving process involving growth for everyone, even at the proficient level. As action research, this study promised support to teachers in their efforts to become increasingly culturally mindful regardless of their preliminary levels.

The noticeable outlier from the baseline quantitative results also warrants a closer look. The participant who scored significantly lower than others, thereby categorized as pre-competent, was me. As an action researcher, I recognized the need to disclose my identity and engage in critical self-reflection of this score (Herr & Anderson, 2015; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Vaccarino et al., 2007). At face value, my score indicated I had markedly less experience, awareness, and knowledge in terms of race and culture than my peers. However, a plausible
interpretation of my low score stems from my doctoral coursework on social justice. I believe the racial and cultural exposure I received through the experience gave me a hyper awareness of my limitations and the expansive interspace between where I was and where I should be: cultural proficiency. This acute awareness likely impacted how I responded to the survey statements.

**Convergent Baseline**

Comparing the quantitative and qualitative baselines yielded a final pre-intervention baseline. I considered adjacent levels of cultural competence correlative, deferring to the qualitative level for the final baseline because the continuum is qualitative in nature and a more descriptive yet precise analysis can evolve from the participant’s own words and phrases rather than their interpretation of a statement on a survey. As Table 4.3 shows, there were no discrepant levels in the data. The qualitative data affected three participants’ levels, placing Coco, Icarus, and Opal in the pre-competence stage. In all, 33% \((n = 2)\) of participants had a final baseline of cultural competence and 67% \((n = 4)\) had a final baseline of cultural pre-competence.

Table 4.3 *Convergent Baseline Cultural Competence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Qualitative level</th>
<th>Quantitative level</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Convergent baseline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intervention

Upon completion of the baseline survey, participants received material for Module 1, ushering them into the heart of the study: the 6-week intervention. During this phase, participants worked on broadening their knowledge and perspective asynchronously by reflecting on independent assignments and synchronously by participating in focus groups.

Module 1 Findings

The focus for Module 1 was uncovering and acknowledging bias. The independent assignment and protocol exposed participants to literature, videos, and activities that emphasized new perspectives and challenged existing ones.

Independent Assignment and Reflection

In response to the material in Module 1, participants took one of three routes: reflective, positive, or negative. For example, CoCo, Icarus, and I took a more reflective stance in considering how the material directly applied to us. CoCo confessed to “questioning [her] role in the community and how [she] may need to diversify [her] community.” Icarus expressed surprise at her Implicit Association Test results, which showed she held more unconscious biases than she thought. I commented on parallels between White male privilege and White female privilege given just “one degree of difference” between the two.

Ariel and Luna responded to the material in a positive way. Ariel commented that she found “optimism” in sentiments shared in the videos, with her greatest take-away from the material being “the notion that we need to intentionally change the way we perceive one another.” Luna found the material
“fabulous and encouraging,” “valid,” and “uplifting,” and identified a running theme of “how often white people have been taught not to see.”

Opal, on the other hand, expressed some frustration, not from the material directly, but from her desire for more people to watch and learn from the material. She wrote, “I found myself angry, knowing lessons like the ones presented here, are lessons I am not allowed to teach the kids I teach, even though in reality these kinds of lessons are why I wanted to be a teacher.” She also expressed feeling overwhelmed, “like I am too small to fix an impossible problem.”

When responding to the impact on their classroom, all participants—minus one who did not address the topic—offered some variation of how it would change their views of and interactions with students. CoCo commented on an increased awareness that her classroom “expectations may not be conditions with which they may be familiar.” Opal and I commented on teachers’ privilege—and therefore, control—in the classroom. I recognized, “my comfort is not everyone’s comfort,” and Opal noted the material’s “language and approach” could transfer to the classroom. Icarus and Luna gravitated to how students feel in their classroom, with Icarus showing “appreciation of others’ experiences and realities” and Luna focusing on “developing empathy and understanding and providing a space in my room that is much more inclusive.”

**Focus Group**

The ensuing focus group session for Module 1 presented evidence for five themes: the acknowledgement that all privileges are not equal, the variance in levels of awareness within the group, our unanimous desire to improve our
awareness, our ability as a group to navigate conversations on racial inequalities, and the utilization of colormuteness.

**All Privileges are not Equal.** As the group of White women sat around the table discussing biases and privileges, there was ample evidence of participants’ increasing awareness of their privileges and that not all privileges are equally beneficial. Opal addressed the core of that understanding regarding her own list of privileges: “I put it as not really so much the privileges that I get because I’m White. I literally just wrote: I am White. It is a privilege.”

The topic of healthcare as a flawed system, disparately impacting those with mental or physical illnesses, the homeless, and racial minorities, came up multiple times. The recurrence of this topic as we discussed different cultural groups demonstrates both its universality and variability. All participants seemed to understand how healthcare availability and accessibility differ for underrepresented groups—and in different ways dependent upon which group.

Therefore, the group seemed to grow in understanding not all subgroups are limited equally. For example, Ariel differentiated between a homeless unemployed person and a homeless employed person, the latter with a modicum of privilege over the former. Similarly, Opal differentiated between subgroups defined by mutable characteristics and subgroups defined by race, reasoning, “The biggest thing with homelessness and mental illness and being gay, if you’re just standing silently in a room in an outfit that somebody dressed you in, you can hide that. But if you are Black, you can’t hide being Black.” Opal thus poignantly uncovered how privilege may lie in an individual’s ability to hide their participation
in a subgroup, thereby presenting a more normalized version of themselves. The privileges of some, in other words, are not uniformly the privileges of all.

**Variance in Levels of Awareness.** The first session highlighted our varying awareness. Opal demonstrated her cultural awareness and others’ lack when she said, “It’s not even convincing people that it’s bad to be racist anymore, but convincing people of privilege and bias.” Although Opal’s competence level appeared consistent throughout the session, other participants oscillated. For instance, in response to McIntosh’s (1990) first listed privilege, “I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time” (p. 32), Icarus questioned this ability in asking, “Why can’t they choose to be in the company of their own race? . . . Why do they not have that choice?,” indicating unawareness of her own privilege of being surrounded by like-raced individuals. However, later in the discussion, Icarus acknowledged a privilege of hers was not “feel[ing] out of place in certain situations or communities where most people are alike” and therefore recognizing others may be limited to “specific communities where there just aren’t that many similar people.”

When discussing homelessness, Ariel indicated it was something she “cannot identify with; I am privileged as a White woman to own my home,” possibly indicating an inability to consider other perspectives. Ariel also indicated she did not write a personal list of privileges because she could not think of any to add to McIntosh’s (1990) “exhaustive” list. However, she confessed to nodding her head while going through the list, perhaps as a physical indication of becoming more aware of her own privileges as she worked through the reading.
Toward the beginning of the conversation, CoCo described the diverse background of her upbringing and indicated an awareness of her own whiteness through comments such as: “Almost everything I do is a privilege, I think.” CoCo also seemed to understand her position and ability to support underrepresented groups when she said, “I’ve helped students and family members seek housing in safe areas that will protect the LBGTQ community.” Conversely, toward the end of the session, CoCo relied on kindness (“If we can just be kind”) and fairness (“Treat others as we would like to be treated”) as band-aid solutions for cultural awareness and added, “It doesn’t matter what’s on the outside, we’re all the same on the inside.” I countered this stance with my own experience:

My parents taught me that, but at the same time, the only people in my sphere were people who were like me. So I hear that, and I’m like: okay, apply it to all these White people. I never had to apply it to other people.

This statement shows my understanding that treating everyone the same is easy when they look and act like me but not so easy when they do not. Alternatively, I openly admitted my relatively new and relatively low level of competence due to this upbringing, sharing, “I grew up in this White bubble and went to a primarily White school and went to a White church and extracurriculars with White people. And it was normal; that wasn’t ever brought to my attention until recently.”

Luna described a similar monochromatic background that impacted her awareness in sharing, “I’m ashamed that I was a product of this White privilege, unaware until I started, you know, summer of 2020, reading and reading, and just being like: Oh, my God!” Even so, Luna referenced the need for the White
community to step up and say: “I need to learn; help me learn; help me learn how to change.” Luna also demonstrated a competent level of understanding and awareness when she said, “It’s hard to keep bias when you make them human,” offering a solution to combat racial and cultural blindness.

**Desire for Improvement.** The group’s variance in awareness notwithstanding, participants shared a common desire for growth. For instance, CoCo stated, “I know I’m missing so much that I haven’t even thought about,” indicating a willingness to understand. Ariel quipped that administration should cover our fourth-block classes so we could dive into our discussions, suggesting a desire for more depth because “after all, what we’re doing here is important!” As a whole, the group seemed to share an eagerness to change society’s fallacious perception about CRT but offered little in terms of concrete solutions. Luna expressed this conflict most articulately when she asserted:

> What worries me, too, about all of this is the voice of reason; the voice of knowledge is being squashed by the sound bites. And we as educators, we have a responsibility, you know? So, when are people going to be brave enough to get up and say and do the right thing?

Her comment and the group’s subsequent, supportive agreement indicate the teachers’ awareness while underscoring the difference between listening and responding to a call to action.

**Navigating Racial Conversations.** The group touched on several local and national headlines that involved racial discourse, demonstrating comfortable, knowledgeable participation in race-based conversations. We discussed at
length the town’s contentious proposal to widen a highway, thereby taking land, relocating homes, and splitting primarily Black communities as opposed to rerouting the highway through one of the town’s most opulent neighborhoods. Luna encapsulated the group’s reaction to this inequity and its impact on “inheritance properties . . . The land was granted to them after emancipation, and there’s no paperwork that they can prove that it’s been in their family for generations . . . It’s like they’re taking advantage of it. It’s really very upsetting.”

The group also discussed a local news article about the last Black family moving out of a neighborhood because they cannot afford the taxes.

A related conversation concerned our shared experiences of being accused by parents and friends-of-friends of indoctrinating students into a liberal lifestyle and teaching White students indignity through CRT. Our open discussion of these misguided, misjudged, and inequitable situations was noticeable; however, most of these events happened outside of class, indicating how context may determine participants’ willingness to engage. Opal’s description of a classroom situation involving a racial issue and her feeling of uncertainty in handling it exemplifies this nuance. As Opal explained, the class was listening to a podcast as part of a unit designed by another teacher:

[It] said the word *Blacks* in it, instead of just Black. And like, I cringed! And then one of the kids was like: ‘Rude!’ And I was like: ‘Oh, my God! Just let it pass!’ Because instead of saying Black people or White people, it said *the* Whites, *the* Blacks, *the* gays, *the* what-, and I was like: ‘Ah!’ And I don’t even, I don’t even know.
This incident demonstrates Opal’s cultural awareness that what was said was inappropriate despite her feeling ineffectual to address it in the moment.

**Colormuteness in Response to Fear.** Notwithstanding sufficient evidence of participants’ knowledge, awareness, and ability to converse about race, their willingness to do so among students is quite another matter. Several statements indicated an uneasiness with engaging in racial discourse in the classroom. Regarding the term blackness, Icarus stated: “I don’t think I would feel comfortable using that term or having a conversation like this in my classroom with my students.” I shared fears of students’ twisting words and negative connotations resulting in trouble for the teacher. Later in the discussion, I also admitted, “to some degree it feels impossible. I don’t know that I can feel comfortable until the whole idea of race changes for people.” CoCo stated, “I don’t want to be viewed as an oppressor,” suggesting she’s afraid to do or say anything that would imply she is.

The polarizing political climate and antagonistic views toward education and educators seemed to elicit the group’s practice of colormuteness, exemplified by my stating, “I have this knowledge that I can actually do something about it, but education is under such an attack now that I feel like I can’t. I’m muzzled by it.” CoCo also commented on the politicization of education, noting, “You don’t want to risk the drama; you don’t want to end up on the news.” Ariel brought up an interesting point that “we don’t know where it can come from,” and Luna commiserated, “We’re all worried. We’ve all been in the hot seat before, and it’s just facts! That’s what blows my mind!”
Despite how much we may try to avoid these conversations, two participants have no choice but to face them due to the use of the N-word in their curriculum; however, they approach the matter in distinct ways. Ariel discussed how she gives students “the talk” before reading so they expect certain words that we don’t need to say out loud because we’ve all got them, but we can make a pact with one another now that if someone slips and something comes out that we’re just going to carry on. On a surface level, Ariel is acknowledging the use of the word and providing a safe space for students to make mistakes. However, she may also be glossing over, rather than accounting for, the presence of the word in the text, thereby disengaging from a conversation about it.

Similarly, Opal reflected on teaching a text that uses the term and qualified her opposition to its use:

I struggle with *Huck Finn*, *Tom Sawyer*, and *Of Mice and Men* because it’s written by an old White dude, and it feels like a very different discussion because it’s a very different use of the word. And it’s a very different moment in the classroom, where I’m having to explain to kids, not that it’s a word that we have to change the ownership of or the meaning of, but rather, it’s a word that somebody, who I’m telling them that they’re supposed to respect the work of, used. And that feels like a very different conversation to me, and I have struggled with this conversation a lot.

In other words, Opal distinguished between the N-word’s use in commentary, as opposed to dialogue, further establishing that its appearance in fiction implies an
author’s artistic choice. Moreover, Opal’s attention to the authors’ race suggests the term may be more acceptable from a Black author.

Both Ariel and Opal were aware of the N-word’s capacity to cause tension in the classroom; however, in this specific instance, their unique approaches illustrate an interesting dynamic between a teacher’s cultural awareness and her certainty for addressing that particular term. Opal showed greater awareness but more uncertainty, whereas Ariel showed less awareness but more certainty.

**Module 2 Findings**

The purpose of Module 2 was to build on the awareness generated in Module 1 and equip participants to engage in racial discourse. The materials within the module focused on how to have constructive conversations involving race with the hope that participants would augment their confidence and competence in this area, mobilizing them to engage in race-based dialogue.

**Independent Assignment and Reflection**

The first question on the independent assignment asked what strategy from the readings seemed most practical. Responses varied, but some commonalities stood out. Three participants (Ariel, CoCo, and Icarus) specifically mentioned the Value, Problem, Solution, Action communication structure from the *10 Lessons for Talking About Race* document (The Opportunity Agenda, 2020), which they felt could be useful for their classroom.

Opal and I also referenced the *10 Lessons* article while finding merit in other lessons and suggestions (The Opportunity Agenda, 2020). Opal responded that Lessons 9 and 10 were her “biggest focus” at present to ensure “the lens of
[her] class is not a White one and that we are embracing and listening to the voices of people of color rather than a White retelling of similar stories.” I found the “openers” helpful in having a starting place, an approach, and an example of what to say to others about race.

Luna was the only participant to reference the Challenging Conversations about Race and Racism (First Book, 2022a) reading. She reported three takeaways: being “comfortable with silence during discussions,” the CodeSwitch podcast, and the anonymous feedback activity.

When asked about strategies for engaging in difficult conversations with students, Ariel and Opal provided notable responses. Ariel commented that just being willing to discuss uncomfortable topics has value, for “until honest discussions are ‘on the table,’ there is a risk of our students continuing to be confused about topics relative to systems of oppression and that confusion could breed quiet rather than constructive discussion and action.” Opal’s strategy centered on providing an opportunity for students to explain their beliefs and their reasoning. She added, “Often when those opportunities are given it allows for the speaker to see the gaps that they have in their own reasoning and it can be easier to listen once you have been listened to.”

Reflections on Module 2 also indicated some similarities between participants. Luna and CoCo both addressed the need for more education on cultural awareness. Luna’s response targeted professional development for our entire faculty, even suggesting follow-up sessions throughout the year or a parent night to address how the school and teachers would be implementing their
training. She wrote, “I truly believe until we create an environment that positively and honestly deals with topics of race, misinformation and fear will continue to be the leading voices.” CoCo targeted all educational levels, arguing for a class on cultural awareness at the primary, middle, secondary, post-secondary, and professional levels as “it is a life-long process that we have to get better at!”

Ariel and I reflected on the idea of learning hard lessons and uncovering uncomfortable truths through humor and games such as Medville’s (TEDx Talks, 2018a). Ariel suggested this approach “could feel non-threatening.” I shared a similar sentiment in that a game atmosphere would “make it more comfortable and ok to make mistakes and admit failures and biases and incorrect thinking.”

Participants then reflected on the potential classroom impact. Luna discussed “continually learning how to better communicate with ALL [her] students” and “clear[ing] away the veil of being uncomfortable.” CoCo suggested more cultural awareness would make our classrooms much more accepting, which could transfer to students’ home environments. Ariel stated she was willing to try a suggested activity from the reading, and Opal and I commented on the concrete suggestions, support, validation, and “how to” guidance provided in the material. Moreover, I felt the material provided a “backbone into why talking about race is a good thing and why identifying whiteness as a universal super power can help lead individuals into anti-racist action.”

**Focus Group**

Topics that arose during the second focus group resembled some of those from the first module, yet novel ideas emerged from new understandings over the
course of the second module. In all, analysis of the focus group surfaced four prominent themes: recognition of the White vs. Black experience, growth in racial and cultural competence, desire for action when recognizing wrongs, and fear.

**Recognition of the White vs. Black Experience.** We started by examining the polarity in how society recognizes and compliments a White person as opposed to a Black person. Icarus referred to a specific interview that called Serena Williams a credit to her race and to general conversations when people feel inclined to describe a Black person as articulate. In these instances, the point of the story is not about race, yet the writer or speaker shifts the focus to race. Icarus highlighted the dichotomy in the perception that compliments to minoritized individuals are paid either as a credit to their race or stereotypical of their race and observed, “but we don’t say that about White people.” I remarked that White people should not be surprised when a person of color does something that astonished us, with Opal contributing, “being surprised by success for people of color tends to be because your assumption is that they aren’t. By saying ‘you’re a credit,’ you’re saying the rest of a population isn’t as likely to accomplish the same thing.” The group’s acknowledgement of these practices underscores White and Black individuals’ divergent experiences.

This theme also manifested in the group’s consideration of the interplay between resources and success. The initial thread of discourse focused on racialized inequities, with Icarus acknowledging not everyone has the same resources and Coco stating, “It’s like almost everybody could do more if they had the resources. Some people just don’t know that there are, you know, resources
available.” However, the conversation shifted to inequities of success between racial groups with the same resources. Ariel drew from the material by quoting a startling statistic from The Opportunity Agenda (2020) that “even when children grow up next to each other with parents who have similar incomes, Black boys fare worse than White boys in 99% of America.” Opal reflected:

The issue is systematic. It’s not just about resources, and the resources aren’t just about racism, and they’re not just about poverty lines. They’re not just about your neighborhood. Even if you were a Black person who lived in a nice, White neighborhood and went to a nice, White school and had nice, White supports all around you and you used all of them, you’re still less likely to succeed because the entire system of the world that you live in is literally built to keep you down.

This particular conversation emphasized the stark chasm between White and Black lived experiences. This theme extended the “all privileges are not equal” theme from the first focus group, recognizing the degree of privileges that exist between not only cultural groups but racial groups as well. This discovery aligns with the intent of the instructional design of the modules and is evidence of the group’s ability to transform their knowledge into new, racial contexts.

The difference in racial experiences also manifested when the group discussed our diversity trainings, which I pointed out were typically led by people of color as if the responsibility to educate White people about diversity and race falls on minoritized shoulders. Icarus doubted my interpretation was school leadership’s intent and claimed, “I think they did that because they were trying to
be diverse in their diversity training.” Regardless of intent, the stereotype leads to Opal’s sarcastic command: “You tell me; be the speaker of your race.” Luna recalled the responses to the national protests in 2020, specifically the awareness in how many times White people, when addressing it, would become emotional and cry, and people of color were like: ‘Stop! I can’t take that. Come on! With everything else, I don’t want to deal with your shame, your guilt in trying to figure this out.’

She concluded by saying, “We just have to learn and we have to do better and we can’t just cry and feel guilty,” with Icarus adding, “Or feel that crying is enough.” This evidence illustrates the group’s realization that action—putting education and knowledge into practice—is needed, but the responsibility for it falls on the uninformed, not the minoritized.

**Growth in Racial and Cultural Competence.** In conjunction with and supporting our acknowledgement of the difference between the White and Black experience, the conversation yielded evidence—both personally and interpersonally—of our growth in racial and cultural competence. For example, CoCo declared, “We’ve been sort of raised to not see color,” but then agreed with Luna’s response: “I’ve read a lot lately by Black authors that say we do need to see color.” CoCo built upon this remark by saying, “We do. We do need to see color. We do need to recognize it and respect it.”

Conversely, later in the focus group, participants were discussing what would be lost if we were all the same, as the tendency of White people is to have an attitude of “we just want to help you be a little more like me” (Icarus).
Participants listed various cultural differences, like food, art, and religion, but ultimately settled on the loss of identity we would suffer if we were all the same, indicating the need not only to see and recognize racial differences, but also to celebrate them. Additionally, Luna commented on appreciating the challenging heaviness and expansiveness of some of the module material, and Icarus acknowledged finally allowing a student to argue for the ability to wear hoodies for a project because she now understands the value of his reasoning.

Luna and I also took a more interpersonal approach in showing concern for others’ competence. Luna suggested this awareness training “is what should be shared with our staff. This is what we should do for a PD [professional development] day.” My responses diverted away from work to my home:

I read an article for a class . . . [that] said children learn to recognize color by 5 years old. And then from that point, they determine whether it’s, like, a good thing or something to be scared of or something that we embrace or something we avoid. And so I’ve been thinking: what am I teaching my children? I mean, because here I am and just getting these lessons that for whatever reason have escaped my education and my awareness. And I’m like, I’ll be damned if I let my kids get to my age and feel and be the same way!

This evidence demonstrates how Luna and I desired continued growth with respect to our own lives but also for those in our proximity, suggesting the path to cultural proficiency is not one you walk alone.
Acknowledging ongoing transformation also recognizes room for continued growth. For example, we revisited our Module 1 conversation about terminology, shifting focus from the N-word to work through other pejorative terms and settling into a discussion about the use of “negro.” Ariel observed that her students are no longer comfortable reading or using the term, and Opal commented that it makes her uncomfortable, much less her students. She suggested the discomfort derives from the word being “one of those things that is dated, and it was only a term that was used in order to segregate, to discriminate . . . It was not something people used to identify themselves. It was an indicator of difference.” The group seemed to discern the negative connotations associated with the terms, going so far as acknowledging the semantic difference between color/person of color or autistic/person with autism because “you’re a person first” (Ariel), and we discussed the necessity for using appropriate gender pronouns. Opal argued the negative connotations associated with certain words are exactly why we have to handle their utilization because “you have to think about the baggage that comes with the word. And just because it doesn’t hurt your feelings doesn’t mean that it doesn’t hurt somebody else’s feelings.” However, what is glossed over is how to do that. Only one part of the equation is cessation of the words; the other part is learning not to use them, which stems from stepping into those conversations and learning how and why to address the words as opposed to avoiding them altogether. This topic is especially apropos considering our identity as English teachers. The how and why of words is our
explicit domain, making a study targeting the English teachers of primarily White students essential in creating classrooms of constructive racial dialogue.

Another area for continued growth stemmed from participants' lacking confidence and desiring more guidance and support. Opal commented, “I still don’t know that I really know what to say to some of the counter narratives . . . I don’t know how to respond to that. I don’t know how to combat that.” I concurred, “I’m with you. I don’t know. I feel like I don’t have the knowledge . . . I have not spent enough time recognizing and studying this to know.” Icarus demonstrated she wanted a new perspective and information when she revealed, “I wish there was a Black person who had signed up for this.” Besides the fact that there are no Black teachers in our department, Opal suggested such a scenario would “become about the Black person trying to educate us.” Icarus then wondered “what our dynamics would be, would we be able to have these same, would we be talking like we’re talking now?” Opal countered with: “No, I feel like we would be directing every question and every concern to the Black person at the table.” Icarus’s question thus brought an interesting perspective by voicing a group desire to seek advice and knowledge while suggesting group members would not speak as freely if a Black participant were present. This conversation presented a new dynamic concerning the race of the individuals discussing the subject of race. Perhaps White teachers are more uncomfortable discussing race in the classroom when there are Black students enrolled in the class.

**Desire for Action When Recognizing Wrongs.** As a third prominent theme from Focus Group 2, participants seemed to desire change, especially in
response to racial and cultural wrongdoings. Opal emphasized a point from one of the readings—to be solution-oriented and consider what your solution-oriented response can be in the face of injustice. Ariel questioned that possibility in today’s climate: “how do we come up with solutions if there can’t be honest conversations?” Luna shared her belief that “schools should be the catalyst. I think that’s where we start,” which Ariel defended by saying:

And if we are charged with making the students college and career ready, do we not have, as part of our responsibility, putting topics out there so that when they find themselves in academic situations or in social situations or in line at the grocery store or reading something on their social media, that they can possibly respond in an informed way?

Here, both Luna and Ariel showcase the responsibility teachers can hold in educating not just on content but on racial and cultural empathy.

Teachers also commented on “wrongs” they had recognized nationally and locally. CoCo and I discussed the misrepresentation of CRT, with CoCo saying, “It’s been presented in social media and the media as a vile, bad thing.” Luna commented, “It’s scary what’s going on in Texas,” and Icarus made a similar reference to Florida. I mentioned a point from the module material about linking history to outcome as a way of identifying inequitable, racial conditions, which seems unlikely when “some people are on a path to completely erase that history, and we cannot make the connection between that cause and effect.” CoCo mentioned the purging of older library books as “a step in erasing things.”
Such examples of external injustices are beyond our control, yet the group spent a significant amount of time discussing an injustice within our domain—our school. Icarus shared how a group of six Black boys signed up to take weightlifting at the end of the day and were dropped to accommodate students who were current athletes on official school teams. Icarus shared:

They’re our high flyers. They get in trouble. They’ve gone to TPA [alternative school for disciplinary purposes] and come back. I mean, these are not the kids who need to be dropped out of a class they want to take when they’re already short credits, particularly not PE because they need to burn off that steam last block of the day . . . They’ve been told they’re not good, they’re not able because they are not on a team because they are not eligible to be on a team.

The group expressed disbelief and dismay at the boys’ treatment through comments such as “So disappointing” (Ariel); “Wait, wait. How? What?!” (Luna); “That’s not public education!” (Icarus); and “What a message we’re sending to them about education and how White people view their education” (DiAnna). Icarus brought the situation full circle when she asked, “How can this be? How can we let this be? It is, to me, the prime example of this conversation,” referring to our purpose in participating in the study. This injustice happened within our backyard, and we should have been able to intervene, yet noticeably absent from the discussion are remarks indicating a willingness to take action. Identifying injustices and desiring change do not necessarily mean participants are willing or equipped to act. Knowing there should be change does not equate to being a
change agent, suggesting a dependency and belief that someone else will step into the situation and right the wrong. This discovery made me consider, if teachers are not willing to be agents of change, who will be?

**Fear.** One reason to explain teachers’ unwillingness to take action is fear—a resounding theme continuing from the first focus group session. Ariel made this connection when she asked, “If there’s a fear of honest conversations, then how is anything ever going to get done?” As White educators, my colleagues and I have an acknowledged privilege of respect from others to speak into situations, yet numerous examples indicate our reluctance to do so. We seemed to reach a consensus of not responding to social media posts that are racially and/or culturally insensitive: “I would not open that can of worms” (CoCo); “No, I’m not engaging in that” (Opal); “No, nothing electronic” (Luna); and “No trail” (Ariel). Opal admitted to wondering if she would get in trouble for listening to one of the TEDx Talks during school. Similarly, CoCo indicated fear of backlash twice during the session: “How is it going to be perceived? Could it be taken out of context?” and “I would be afraid to be attacked by some kind of action group.” Additionally, I described two situations when I allowed fear to determine my actions. The first involved using my headphones instead of my classroom speaker when working on the transcript of a focus group session while a student was in my classroom, and the other involved my refusal to explain my dissertation to students. In both situations, I defended my actions as “protect[ing myself and] the identity of my participants,” but ultimately I questioned, “What if this got out? What if that put all of us in jeopardy for our topics of conversation?”
In these instances, our group took the pathway of least resistance and avoidance rather than speaking our mind about truth and against injustice.

In one particular instance, Icarus admitted to her own color muteness in the classroom while illuminating how to change through engaging in dialogue:

We keep bringing up things; what would you say in class? And I’m like: nothing. I’m not saying anything. I don’t know what to say in class. I don’t even know what to say. ‘There are three Black boys in this classroom.’ I don’t know if I could say that out loud. But since I heard my kids say it, now I’m saying it. What are y’all saying? ‘How many people of color are here today?’ I mean, how are we talking about that? Are you saying this Black author? Or are you saying this author of color?

Icarus thus showed us comfort may derive from having more open discussions: she became more comfortable using the word “Black” in class after hearing her students use it when referring to themselves and without offense. She also encouraged this discourse among her colleagues by using the collective “we” and asking about our use of racial terminology in the classroom. Perhaps prompting and being cognizant of appropriate terminology being used by others can catalyze teachers’ need to engage in race-related discourse.

**Module 3 Findings**

Module 3 focused on applying lessons learned in Module 2 to the classroom. Drawing on knowledge of how to talk about race, the materials in this module challenged participants to consider employing those skills in their curriculum decisions and deliberate classroom discussions.
Independent Assignment and Reflection

For the final module, participants again reflected on the material. Four participants responded to Lyiscott’s talk, *Why English Class Is Silencing Students of Color* (TEDx Talks, 2018b). Ariel commented that she felt “enlightened” as she was “unaware and now understand[s] the notion of having a ‘linguistic repertoire.’” I reflected on the frequency with which I had observed AAE in school, believing the students who used it did not know “proper” English. I wrote, “I’m sure I judged them as less educated, less formal, and less correct.” Opal was familiar with AAE from previous graduate classes in which she learned “there is no right or wrong way to speak English and really more than that, [she] learned that it is important to make sure [her] students know that.” She continued, “There is a time and a place for formal Standard American English and it is my job to make sure they know when that is, not to change the way they communicate.” Opal indicated she felt validated and helped by Lyiscott’s handling of that information. Icarus reflected that although the TED Talk was interesting, she “got bogged down in what to do with that information.”

In addition to reflecting on the video, participants also responded to the readings. Luna and Ariel commented on new strategies they would like to try, such as anonymous writing. Coco wrote that her thoughts went to “the cancel culture our society seems to be fostering.”

While reflecting on the impact this module could have on their classroom, participants seemed to take two approaches: the practical or the theoretical. Among many practical examples and strategies that participants cited as
actionable steps to try in their classrooms, Luna and CoCo mentioned offering more diverse literary texts. According to CoCo, “so many students have very insular backgrounds that experiencing new cultures and experiences may help broaden their cultural perspectives.” Luna, Icarus, and Ariel wrote about wanting to implement the anonymous writing strategy, although Luna did admit, “What I struggle with is the follow up discussion and until I feel it’s a supported aspect of our classrooms, I’m uncomfortable going down this road.”

Opal and I took a broader, theoretical approach. We both referenced the same quote about educating White students and moving through their discomfort with race as the greatest antiracist impact we can have. Opal expressed what a revelation reading the quote was in view of her teaching approach:

For years . . . I wanted to be teaching in a small school, with more minority students, who ‘needed me.’ I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to support the communities I thought needed the most support. It never occurred to me that I could be doing MORE important work by opening different doors to my white students in the suburbs. I am going to try to hold onto that idea for as long as I am at [our school] and make active choices to make a different kind of difference.

I addressed the sense of “necessity and urgency of engaging White students in conversations about race,” with this responsibility falling on teachers.

Focus Group

The focus of Module 3, how to talk about race in the classroom, gave rise to four clear themes in our conversation: pessimism vs. optimism, fear, modeling
competent behaviors, and classroom impact. These themes emerged through analysis of this new data set, yet several exhibit recurring ideas from prior sessions. Because Luna did not attend this session, her contributions are noticeably absent from this data set, although she remained a participant.

**Pessimism vs. Optimism.** Echoing the uncertainty participants demonstrated in previous sessions, the group’s perception of racial discourse in the classroom also seemed ambivalent. Opal opened the dialogue when she disclosed, “That’s what I’m bad at. That’s what I can’t handle, is when things like that happen. I don’t know how I’m supposed to respond.” Icarus suggested teachers have two paths involving race-related dialogue in the classroom by asking, “do you initiate or ignite?” To her, initiating means pressing pause on the classroom agenda and inviting students into a conversation. She illustrated, “Oh! Interesting thing that you said. Maybe we could take a little break and talk about that a little bit.” However, realizing this approach could inflame emotions, she continued, “Or does that then get people freaking out and getting hostile, and, you know, we’re trying not to have that happen. But is that maybe what needs to happen? It’s a great question: how do you handle it?” From there, participant evidence seemed to fall into either a pessimistic or an optimistic view of what would happen in the classroom if we chose to initiate.

In answering her own question, Icarus took a pessimistic approach: “I always worry. I guess how I handle it is not choosing to ignite it, so I just move on.” I concurred with my tendency to ignore and move on “because you never know what the response will be.” Icarus later asked if we “invite trouble by
wanting to have these conversations and trying to have these conversations.”

Our comments suggest a worst-case scenario approach to these race-based conversations with the expectation that they will backfire; therefore, we resolve to avoid them completely. In this pessimistic view, the risks are too great and rewards too small to initiate discourse.

Opal acknowledged the risks involved with such classroom conversations but was a little more hopeful regarding potential benefits:

There are ways to do it. I don't think that maybe all of us are super equipped to do it. I don't know how to do it. It's way harder, I think, to try and work within this system and still make a difference. But then I make it smaller for myself [by engaging with individuals in her inner circle]. If that's something that we can manage to do with a room full of White kids, then I don't think necessarily that it's always going to be better, and sometimes it is going to ignite, and sometimes we are just causing trouble. But sometimes you can cause trouble and then 3 months later, it actually mattered to somebody.

Opal thus illustrates the balancing act teachers may need to perform but suggests the good that can derive from it supersedes any risks. In this view, the rewards may outweigh the risks, so the conversations are worth igniting.

From an even more optimistic viewpoint, Ariel confidently showed us the rewards outweigh any risks by testifying through personal experience:

5 years ago . . . I wanted to introduce African-American authors into [my class] . . . and I will say, the first year I taught it, I was worried because I
didn’t know how it would go over . . . [but they] all latched on to those two selections. It was so gratifying!

This anecdote evinces that we can find success and value in having more diverse curriculum and willingly initiating those conversations.

Following Ariel's shared experience, Icarus described a time when a colleague dissuaded her from teaching a diverse text, which she still regrets: “I believed she’s gotta be right, so I didn’t. And it burns me up to this day because I think those kids would have gotten, would have really jumped in, would have loved it.” Seemingly contradicting her earlier, more pessimistic, sentiments, Icarus acknowledged the positive outcome that was likely to occur if she had only been willing to attempt it. Like Ariel, Icarus also suggested the rewards far outweigh the risks and therefore teachers would be derelict in their duty if they did not ignite those conversations.

Fear. Once again, evidence from participants suggested a paralyzing fear that prevents teachers’ action. Ariel described the uncertainty resulting from different perspectives about a contentious matter: “We don’t know what they’re going to go home and tell the parents they learned in English today, from a skewed point of view or adding on things that really weren’t part of the teaching. Or deleting.” I confided about changing my entire dissertation proposal because “I just got so dang scared when it came down to it” of pushback from students and parents and “not feeling support from admin and even the district because . . . . I just feel like we are a district where, if you wanted to try something like that and it started going south, you would be hung out to dry.” Other remarks
included: “it’s scary to cause trouble” (Opal); “if there’s kickback you could [be fired] because you’re not following the curriculum” (CoCo); “retribution” (Icarus); “our political climate has just influenced what is considered safe” (CoCo); “where is the actual line here, like, is it all just fear?” (Opal); “you would be ostracized on the news and the community” (CoCo); “I would be so worried that would start an escalation” (Icarus); “I’ve been burned too many times” (CoCo); and “I mean, one thing we have to understand is that it can backfire. It can bring repercussions” (Icarus). This theme’s frequency within and across focus groups suggests its prominence in the forefront of our approach to the classroom, dictating what we teach, how we teach it, what we say, and how we say it. Fear thus underpins why teachers exert colormuteness while also defending the need to increase teachers’ racial and cultural competence. Despite the heaviness and trepidation this fear can inspire, there is some consolation in the security we felt in acting and making curricular decisions as a team, as opposed to a single individual. For example, Opal responded “a million percent” when I asked participants if they would feel more comfortable taking classroom risks among a team of teachers.

**Modeling Competent Behaviors.** Even though participants frequently verbalized their fear, they also demonstrated their capacity to model competent behaviors. The opening activity involved writing a question, comment, or situation concerning race in the classroom to pose to the group. Every time a potentially contentious conversation was a prompt for discussion, participants responded with a probing question rather than a denial, comment, or answer: “I guess I don’t really understand [the student’s] statement there, so I feel like I’d be tempted to
ask him to explain” (DiAnna); “Can you elaborate on that?” (Ariel); “What makes you say that?” (Icarus); and “What did I say or do that makes you feel that way?” (DiAnna). The natural ability to dig deeper and probe for further details gives the teacher more insight into the mindset of the speaker so they are more equipped to offer a response that will not escalate the situation. In this way, my colleagues and I seemed to understand the importance of opening up constructive dialogue rather than avoiding it or escalating. As Ariel articulated, “I think it’s a question that has to be answered or it has to be addressed open-ended so that there is not a ‘yes’ or a ‘no;’ that forces them” into this conversation.

Along these same lines, another area where we demonstrated competent behaviors was the ability to recognize and de-escalate combative situations. Ariel discerned, “I also think that if a kid said that to me, they know the words are going to be explosive and sometimes they just want to get a rise out of you.” I agreed with her assessment and added, “probably the worst thing you could respond with is denial.” Ariel shared a personal tool to avoid escalation in removing the student from the situation by offering to “talk about that offline. And if I say to a student, I’ll be here after school, but if it’s really important to that student, they’ll come by. If they’re just trying to get a rise, they’ll go on.” Being able to read the situation, pausing to consider the feelings of all parties, and establishing a more conducive atmosphere for honest communication characterize our cultural competence.

Participants also showed their competence by valuing diverse literature in the curriculum, which, according to CoCo, makes us “more inclusive than
exclusive.” I discussed wanting to make such a change: “I’m trying to think, what actionable steps can I take? And so I was like, well, I can try to diversify my curriculum more, and then I read Simmons’s article and he says diversifying the curriculum is not enough!” The feeling of not doing enough may be discouraging, yet any step toward teaching equitably is better than no step at all. Opal also encouraged utilizing meaningful, diverse literature to teach fundamental racial lessons where others have fallen short. She reflected on one such experience:

My first year here we taught *The Secret Life of Bees*, which is garbage. It’s terrible! The book is bad. The premise is bad. It’s just a reinvention of *To Kill a Mockingbird* where we’re talking about Black lives through the lens of a little White girl from the South, and it’s just teaching, it’s just having White kids read about Black people through their own eyes.

Ariel corroborated the value in teaching literature of merit “because good literature should disturb you. It’s supposed to make you itch and make you think. And we have, in some instances, this world where things are so sanitized that there is no itching.” These comments suggest the teachers approach their job and curricular decisions, not based on student comfort, but rather what will make their students more empathetic and culturally competent. Ariel also rationalized the building of character traits through her own experience teaching diverse literature by saying, “In my year-end survey . . ., my kids consistently say *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was the best book they read all year.”

Icarus also considered the need to be selective when using diverse texts as she pondered, “to teach a classroom full of predominantly White kids *Nickel*
Boys, I mean, that in itself is a statement, so much more than *To Kill a Mockingbird* ever could be.” Throughout the conversation, the group exhibited a desire to teach more diverse literature either by referring to positive experiences teaching it or considering opportunities to include it. Valuing diverse literature, de-escalating situations, and asking probing questions are all signs of culturally competent behaviors. Employing these skills would suggest my colleagues and I are more equipped to engage in racial discourse than we may think, implying our fears of having these conversations may be unwarranted.

**Classroom Impact.** Throughout the focus group, participants either directly referenced the study’s impact on their classroom or alluded to it, making such changes a fourth area of analytical focus. Suggesting a change in her perspective about *how* she teaches *whom* she teaches, Opal said:

> In the article, they were talking about the most significant job that you can do if you want to be an anti-racist... is working with White kids, like, in opening the doors that way. And that was the most, probably the most impactful thing that I’ve read so far in doing this whole thing.

However, we recognized our White students are not like those who attended school years ago. I observed total agreement, verbal and nonverbal, when I said:

> But to the same degree, I feel like kids today, I mean, they’ve seen these protests. They’ve seen White cops shooting Black citizens. I mean, I feel like they are more socially aware than I ever was at their age. And so I feel like there’s an opportunity here to make it not just what’s ‘out there,’ but
we can make it academic and school-worthy and worth studying and
talking about.

We thus identified a need to make the classroom and the curriculum more
relevant to our students, their lives, and their struggles rather than the antiquated
literature of dead White males.

CoCo mentioned her “focus on the universal theme of how it doesn’t
matter. Time, space, conditions may change, but it’s what the human experience
is. It transcends race and color, but it influences race and culture.” She revealed,
“the more I think about it, the more I deconstruct it, and I’m just like: how to be
more inclusive.” This statement indicates the concept of teaching more relevant,
diverse texts to have a more inclusive environment has taken root in her thinking.

Ariel also demonstrated the importance of inclusion and diversity in the
classroom when she discussed the “courage” required to “sit in a room where no
one looks like you.” Icarus made direct connections to her curriculum when she
mentioned for a second time, “I’m really thinking about with our independent
novels, only allowing books off the banned list.” These connections indicate a
growing awareness of the topics we discussed as this theme did not emerge
during the first two focus sessions. Participants were absorbing information and
gradually ruminating as they worked through how to apply it to their classrooms.

Moreover, the group spent ample time discussing the information and
implications from Lyiscott’s talk about the value of linguistic differences (TEDx
Talks, 2018b). The group worked through our experiences, as English teachers,
when teaching students following AAE standards and other linguistic practices
such as “leaving out that ‘to be’ verb” (Icarus); “code switching” (Opal); and the “habitual ‘be’” (DiAnna). We acknowledged that these practices, often considered improper or uneducated, are actually the product of multilingual students who are versed in AAE and Standard American English (SAE), while also acknowledging our privilege in “not hav[ing] to do that: have one language at home and one language here” (Icarus). I then asked about enforcing the use of SAE rules in the classroom: “When we do that are we not saying: when you’re in my world, you have to do it my way?” I continued, “Our standards are based on SAE and every school and institution of learning follows these same standards.” Opal’s response reflected a compelling approach English teachers can take:

I mean, essentially, you are and that is kind of our job . . . it’s important for them to understand that you’re not telling them that there is a right or a wrong way to speak English or that the way they speak it is wrong or that there is a correct or incorrect English. But what they need to know is that what exists is this thing called Standard American English, and those are the rules that we follow in this room. We follow different rules in different contexts, right? You don’t have to follow these rules everywhere in your life, but if you want to be successful at this skill, you have to follow that rule for this thing. And I don’t think that that’s something that, like, should involve shame, but a lot of times it does because it’s correct/incorrect; it’s right/wrong; it’s graded.

Agreeing, the group realized literature offers a way to affirm other dialects or languages, further defending the need for multicultural texts in English class. If
students can see that AAE has literary value, academic merit, and a place in the classroom, the impacts could ripple and indicate that the teacher sees each minoritized student has value, merit, and a place in the classroom as well.

**Additional Findings From Field Notes**

Independently, the field notes from each session did not generate a lot of noteworthy data, but considering them collectively yielded some interesting insights. Through the field notes, I hoped to discern the group members’ interactions and understand the certitude of participant responses. Additionally, I hoped to denote any nonverbal or uncharacteristic communication and determine the consistency in communication shared inside and outside the sessions.

I noticed the sessions grew in length, not only in the official session time from welcome to final thank you, but also in the time participants would arrive early and stay after the sessions. I arranged four tables into a square so there would be no “head” of the table; most participants changed the location of their seat from session to session. This dynamic confirmed a level of comfort I thought would exist among the participants as colleagues and also encouraged me to consider participant responses as honest and bona fide.

Additionally, conversations prior to and immediately following the sessions indicated real-world connections to the assigned material. Icarus arrived at the first session talking about an interview in which Serena Williams was called a credit to her race. CoCo discussed the divisive political climate and its impact on wanting to create more diverse and inclusive classrooms. George Floyd’s murder, the Black Lives Matter movement, Halle Bailey’s being cast to play the
Little Mermaid, and the need for other teachers to participate in similar discussions were all subjects of conversation outside of the session.

Furthermore, throughout the study, participants shared numerous resources—one book, one podcast, one author, and four articles (one with screenshots of comments)—with me, usually with a note such as “you should check this out” or “I thought you would be interested.” Participants’ connections to real-world events and extending their connections to others illustrated a promising step toward resolving the problem of practice, suggesting they could transfer their knowledge and skills related to social equity to their students.

The sessions themselves did not necessarily go as planned; I rarely referenced my protocols to ask questions, prompt thinking, or guide discussion. Instead, the conversations initiated by the opening activities rarely hit a lull and evolved naturally. I observed equal sharing of time and ideas. No one dominated attention or the conversation or alternatively refused to speak or take part in the discussion. As participants shared, I observed mutual signs of support: frequent nods, “mm-hmms,” and smiles, and comments of “yes,” “right,” or “I agree.” No participants were combative, yet there was freedom to disagree or ask clarifying questions and a clear respect for everyone’s position. This atmosphere echoed participants’ responses on the baseline survey regarding their motivation for participating in the study. Five participants indicated they wanted to further themselves as educators and three indicated they wanted to increase their racial and cultural competence. The teachers who volunteered to participate did so
because they had a desire to advance themselves personally and professionally, so they approached the sessions with openness, curiosity, and a growth mindset.

One final note from my observations centers on what I believe to be a disparity between how Opal views her racial/cultural competence and how others view her racial/cultural competence. Throughout her responses to the open-ended survey questions and the independent assignments, Opal expressed uncertainty; lack of confidence; and an apprehensive, almost uneasy, grasp of the interplay of the topics we discussed and her role with them, particularly in her classroom. However, in the focus group sessions, she spoke with remarkable depth of knowledge, logical authority, sensitivity, and experience. Her articulation of terms, texts, and ideas about racial and cultural discourse solidified hers as an adept voice in the room. In fact, if the focus group transcripts were my only data set, I would claim Opal to be the most culturally competent member of the group. Other participants seemed to notice Opal’s knowledge, affirming her role in the group dynamic by pointedly asking her multiple times what she would say or do in certain situations. Group members came to value her insights and contributions as they intentionally and directly addressed her to seek answers to their questions. This dynamic did not occur with any other participant.

**Endline Survey**

The third and final phase of the study involved participants’ completing a follow-up survey (Appendix H), which was akin to the preliminary survey. The results and responses from the survey are constructive in their own right, and
they also enabled me to surmise the efficacy of the intervention through analytical comparison against the pre-intervention survey.

**Qualitative Endline Cultural Competence Levels**

As with the baseline survey, I analyzed responses to the open-ended questions (Appendix M) to assign participants a post-intervention cultural competence level (Table 4.4). Based on this representation of the qualitative findings, 83% \((n = 5)\) of participants demonstrated cultural competence and 17% \((n = 1)\) demonstrated cultural pre-competence.

**Table 4.4 Qualitative Endline Cultural Competence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>cultural pre-competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group Endline Findings**

As with the baseline survey, my qualitative analysis of the endline survey focused on the open-ended questions aligned with my aims. Two common themes emerged in response to Question 32: Do you feel more equipped to talk about race in your classroom? Most responses were positive and indicated participants felt more equipped but nevertheless hesitant. For example, Luna wrote, “Yes, but still not enough,” and I responded, “Somewhat,” explaining,
I can’t say that I feel extremely knowledgeable or comfortable, but I also feel like I’m not as scared to engage in that discourse or would not actively try to divert the conversation if it were to come up in my classroom. Participants also seemed to find value in the material from the independent assignments. Opal and CoCo specifically referenced how the TED talks provided vocabulary and strategies for conducting racial conversations in the classroom.

Along those same lines, Question 33 asked if participants noticed a change in their teaching approach. Responses ranged from yes (50%; \( n = 3; \) Ariel, CoCo, and Luna) to maybe/a little (33%; \( n = 2; \) Icarus and DiAnna) to no (17%, \( n = 1, \) Opal). A response of yes indicated feeling more aware and honest, adapting terminology, and being more inclusive toward students and in the curriculum. The maybe/a little responses alluded to feeling more confident and less afraid or hesitant alongside a willingness to try to make changes or apply new learnings. Opal’s response indicated no specific changes to her teaching approach but did express a hope that she would make changes in the future.

Question 34 asked participants to report any changes to their curriculum. Two participants (33%; CoCo and DiAnna) had added a racially diverse text, two participants (33%; Opal and Ariel) acknowledged changing their approach to an existing text, and two participants (33%; Icarus and Luna) reported no changes. Documented and desired changes to the curriculum, no matter how small, are worthwhile, whereas the “no” responses merit a deeper look. Luna indicated that district demands and course pacing prevented her from answering affirmatively. She also noted that “conversations need to continue and learning still needs to
be developed for educators to effectively be the messengers,” demonstrating her willingness to change her curriculum if she had the means to do so. Likewise, Icarus responded that her “team needs to make changes,” suggesting external factors restrict her from making desired changes to the curriculum.

Considering Question 33 and Question 34 in conjunction was illuminating (Table 4.5). Question 33 looked specifically at how students and content were taught and Question 34 looked specifically at what was taught. For instance, the three “yeses” to Question 33 came from Luna, who did not alter her content; Ariel, who changed her approach; and CoCo, who did change her content. The two “maybe/a little” responses to Question 33 came from me, and I did change my content, and Icarus, who did not. Finally, the “no” response to Question 33 came from Opal, who reported changing her approach to current content.

Table 4.5 Responses to Questions 33 and 34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Question 33: change in approach</th>
<th>Question 34: change in content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>changed approach to current content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>maybe/a little</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>maybe/a little</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>changed approach to current content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 illustrates that each participant provided a unique combination of responses to these questions, which indicates the varied responses to the intervention. A shared experience can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, and
its impacts on the classroom can vary. However, this evidence also speaks to the complexity of my problem of practice and the complex nature of race in the classroom. There is no one-size-fits-all model to becoming more racially and culturally competent. However, when a group of educators commit to walking that journey, the ripple effect of their impact can be multifaceted.

Additionally, to gauge participant growth and understanding of cultural competence, Question 35, as on the baseline survey, asked respondents to define the concept. Generally speaking, participants’ post-intervention definitions were longer and more in-depth. Awareness, which three participants mentioned, remained a prominent theme—specifically the awareness of complexities and historical misrepresentations and the role of the teacher within those (Luna); a “present” awareness of racial and cultural biases, topics, and issues (DiAnna); and an awareness of “hidden assumptions . . . that may be present in one’s preconceived mindsets about other races and cultures” (CoCo).

Another major theme, which was not present in the pre-intervention definitions, was celebrating differences. This theme manifested in acknowledging and understanding differences (Icarus), effectively communicating with others outside one’s racial/cultural group (DiAnna), willingly participating in culturally diverse situations (Opal), and considering other perspectives (Ariel).

Other noteworthy words and phrases include “honest conversations” (Luna), “a skill, not an attribute, that can grow” (DiAnna), “empathy and consideration” (Opal), and “appropriate sensitivity” (Ariel). These definitions align more with Moule’s (2012) view of educational cultural competence as the
awareness and sensitivities, cultural knowledge, and cross-cultural teaching skills that determine a teacher’s facility for educating culturally diverse students.

**Quantitative Endline Cultural Competence Levels**

The endline survey contained the same Likert-scale statements as the baseline survey, the responses to which I calculated and analyzed in the same way, facilitating a comparative sample. Table 4.6 shows each participant’s post-intervention score along with the analogous level, revealing 17% \((n = 1)\) of participants scored at the pre-competence level, 50% \((n = 3)\) scored at the competence level, and 33% \((n = 2)\) exhibited cultural proficiency. The mean score was 137.33 with a standard deviation of 15.46, placing Icarus and Luna two deviations above the mean, CoCo one deviation above the mean, Opal and me one deviation below the mean, and Ariel two deviations below the mean.

**Table 4.6 Quantitative Endline Cultural Competence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>cultural pre-competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>cultural proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>cultural proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>cultural competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some pre and post shifts in individual scores and along the continuum are worth noting. Figure 4.2 depicts the difference in scores by participant, and Table 4.7 contextualizes the changes in terms of the continuum.
Scores and levels increased for Luna, Icarus, and me (50%; \( n = 3 \)). CoCo’s score increased, but her competence level did not change (17%, \( n = 1 \)). Opal’s score decreased, but her competence level, like Coco’s, did not change (17%, \( n = 1 \)). Ariel was the only participant whose score and competence level decreased (17%, \( n = 1 \)). Although two-thirds of participants showed growth in their cultural competence, consistent with the aim of my study, the lack of a clear-
cut trend among the group signals a variety of reverberations among participants, reflecting the complexity of racial and cultural competence.

To increase my understanding of these quantitative results, I conducted a paired *t*-test to assess the mean difference of the baseline and endline scores (Table 4.8). Based on this sample, there is not a significant difference in the scores pre- (*M* = 129.5, *SD* = 9.44) and post-intervention (*M* = 137.33, *SD* = 15.46); *t*(5) = 1.43, *p* = 0.106, 95% CI [-6.27, 21.94].

Table 4.8 *Change in Survey Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Baseline score</th>
<th>Endline score</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| *M*         | 129.5         | 137.33        | 7.83       |
| *SD*        | 9.44          | 15.46         | 13.44      |

**Convergent Baseline**

Comparing the qualitative and quantitative levels, I again determined a final, post-intervention level, giving preference to the qualitative assessment as needed (Table 4.9). As with the baseline survey, there were no discrepant levels. Coco and I were the only participants whose endline measures aligned. All others moved up or down the continuum based on their qualitative data, with Ariel shifting one level up and Icarus, Luna, and Opal shifting one down. This outcome could indicate the instrument’s inconsistency but also further validates
my decision to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed-method analysis enabled more certain conclusions about participants’ cultural competence levels.

Table 4.9 Convergent Endline Cultural Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Qualitative level</th>
<th>Quantitative level</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Convergent endline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>Proficiency</td>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>Proficiency</td>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, I compared the final levels from the baseline and endline surveys to detect any movement along the continuum that may be attributed to the intervention. Table 4.10 shows these results. Half of the participants (50%; \( n = 3 \); Ariel, Luna, and Opal) exhibited no change in their cultural competence from pre- to post-intervention. The other half (50%; \( n = 3 \); Coco, DiAnna, and Icarus) exhibited an increase in cultural competence from pre- to post-intervention.

Table 4.10 Change in Cultural Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Convergent baseline</th>
<th>Convergent endline</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>no change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>competence</td>
<td>no change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>pre-competence</td>
<td>no change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis

To address my research questions, I performed analysis across data sets. Converging themes and change effects enabled me to determine overall impacts of the intervention and participants’ racial/cultural competence growth.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: What factors contribute to racial silence in our classrooms? Analysis of responses to Question 32 from the baseline survey, the theme of navigating racial conversations during Focus Group 1, reflections on the independent assignment for Module 3, and themes of pessimism vs. optimism and modeling competent behaviors derived from Focus Group 3 revealed that discourse and teaching diverse literature encourages growth in racial competence. This outcome suggests the more a teacher exposes herself to racial and cultural dialogue and literature, the more comfortable she will become implementing it. However, few participants admitted to teaching diverse literature or engaging in racial discourse, underscoring the need for the study.

Figure 4.1 depicted four fears underlying participants’ colormuteness: professional repercussions, offending, external consequences, and showing ignorance. However, when we discussed colormuteness during the focus groups, fear of professional repercussions was the only reason on display. Participants expressed uncertainty and discomfort in their skills, yet evidence suggests colormuteness has more to do with participants’ willingness than their knowledge or awareness. The navigating racial conversations theme from Focus Group 1, the growth in racial and cultural competence theme from Focus Group 2, the
modeling competent behaviors theme from Focus Group 3, and participant definitions of cultural competence on the endline survey illustrate this point. Further, participants’ willingness aligned with their recurring fear of professional repercussions. Participants demonstrated this fear emanates from threats within the school building yet outside the classroom and completely external threats. Thus, they placed more significance on external improbabilities, making decisions based on potential reactions of individuals outside the classroom.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asked: How does targeted intervention impact our cultural competence? Table 4.10 revealed three participants originally at the pre-competence level increased to the competence level, two initially at the competence level stayed the same, and one at the pre-competence level stayed the same. The increase in cultural competence evident in Coco, Icarus, and me could be attributed to our participation in the study and additional exposure to reading materials, videos, and focus group discussions on racial and cultural topics—likewise for participants whose scores decreased but whose level remained the same (i.e., Ariel and Opal). Perhaps the increased exposure heightened an awareness of racial and cultural topics that resulted in a deeper self-realization of their need for improved cultural competence.

Regardless, the results of this analysis are inconclusive: 50% ($n = 3$) of participants increased a level, while 50% ($n = 3$) did not. However, rather than completely dismiss the data, I suggest the 50% who retained their cultural competence level pre-intervention to post-intervention may have increased their
cultural competence after all. A lack of change in level does not preclude growth within the participants; perhaps I simply could not measure it in this context.

Analyzing pre and post responses to Question 35 showed participants’ definition and understanding of cultural competence expanded over the course of the intervention, and Table 4.11 demonstrates participants’ self-reported description of their racial/cultural competence as provided in Question 36 of the baseline and endline surveys. Participant descriptions of their own cultural competence denote a positive shift. A growth in their knowledge of what cultural competence is alongside their improved feelings about their own cultural competence suggests the intervention succeeded.

Table 4.11 Responses to Question 36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Baseline response</th>
<th>Endline response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>I work hard to understand all sides of any given issue or situation and to keep any potential biases at bay.</td>
<td>As a result of our Focus Group discussions, as well as what I read and viewed as part of this esteemed company every two weeks, I feel optimistic and empowered to respond to issues of race and culture in the classroom albeit I still have plenty to learn!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>I would describe my level of racial/cultural competence as Moderate, but I would love to learn more.</td>
<td>My level of racial/cultural competence has been raised as the topic has been at the forefront of my awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>Low to Medium. I am becoming more aware and knowledgeable and interested in learning more.</td>
<td>Growing. Better than before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>beginner to intermediate</td>
<td>much improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>Still learning…</td>
<td>Evolving. Long way to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opal</td>
<td>I think that I am sensitive to racial disparities but I do not feel confident saying that I am a highly culturally competent person.</td>
<td>Medium-low. I could be more educated for sure. I need to take the time to really educate myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: How does focusing on teacher cultural competence affect our classrooms? During Module 3, I expected participants to apply new learning and awareness in the classroom. Participants demonstrated deep self-reflection on their professional habits and an intentionality in employing these lessons, particularly through the endline survey open-ended responses and the third focus group discussion. The mere fact that participants could make this application suggests an increase in a teacher’s cultural competence can directly impact her classroom. From new strategies to new considerations of terms and languages, participants were willing to adapt their practices to be more inclusive, diverse, and accepting. This willingness has the potential to radically shift classroom practices so long as teachers maintain and act upon it to be the change agents the participants identified that the educational system so desperately needs. Specifically, when asked about the potential impact on their classroom for the Module 3 independent reflection, participants offered practical strategies they were willing to try such as journaling (DiAnna and Luna), anonymous writing (Ariel, Luna, and Icarus), and offering diverse literature (Coco and Luna). During Focus Group 3, Icarus and Coco specifically cited independent reading as a way to diversify literature and provide opportunity for student choice and exploration with cultural and racial topics. Any of these steps would offer students designated time and a safe space to articulate and even work through their own thoughts on culture and race and are admirable ways to make classrooms more racially and culturally inclusive. However,
strategies like anonymous writing, journaling, and independent reading are solitary in nature and suggest a hands-off approach on the teacher’s part. Neither hiding writing through anonymity nor independently reading diverse texts constitutes talking about race, permitting colormuteness to persist.

Even so, any progress or paradigm shift has to begin somewhere. That participants’ confidence and competence grew through exposure and practice throughout the study is promising, demonstrating the first steps toward a racially and culturally inclusive classroom. Taking such steps is key. As teachers grow in their competence, any impact on the classroom directly stems from their intentional action, rather than simply a willingness or desire to see it happen. A growth in competence should equate to a growth in confidence, but teachers have to proactively do something before seeing or feeling a difference. Within the independent reflection for Module 2, both Luna and Ariel made a statement to the effect that until we teachers do something to create classroom environments conducive to honest discussions about race, misinformation, hatred, fear, racism, confusion, and oppression will continue to reign in our classrooms and in our students. Their responses show that taking ownership and the burden of responsibility for action falls on teachers, essentially asking participants specifically and teachers in general: if we are not the ones to take action, who will? If not me, then who?

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the findings from this convergent mixed-method action research study designed to increase teacher cultural competence through
targeted intervention with the hope of creating more racially and culturally inclusive classrooms. I collected data prior to and following the intervention through a survey. Data emerged throughout the intervention through independent reflections, focus group transcripts, and field notes. Triangulation uncovered several insights, suggesting (a) targeted intervention can impact cultural competence; (b) teachers desire and show willingness for more racially and culturally inclusive classroom practices; however (c) the desire and willingness for this change does not equate to acting for change; because (d) the prevalence of fear engenders colormuteness and inhibits change in the classroom.

The study, which took place among six White, female English teachers within the same school context, pinpoints the need for additional work concerning teacher cultural competence, colormuteness, and racially/culturally inclusive classrooms within our own department, within our school, and beyond. In consideration of these discoveries and based on the literature surrounding CRT, whiteness, and cultural competence, the following chapter delves into the implications for practitioners and future researchers.
CHAPTER 5
IMPLICATIONS

Public schools are becoming more racially diverse (NCES, 2019a), compelling more inclusive classroom practices to combat the prevalence of inequitable whiteness. Meanwhile, the racial composition of classroom teachers continues to skew White and female (NCES, 2019b) and classroom curriculum remains Eurocentric (Muhammad & Mosley, 2021). By 2042, the United States will classify as a majority-minority population, likely triggering increasingly adverse attitudes toward diversity among White people who perceive a threat to their social status (Craig & Richeson, 2014). A recent increase in hate crimes reported by the United States Department of Justice (2022) suggests Craig and Richeson’s (2014) prediction may already be underway. The time for teachers to act as agents of change toward social justice and equity is overdue. However, many teachers are reluctant to embrace this role (Crowley & Smith, 2015; Haviland, 2008; Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Tatum, 2003).

I undertook this action research study to improve my colleagues’ and my cultural competence, thereby empowering us to espouse our responsibility as change agents. I essentially wanted to determine what may be preventing our classrooms from being racially equitable and whether targeted intervention and increased cultural competence could assist in breaking through those barriers. This mixed-method study was specific to the English department at one
southeastern high school, yet my findings may inform other educators and educational leaders interested in combating colormuteness and promoting social and racial justice. This chapter explores these implications and their applicability for our department and other practitioners—educational and research alike. In the remainder of this chapter, I position my findings in relation to existing literature, offer recommendations for practice and implementation plans, reflect on my methodology, and suggest opportunities for future research.

Reflection on Existing Literature

Positioned within the context of racial and cultural competence, this study examined the impacts of a targeted intervention on teachers and their classrooms. Grounded in CRT, whiteness, and cultural competence, the framework informed and supported my interpretation of the data, which yielded four major findings: targeted intervention can impact participant cultural competence; teachers desire and show willingness for more inclusive practices; the desire and willingness for change does not equate to action; and the prevalence of fear engenders colormuteness and inhibits change. In this section, I consider each finding in relation to existing scholarship.

Targeted Intervention Can Impact Participant Cultural Competence

Quezada and Alexandrowicz (2019) identified a mutually beneficial relationship between teachers’ growth toward cultural proficiency and understanding of cultural diversity—and culturally diverse students. Likewise, my participants demonstrated growth—both measurable and articulated—in their confidence, skills, awareness, and competence. Specifically, their change in
cultural competence (Table 4.10) demonstrates empirical evidence of cultural development in exactly half of the participants. Conceding a small sample size and fractional increase, the 50% growth is nevertheless notable, as even one teacher’s advancement could benefit hundreds of students each year.

Concerning the 50% who did not demonstrate explicit evidence of growth, Ward (2013) posited transformation for equity happens through reflection and dialogue. Therefore, growth, though indeterminable, may transpire from discourse and rumination of racial and cultural topics. By participating in focus group conversations and studying materials over the course of 6 weeks, participants exhibited competent behaviors in Focus Group 3, and again, any growth in a teacher’s cultural competence is worthwhile.

Evidence also suggests the targeted intervention impacted teacher cultural competence, given their expansion of its definition across the study and their desire for more professional development opportunities on race and culture. The participants collectively found our work beneficial and acknowledged the increasing need to learn more and for others to benefit from learning as well. Luna specifically articulated this point in the Module 2 independent reflection with her suggestion that “this needs to be and should be addressed throughout the staff . . . a staff development that includes follow-ups throughout the year,” as did Ariel during the first focus group with her desire for more meaningful discussion. Likewise, Opal’s independent reflection for Module 1 expressed frustration that these interventions and lessons were not accessible to more teachers, students, or general society. Participants’ recognition of this dearth of opportunities for
race-related professional development is consistent with scholars’ claims of “few resources to support teachers in learning how to address racism in the classroom” (Borsheim-Black, 2015, p. 250) and even fewer that specifically address race in the English classroom (Thomas, 2015).

As teachers’ conceptions of race and culture influence their teaching (Picower, 2009), professional development that specifically targets race, diversity, and whiteness in the classroom is necessary for combating inequities (Casey & McManimon, 2020). Howard and Navarro (2016) recommended “align[ing] teaching practice to the elements of CRT . . . [which] should be teacher driven and led, based on teachers’ questions and concerns” (p. 266). These directives echo the focus of my study, as well as by participants’ express desire for professional development on identifying and limiting biases, best practices for teaching White students and students of color, navigating racial conversations, and combatt[ing] the predominance of whiteness in the classroom.

**Teachers Desire and Show Willingness for More Inclusive Practices**

The pervasiveness of educational inequities has led scholars to claim any prior action deficient and to call for impactful future action (Amiot et al., 2020; Howard & Navarro, 2016). From the earliest stages of my study, even through their willingness to participate, the teachers demonstrated a desire for more socially just practices. Baseline survey responses indicated aspiration for themselves as well as their students through “rais[ing] their racial and cultural competence in their own lives” (Luna), creating a safe and respectful space for students of color (Opal), “learning how to handle topics and learning what to do
so [as to] not continue to do nothing” (DiAnna), and “mak[ing] classes more comfortable and open spaces for all topics” (Icarus). If teachers incorporate more inclusive practices, such competencies can transfer to students. Therefore, the shift toward cultural proficiency does not occur in isolation or without intention, but rather in consideration of those directly impacted. Thus, our group embodied prior assertions that creating a more culturally aware society requires instruction that emphasizes learning across cultures (Glazier & Seo, 2005), “disrupt[ing] the language and silence of schools” (Sosa, 2020, p. 1060), and “creating safe, brave, and collaborative spaces for sharing and exploring our thoughts, feelings, truths, and stories” (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017, p. 476).

**Desire and Willingness Do Not Equate to Action**

The nuance between hearing and responding to a call for action manifested as I realized participants shared a desire and willingness to make changes in their classroom but stopped short of actually taking those steps. The teachers offered ideas for future changes to their classroom; however, these changes contained undercurrents of colormuteness and exclusivity. Participants’ disconcerting lack of action is not completely surprising because actually doing something to combat whiteness is far more arduous than just recognizing it (Hartmann et al., 2009; McIntosh, 1990). Opal and I both seemed to understand the immensity of a racial paradigm shift through our comments indicating feelings of negligibility and hopelessness in making any significant impact.

Nevertheless, the call for action is clear. CRT encourages educators to be catalysts for change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), and Boyd and Glazier (2017)
underscored the responsibility of the classroom, and therefore the teacher, to prepare students to respond to cultural ineptness. Promoting justice and equity requires interrogating whiteness (Green & Sohn, 2005; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2004; Thompson, 2003), implying teachers’ need to act.

Given a persistent deviation between what scholars and my participants proposed and what teachers actually do, inaction may be misunderstood as a lack of cultural competence. However, Nelson and Guerra (2014) found that participants may model characteristics of cultural competence and proficiency without consistently applying their awareness to practice. My participants’ inaction, therefore, underscores the challenges associated with the application of an individual’s competence more so than the level of competence.

**Prevalence of Fear Engenders Colormuteness and Inhibits Change**

Diller and Moule’s (2005) assertion that most people are apprehensive about discussing race and ethnicity also rang true in my study, chiefly through its departure from my initial plan. Originally, I sought to explore changes to White honors students’ self-efficacy and empathy when tasked with reading a culturally unfamiliar novel, Coates’s (2015) *Between the World and Me*. However, as I envisioned the action part of my prospective action research study, my fears and doubts overwhelmed my plan and resulted in a shift to explore my silence.

My literature review confirmed I was not alone in my fears: racial discourse and antiracist action are conspicuously absent from schools (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2017). Tatum (2003) identified isolation from friends and family, social ostracism, a loss of privilege or status, and even physical harm as reasons
why someone would remain racially silent, with Singleton and Linton (2006) adding inexperience to the list. My participants’ responses highlight such reasons; however, the predominant excuse for our colormuteness was fear of professional repercussions, which Frankenberg (1993), McIntyre (1997), Morrison (1992), and Weis and Fine (1993) discussed. Wary of professional reverberations, teachers choose colormuteness over racial discourse, solidifying their posture as inhibitors rather than catalysts for classroom change.

Suggesting teachers do recognize their role as change agents and see value in improving racial and cultural inequities, Luna, on multiple occasions, pointedly referred to the classroom—and by extension, the teacher—as the platform for change, both within the context of school and society. Icarus referred to the classroom as the potential basis for a “grassroots movement,” an intimation in Banks’s (2004) argument that “when we teach students how to critique the injustice in the world, we should help them to formulate possibilities for action to change the world to make it more democratic and just” (p. 298). Teachers who embrace their role as change agents can transfer this agency to students, exponentially combatting the predominance of whiteness. As Tatum (1992) argued, “empower[ing] students as change agents is thus a necessary part of the process of talking about race and learning about racism” (p. 21).

However, teachers must choose to exert their agency. Although conversations about race and racism can be catalysts for change (Bolgatz, 2005; Olou, 2018; Tatum, 2003), my participants were more concerned about potential fallout than potential benefits. The teachers regularly chose to disengage and
avoid contentious dialogue, inhibiting potentially equitable progress. If school leaders do not challenge inequities, they stand to reproduce them (Khalifa et al., 2013). Because inhibiting change may be tantamount to sustaining social injustice already present in the educational system, my study emphasizes fear’s detrimental impact on teachers, students, classrooms, and even society.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Considering how race and whiteness permeate society, a study examining their roles in the classroom may be significant as well as timely and relevant. Thus, the findings of this action research study occasion recommendations for fellow practitioners. The insights, although specific to my school and department colleagues, may transfer to other settings. Because racism is systemic, the fight for social justice should be universal.

Achieving cultural proficiency is a lifelong process; therefore, teachers should commit to professional growth in their competence. Cultural awareness implies learned behaviors, so teachers must take intentional steps to improve their competence; the likelihood of accidentally becoming more culturally aware and inclusive is marginal. The CCC framework assesses individual or organizational cultural competence, yet progression along the continuum need not occur in solitude. In fact, Lindsey et al. (2009) encourage professional learning communities to partake in cultural activities and dialogue. Given my participants’ productive group discussions and altruistic desire for others to experience growth in their cultural competence, I recommend that teachers pursue cultural proficiency alongside others, multiplying its impact.
Teachers must also investigate their classroom practices and curriculum, critically examining what they teach and why and how they teach it. Incorporating diverse curriculum showcases a priority to acknowledge and celebrate differences in students and in content. More so, teachers should intentionally engage in racial conversations and embrace contentious circumstances by recognizing them as opportunities to teach students beyond the normative, predominantly White perspective. Classroom decisions and efforts should be directed at combating inequities and promoting social justice. However, before taking any or all of these action steps, teachers must first abandon their fear.

School leaders can mitigate teachers’ fear by examining the school policies, environment, and administrative level of support they provide to teachers pursuing antiracist work. Fear of professional consequences was my participants’ most viable reason for colormuteness. Assurances and policies put in place to prevent such consequences would go a long way to smother this reported fear. To provide this necessary support, administrators must also be well-versed and committed to continual growth in terms of cultural competence and diversity. Operating outside the classroom does not render school leadership immune to whiteness and racism within the school. In fact, administrators are arguably the school’s first line of defense against external complaints or opposition, which may materialize as teachers adopt antiracist practices.

Moreover, administrators should also examine support they provide to students. Regardless of school population or demographics, students deserve a school and a curriculum that is inclusive, promotes equity, and celebrates
diversity. Specifically, polices, practices, course offerings, and curriculum that disproportionately impact one race over another should be scrutinized and, if needed, abolished. My study suggests maintaining the status quo is no longer acceptable; leadership must determine whether the school will actively foil or foster a commitment to social justice.

Furthermore, school leaders should provide research-based, antiracist professional development. My participants’ call for such opportunities is clear, echoing Ward's (2013) proclamation that “Teaching tolerance is not enough. School leaders must transform their staffs by fully engaging them in difficult conversations, exercises, and professional development that move them along the cultural proficiency continuum” (p. 28). Rather than a 1-hour, 1-day, one-group, or one-department session, a school-wide series is necessary to uproot and transform school culture. Based on the school’s self-assessed racial and cultural needs, this training could cover identifying and limiting biases, navigating racial dialogue, colorblindness, colormuteness, diversity, multicultural pedagogy, and/or antiracist practices. Ultimately, the professional development should be meaningful for teachers attempting to implement these strategies in their classroom and seeking to combat systemic racism within the school.

**Implementation Plan**

Action research often follows a circular pattern (Efron & Ravid, 2013). For the purposes of this study and the continuation of action research within my own setting, I prefer Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) model, in which an action researcher progresses toward a goal by continuing to spiral through action
research cycles. As Figure 5.1 illustrates, this model is thus conducive to the linear progression of the cultural competence model.

**Action Research Model**

![Diagram of Action Research Model]

**Cultural Competence Model**

![Diagram of Cultural Competence Model]

Figure 5.1 *Action Research and Cultural Competence Progression*

Both models, in conjunction, reflect my ultimate goal of cultural proficiency in my thinking and in my classroom. Educational action researchers identify a problem of practice, determine a plan to resolve it, implement the plan, observe and reflect on its impacts, and then develop a revised plan that moves the teacher researcher and their students closer to the goal (Herr & Anderson, 2015). In my case, the plan could be an antiracist practice or strategy, which would serve as a targeted intervention for racial and cultural awareness, thereby improving my cultural competence and that of my students as well.
The conclusion of this study means the commencement of the real work ahead toward social justice. I foresee several means of applying the findings to create a more equitable classroom, beginning with being intentional about classroom and curricular decisions that thwart whiteness and celebrate diversity, such as diversifying literature through choice novels and whole-class novel studies, engaging and even prompting racial discourse, and critically examining my pedagogy. I must remain cognizant of my fear and take steps to curb it by choosing action and discourse over negligence and silence. While I am just beginning to envisage what that means and what that may look like for me and my classroom, heeding my own advice, I will find others to share in my cultural competence journey. Changes will be more feasible and attainable if I allow myself to influence and be influenced by others.

Sharing my results with my English department and school leadership may spark additional impacts at the school level. In collaboration with my department colleagues and my professional learning community team, I will use the study to initiate conversations surrounding our English content—potentially to the point of rewriting our curriculum. Additionally, our school should critically examine our behavior, attendance, and academic policies to ensure they are equitable. Furthermore, as “antiracist professional development requires ongoing reflection and learning throughout a teacher’s career” (Matschiner, 2022, p. 2), I will use my findings to advocate for a school-wide professional development series to uncover any culturally or racially prejudiced practices. Coles-Ritchie and Smith (2017) found “teachers who had open discussions about [such]
professional development with their administrators were more comfortable engaging in discussions about race with their students than teachers whose administrators ignored or avoided discussions about their participation in the professional development” (p. 182). Therefore, encouraging culturally mindful professional development and racial discourse not only in classrooms but among teaching professionals will be a significant step in creating a more socially just school for students, faculty, and leadership alike.

Reflection on Methodology

The study did not produce statistically significant results; however, there were some interesting qualitative results in terms of teacher cultural competence, desire vs. action toward inclusive practices, and fear. The variance between quantitative and qualitative results validated my choice of a mixed-method approach. Further reflection on this methodology illuminated modifications that may be warranted for future investigations of this problem of practice.

The Study Sample

The non-probability convenience sample yielded six total participants (five colleagues plus me) who were all White and female. Uniformity made the results more conclusive, but lack of variation by gender, cultural, or racial perspectives likely had an impact. Additionally, even though we represented a third of our department, our small sample size would not produce generalizable results.

After 3 weeks of the intervention, one participant withdrew from the study due to overwhelming school responsibilities and schedule conflicts. As she did not participate in Focus Groups 2 or 3, complete Independent Assignment 3, or
take the endline survey, I chose to pull her data from the study. Luna was absent for the third focus group but contributed to every other data set, particularly the baseline and endline surveys, so I retained her contributions. Understanding the full impact of these decisions is impossible, but the loss of one participant’s contributions likely had some impact. Considering our small sample size, any additional participant would have made the results more generalizable in terms of our department. Quantitatively, as the participants were split evenly between “increase” and “no change” in their cultural competence (Table 4.10), a seventh participant could have swung the results one way or another or even offered a third result of “decrease,” making the results of the study either more conclusive and statistically significant or even less so. Furthermore, as qualitative research is heavily grounded in the individual’s experience and cultural competence growth is heavily grounded in dialogue, not having the seventh participant’s perspectives likely impacted the qualitative measures and the group’s movement toward cultural competence. Nevertheless, I stand by the decision to omit all of the participant’s data rather than attempt to interpret and expound upon incomplete sets of data (Connelly, 2020).

**Time Restrictions**

I faced a little bit of a challenge in determining appropriate tasks in relation to an appropriate amount of time to complete them. The first was what I could ask participants to do in the independent assignments. The assignment had to be short enough to attract and retain willing participants but deep enough to be meaningful. I settled on about an hour’s worth of work over a 2-week period. I
chose selections to read and watch, hoping to serve various interests and learning styles, and also tried to include options for participants who wanted to learn more and/or were willing to give more time.

Second, I had to consider the day and length of time for the focus groups. I wanted the sessions to be exactly 2 weeks apart, so I considered 8 consecutive weeks, avoiding major school functions (e.g., Open House) and major holidays (e.g., Labor Day). I chose Tuesdays to meet earlier in the week while allowing me to send a reminder email on Mondays. I chose the 1-hour time frame for the sessions in consideration of teachers’ schedules and personal time outside of school; however, the time frame did not feel like enough time to say everything that needed to be said. Based on participants’ increasingly early arrivals, late departures, and the unused protocols, perhaps this time should have been longer, although advertising a longer time might have inhibited recruitment.

Third, I elected to design three 2-week modules. Considering how long participants would be willing to commit, I was concerned about the overall length of the study because if participation decreased, results could become indeterminate. Indeed, with just three modules, participation started to wane; the likelihood that it would continue to do so the longer the study progressed was high, so I am pleased with the completion of three modules for six participants. On the other hand, a small group of participants cannot be expected to make any significant changes regarding systemic inequalities in 6 weeks’ time. I am just beginning to unravel a new awareness concerning these issues, and I have been working within these topics as a graduate student for 3 years!
The Instruments

I originally considered using the Intercultural Development Inventory based on Bennett’s (1986, 1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. However, due to the time and cost associated with training, I created my own instrument by borrowing from the CCAI (Balcazar et al., 2009) and the CoBRAS (Neville et al., 2000). My survey fit my needs but made analysis cumbersome. Beyond having to compare qualitative and quantitative results, applying the outcome to the CCC (Cross et al., 1989) was not a validated method of analysis.

Additionally, I am grateful for the focus group protocols I developed, which helped me center the theme of each session and lessened any worries about leading the sessions. However, I rarely had the opportunity to use them. As I analyzed the independent assignments and focus group transcripts, I found myself wanting to ask follow-up questions. The desire for more data could be a double-edged sword, yet post-session reflections or post-intervention interviews would have been conducive to asking more clarifying questions of each participant to probe further into their thinking and competence levels.

The Continuum

The CCC (Cross et al., 1989) includes six levels with category limits determined by qualitative descriptors of what someone in that category may think, say, or do. While I researched several scholarly interpretations of the model to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the qualifiers and endeavored to explain my analysis of participants’ responses, a researcher acting alone can easily misinterpret data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
The main difficulty with the continuum was applying the quantitative results to the qualitative model, given my mixed-method approach, which required developing a range of scores for each level (Table 3.2). Viewing the CCC (Cross et al., 1989) as six commensurate, equidistant levels and having six Likert-scale options for the survey responses, I took the total possible points generated by the survey and divided by six to provide the range associated with each level. In other words, I assumed a participant scoring a 1 on all survey questions, reverse-coding aside, would be considered culturally destructive, a participant scoring all 2s would exhibit cultural incapacity, etc.

Therefore and because of this range, the degree to which a participant would have to increase their score in order to increase their competence level varied. A "no change" participant could have grown more in their cultural competence than a participant who did change levels based on the difference in their pre and post scores. As a result, a "no change" determination did not necessarily signify no growth. I could have accounted for this outcome by determining percent growth increase by participant, but the percentage would not have aligned with the continuum. Consequently, I deferred to the qualitative analysis when assigning a competence level to participants if there was a discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative levels.

During this analysis, I realized that, quantitatively, the continuum may be less of a proportionate, linear model and more of a normally distributed bell curve. As I reread the competence characteristics per level (Table 3.3), I suspected fewer people would be positioned within the destructiveness and
proficiency categories than the blindness and pre-competence categories as those characteristics should be harder to attain. Therefore, as Figure 5.2 illustrates, I propose supplementing the culturally competent qualitative continuum (A) developed by Cross et al. (1989) with a culturally competent quantitative model (B). After countless hours of searching, I could neither defend nor verify this hunch, yet I believe that applying cultural competence quantitative scores to the standard deviations of a bell curve, would shift the scores down the continuum—and therefore in alignment with my qualitative results, negating the need to defer to one over the other.

Figure 5.2 Comparison of Cultural Competence Models
Recommendations for Future Research

Bradburry et al. (2019) summarized action research in education by suggesting “the practice/inquiry combination at the heart of the work aims at making a situation such as a classroom or whole school system better” (p. 7). As such, this study invited further research on colormuteness and teacher cultural competence to make the classroom and the educational system as a whole better. In consideration of the invariability of the small sample size, future researchers may wish to include different gender, racial, and/or cultural perspectives. For example, a similar study investigating how teachers of color approach race and culture in the classroom could be of great interest. Also, future research could investigate whether the problem of practice exists in other departments, such as history or the social sciences, or whether it exists in other schools and districts. Additionally, reproducing the study on a much larger scale could verify the results.

Further testing of the survey instrument is needed to ensure it is both precise in providing consistent measurements and accurate in representing individuals’ scores. Further testing and validation of my proposed quantitative cultural competence model may also be in order, following in the footsteps of Bennett (1986, 1993), who established a formidable qualitative instrument and corresponding cultural competence model.

Finally, in light of the fear expressed by teachers and the role of school leaders to abate it, a study examining the cultural competence of and support provided by administrators may be necessary. An investigation of the antiracist
support systems in place for teacher activists could yield school-wide growth patterns toward cultural competence and more longitudinal results concerning racial discourse and diversity in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

In the nature of action research and by employing a regular critical lens throughout this study, I often felt like I was writing an indictment of public education—this system that has served me and my family; the system to which I have been professionally devoted for 16 years; the system in which I have the privilege to work alongside some of the most gifted, hardworking individuals I have ever known; the system in which I have entrusted my children’s education. This recognition gave me pause, yet I could not ignore that it is a broken system—one that does not serve all students with parity.

Traversing Du Bois’s (1903) demarcated color line requires taking a stand against these inequities. So instead of reading as an imputation of failures, I hope this work will serve as an appeal for action to which teachers respond. Educators can and must battle for equity by advancing toward cultural proficiency and translating awareness into practice by overcoming fear. Changing the racial and cultural climate of a classroom is not an accidental process, nor can we expect it to occur naturally within a broken system. Teachers, who are in the position to enact necessary change, must critically consider how important social justice is for their students and the lengths they are willing to go to achieve it. Who can we expect to take action if we ourselves are not willing? Who will set an example for parity and justice if I do not? If not me, then who?
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APPENDIX A

BASELINE SURVEY

Directions:
This survey was developed from the Balcazar et al. (2009) Cultural Competence Assessment Instrument (CCAI) and the Neville et al. (2000) Color-Blind Racial Attitude Scale and includes some researcher-developed open-ended questions. Following the demographic information, you will see a set of statements concerning cultural and racial issues in the United States. Using the 6-point scale, please indicate the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each statement with 1 representing Strongly Disagree and 6 indicating Strongly Agree. There are no right or wrong responses, so I invite and appreciate your honesty. Likewise, I welcome your perspective in response to the open-ended questions in the final section of the survey. Thank you for your time!

References:


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<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Demographic Information

A Pseudonym
Provide a pseudonym you would like to be referred to throughout the study. The pseudonym should begin with the 2nd letter of your last name. For instance, I might choose Ophelia as "o" is the 2nd letter of my last name.

B Age

C Race/Ethnicity
Black, Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Native Alaskan, Hispanic/Latina(o), White, Other, Please specify:

D What is the highest level of education (degree) you have obtained?
Bachelor’s, Master’s, Professional, Doctorate

E How many years of teaching experience do you have?

F Which types of training did you receive on racial/cultural competence? Select all that apply.
a) I took a required class that focused specifically on this topic in school
b) I took an elective class that focused specifically on this topic in school
c) This topic was covered in various classes in school

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I learned about this during my student teaching experience
e) I took professional development (PD) workshops on this topic
f) I gained knowledge from reading about this topic on my own
g) I learned about it through supervision on the job
h) I learned about it through interaction with professionals from other disciplines at my workplace
i) I have had no formal training on cultural or racial competency

Cultural and Racial Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I can learn from my ethnic minority students.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>My verbal communication with students whose culture differs from mine is effective.</td>
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<td>My district provides ongoing training on cultural competence.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>I receive feedback from supervisors on how to improve my work with ethnic minority students.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The literature in my classroom reflects students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Cultural competence is included in my school’s mission statement, policies, and procedures.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>I have ample experience working with ethnic minority students.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Practicing skills related to cultural competence is easy.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>I am sensitive to valuing and respecting differences between my cultural background and my students’ cultural background.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>I have opportunities to learn culturally responsive behaviors from peers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I have the skills to adequately teach ethnic minority students.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>I examine my own biases related to race and culture that may influence my behavior as a teacher.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>I actively strive for a classroom atmosphere that promotes risk-taking and self-exploration.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Working competently with ethnic minority students is easy.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>I openly discuss with colleagues any issues I may have in developing multicultural awareness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Race plays a major role in the social services (such as type of health care or day care) that people receive in the U.S.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>People should begin to think of themselves as American and not African American, Mexican American, or Italian American.</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not.</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as White people in the U.S.</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Talking about race causes unnecessary tension.</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Political leaders should talk about racism to help work through or solve society’s problems.</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.S.</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>White people are more to blame for racial discrimination in the U.S. than racial and ethnic minorities.</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Public schools should teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
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**Open-Ended Questions**

31 How does race impact your teaching?
32 What race-related literature or discussions come up in your classroom?
33 How do you address racial topics when they come up in your classroom?
34 Have you ever avoided talking about race? Why or why not?
35 How would you define racial/cultural competence?
36 How would you describe your level of racial/cultural competence?
37 What can teachers do to improve their racial/cultural competence?
38 Why are you interested in participating in this study? What do you hope to gain from it?
APPENDIX B

MODULE 1: INDEPENDENT WORK AND REFLECTION

Dates for Completion: Tuesday, August 30

Participant Pseudonym:

Directions: Please read and watch the following material and then respond to the reflection questions. This is a copy of the original assignment shared specifically with you for the purposes of my data collection. We will both need access to this “live” document, so please do not make a separate copy. Instead, type your responses directly on this document. Please bring your laptop with you to the focus group session so you may refer to this document!

READ:
White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh
- (McIntosh, 1990)
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1trFvBgREEjIlrGPHTApa7mVgdmCnUCA1/view?usp=sharing

WATCH:
White Men: Time to Discover Your Cultural Blind Spots by Michael Welp
- (TEDx Talks, 2017)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rR5zDljUrfk

and
What Beyoncé Taught Me About Race by Brittany Barron
- (TEDx Talks, 2016)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDzj9vRw5yM

OPTIONAL:
Take one (or several!) of Harvard University’s Implicit Association Tests
- (Project Implicit, 2011)
Based on various topics, these tests measure the strength of associations we make between concepts (e.g. fat people, White people) and evaluations (e.g. good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g. athletic, lazy).

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

**REFLECT:**
1. Write your own list of privileges. Consider class, religion, gender, employment, sexual orientation, physical ability, language, education, money, housing, etc. (McIntosh).

2. What are your thoughts and feelings in response to the material in this module’s assignment?

3. What impact, if any, would this have on your classroom?

4. What questions do you have after reviewing the material?
APPENDIX C

MODULE 2: INDEPENDENT WORK AND REFLECTION

Dates for Completion: Tuesday, September 13

Participant Pseudonym:

Directions: Please read and watch the following material and then respond to the reflection questions. This is a copy of the original assignment shared specifically with you for the purposes of my data collection. We will both need access to this “live” document, so please do not make a separate copy. Instead, type your responses directly on this document. Please bring your laptop with you to the focus group session so you may refer to this document!

**READ:**
*10 Lessons for Talking About Race*
- (The Opportunity Agenda, 2020)
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l3Nu--Xpe3j2CuryKTYM1B4Qrl-LRzXf/view?usp=sharing

*and/or*
*Challenging Conversations About Race and Racism*
- (First Book, 2022a)
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ozzjIoDlgkqriRaupdeKj92S9yCDMFuK/view?usp=sharing
- There’s a lot of information to unpack and many links to follow in this resource - just explore what you believe would be most helpful for you!

**WATCH:**
*Your Privilege is Showing by Lillian Medville (13:26)*
- (TEDx Talks, 2018a)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4b_ojKx6UI

**REFLECT:**
1. Which tool, strategy, or idea from the reading(s) seems the most practical to use in your class? How so?
2. Are there other strategies you’ve seen, used, or just now thought of that may be useful to engage in difficult conversations with students? Explain.

3. What are any other thoughts and feelings you have in response to the material in this module?

4. What impact, if any, would this have on your classroom?

5. What questions do you have after reviewing the material?
APPENDIX D

MODULE 3: INDEPENDENT WORK AND REFLECTION

Dates for Completion: Tuesday, September 27

Participant Pseudonym:

Directions: Please read and watch the following material and then respond to the reflection questions. This is a copy of the original assignment shared specifically with you for the purposes of my data collection. We will both need access to this “live” document, so please do not make a separate copy. Instead, type your responses directly on this document. Please bring your laptop with you to the focus group session so you may refer to this document!

READ:
Engaging White Students In Conversations About Race
- (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2022)
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bzbpl9KgN0CrVQ-2GT1JTKRgtvZHx/view?usp=sharing

and/or
Teaching Strategies & Lesson Plans
- (First Book, 2022b)
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ch-gmdI1MoVdtB33gPzckDMqY6RsqNgg/view?usp=sharing
- Similar to the last module, this resource includes a lot of information and links; explore whatever would be most helpful for you!

WATCH:
Why English Class is Silencing Students of Color by Jamila Lyiscott
- (TEDx Talks, 2018b)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4dc1axRwE4

REFLECT:
1. What are any thoughts and feelings you have in response to the material in this module?
2. What impact, if any, would this have on your classroom?

3. What questions do you have after reviewing the material?
APPENDIX E

MODULE 1: FOCUS GROUP SESSION PROTOCOL

**Opening Remarks (approx. 7 min):**
Thank you and welcome.

Establishment of a confidentiality agreement. For the purposes of the study, I want to assure you that I am taking measures to protect your identity. Please use the pseudonym you created on the initial survey as you work through the modules, and I will also use it when referring to you within the study. I also think it's important to establish a level of confidentiality between us as a group. Since we will be surrounding ourselves with difficult topics, and I'll be the first to admit I don’t know how to comfortably engage with those topics, I would like for us all to agree that this is a safe space where we can say the wrong thing or admit to holding certain biases but still entrust that our words won't be used against us or gossiped about or disclosed to others outside of this room. Do we all agree? And one final thought: I just want you to know that I'm not facilitating this session because I have answers or knowledge that you don't – it's actually quite the opposite! I'm here as a researcher but also as a participant, completing the assignments in the modules and writing reflections, because I don't have answers and don't feel comfortable talking about race in my classroom, but I would like to.

Reminders.
And before we begin, I just want to remind everyone that while your participation is extremely beneficial, you may withdraw at any time without penalty. And just for the purposes of transcription to help me later on in the study, we are being recorded, but you will have the right to review and retract any statements after the fact. Shall we begin?!

**Opening Activity (10 min):**
Refer back to your list of privileges you developed in the reflection. I'm going to hand you a card indicating a characteristic (physically disabled, cognitively/developmentally disabled, homeless, gay, Black, high school drop-out, mental illness, transgender, etc.), and I would like for you to take a couple of minutes to go through your list and determine if you would have access to those same privileges if you also encompassed the characteristic on your card.
1. Would anyone like to share their results? What were some items on your list and how did they translate to a person with a different characteristic from you?
2. Now imagine two of those characteristics applied (you were both homeless and transgender or disabled and Black, etc.). How would the results change?

**Reviewing the Module:**
1. Did anything strike you from the material this week?
2. What was your response to Peggy McIntosh’s article about privilege?
3. What was your response to Michael Welp’s video?
4. What was your response to Brittany Barron’s video?
5. Did anyone take any of the Implicit Association Tests? What were the results? Did you have any takeaways from that experience?
6. Was there anything from this module you found helpful?

**Other Possible Guiding Questions:**
1. What types of training did you receive on racial/cultural competence?
2. How would you rate or consider your cultural competence now?
3. Is there anything from the material or discussion this week that could impact your classroom? If so, what and how?
4. Do you have any questions that we as a group can try to explore together?
APPENDIX F

MODULE 2: FOCUS GROUP SESSION PROTOCOL

Opening Remarks (approx. 3 min):
Greetings and welcome back.

Reminders about confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the session being recorded.

Opening Activity (20 min):
So I bought a deck of cards from the game Lillian Medville created, and I would like us to try and work our way through some of them. I asked Jason to pick out the cards he thought best suited the purpose of our discussions and the study in general. So, I have not seen these, nor have I prepped for them in any way. I don’t want to put anyone on the spot; I would like us to approach these together as a group and talk through how we would respond to these situations.

1. How would you respond?
2. How else could you respond?
3. Did anything strike you while we were discussing the situations on the cards?

Reviewing the Module:
1. Did anything strike you from the material this week?
2. What was your response to the readings this week? Any takeaways?
3. What was your response to Lillian Medville’s video? Any takeaways?
4. Was there anything from this module you found helpful?

Other Possible Guiding Questions:
1. How would you rate or consider your racial/cultural competence now?
2. Is there anything from the material or discussion this week that could impact your classroom? If so, what and how?
3. Do you have any questions that we as a group can try to explore together?
APPENDIX G

MODULE 3: FOCUS GROUP SESSION PROTOCOL

Opening Remarks (approx. 2 min):
Greetings and welcome back.

Reminders about confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the session being recorded.

Opening Activity (20 min):
Similar to the cards we used from Medville’s game last week, this week I thought we could write our own cards and then discuss how we did or could have responded to them. I am going to pass out a notecard to everyone, and on that notecard I would like for you to write a question that you have as it concerns race and your classroom, a situation concerning race that has happened in your classroom, or a situation concerning race that you fear might happen in your classroom. Once everyone has something written on their card, we’ll share them together and talk through possible responses together.

1. What did you write on your card?
2. How would / could you respond?
3. Did anything strike you while we were discussing the situations on the cards?

Reviewing the Module:
1. Did anything strike you from the material this week?
2. What was your response to the readings this week? Any takeaways?
3. What was your response to Jamila Lyiscott’s video? Any takeaways?
4. Was there anything from this module you found helpful?

Other Possible Guiding Questions:
1. How would you rate or consider your racial/cultural competence now?
2. Is there anything from the material or discussion this week that could impact your classroom? If so, what and how?
3. Do you have any questions that we as a group can try to explore together?
APPENDIX H

ENDLINE SURVEY

Directions:
This survey was developed from the Balcazar et al. (2009) Cultural Competence Assessment Instrument (CCAI) and the Neville et al. (2000) Color-Blind Racial Attitude Scale and includes some researcher-developed open-ended questions. Following the demographic information, you will see a set of statements concerning cultural and racial issues in the United States. Using the 6-point scale, please indicate the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each statement, with 1 representing Strongly Disagree and 6 indicating Strongly Agree. There are no right or wrong responses, so I invite and appreciate your honesty. Likewise, I welcome your perspective in response to the open-ended questions in the final section of the survey. As a reminder, participation in this study is completely voluntary, has no bearing on your professional responsibilities or evaluations, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Thank you for your time!

References:


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<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>Demographic Information</td>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
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<td>Cultural and Racial Statements</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>I can learn from my ethnic minority students.</td>
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<td>My verbal communication with students whose culture differs from mine is effective.</td>
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<td>My district provides ongoing training on cultural competence.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>I receive feedback from supervisors on how to improve my work with ethnic minority students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The literature in my classroom reflects students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cultural competence is included in my school’s mission statement, policies, and procedures.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I have ample experience working with ethnic minority students.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Practicing skills related to cultural competence is easy.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>I am sensitive to valuing and respecting differences between my cultural background and my students’ cultural background.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I have opportunities to learn culturally responsive behaviors from peers.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I have the skills to adequately teach ethnic minority students.
I examine my own biases related to race and culture that may influence my behavior as a teacher.
I actively strive for a classroom atmosphere that promotes risk-taking and self-exploration.
Working competently with ethnic minority students is easy.
I openly discuss with colleagues any issues I may have in developing multicultural awareness.
Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.
Race plays a major role in the social services (such as type of health care or day care) that people receive in the U.S.
People should begin to think of themselves as American and not African American, Mexican American, or Italian American.
Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not.
Racial may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today.
Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as White people in the U.S.
Talking about race causes unnecessary tension.
Political leaders should talk about racism to help work through or solve society’s problems.
White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.
Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the U.S.
White people are more to blame for racial discrimination in the U.S. than racial and ethnic minorities.
Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people.
Public schools should teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities.
Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.
Race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison.

Open-Ended Questions

How have our focus sessions impacted your views on racial and cultural diversity in the classroom?
Do you feel more equipped to talk about race in your classroom? Why or why not?
Have you noticed a change to your teaching approach as a result of participating in the study? How so? If not, do you feel like you will approach teaching differently now? If so, how? If not, why not?
Have you made any changes to your curriculum as a result of participating in the study? If so, what? If not, do you feel like you will make changes to your curriculum now? If so, how? If not, why not?
How would you define racial/cultural competence now?
How would you describe your level of racial/cultural competence now?
Is there anything else you would like to share?
APPENDIX I

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear English Colleagues,

This email serves as a formal invitation to participate in a research study conducted by DiAnna Sox, a student in the University of South Carolina’s Doctor of Education program in Curriculum Studies.

The purpose of this study is to examine how and why race is or is not discussed in our English classrooms as well as to determine if increasing teachers’ cultural competence leads to more racially and culturally inclusive dialogue and curriculum within our courses. As a member of our English department, you are in an ideal position to provide valuable, first-hand information from your own perspective and your own classroom.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and not tied to your professional or contractual obligations with the district. While I am authorized by the district to conduct this study, I am operating independently of them. Participant information, identifiers, surveys, and discussions will be kept confidential, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participation in this study will include a 30-minute baseline and follow-up survey as well as three, 2-week modules of learning. Each module will consist of reading and watching provided material and submitting a written reflection on the material (approximately 1 hour in total for each module) and participating in a recorded focus group session (approximately 1 hour in total for each module). The independent work and reflections will be completed asynchronously throughout the assigned 2 weeks, while the focus group session will take place in my classroom one afternoon at the end of the 2 week period (Tuesdays: Aug 30, Sept 13, and Sept 27). After consideration of these study components, if you decide to participate, please click on the following link to begin the baseline survey via Google Forms. Clicking on this link serves as your implied agreement to participate in the study.

Any discourse on potentially contentious topics such as race and culture may involve some emotional and mental discomfort in participants, but I am hopeful the benefits and results of the study outweigh any potential risks.
You will not receive any compensation for participating in the study (other than snacks!); however, your participation will be a valuable addition to this study’s findings, which could lead to greater educational understanding of racial/cultural discourse and curriculum within secondary English classrooms. This study has the potential to stimulate teacher growth in racial and cultural competence, giving rise to a more diverse and inclusive curriculum that can benefit current and future students.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at dianna_sox@charleston.k12.sc.us.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

DiAnna Sox, M.T.
APPENDIX J

CULTURAL COMPETENCE INSTRUMENTS


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUMENT</th>
<th>DEVELOPER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actively Open-minded Thinking Scale</td>
<td>Stanovich and West (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Awareness and Acceptance of Diversity in Healthcare Institutions (AAAD)</td>
<td>Emami and Safipour (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Cultural Awareness in Communication Sciences and Disorders Students</td>
<td>Green (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude-Skills-Knowledge Scale (ASK Scale)</td>
<td>Leung and Cheung (2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belief Formation Scale (BFS)</td>
<td>Sá et al. (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blueprint for Integration of Cultural Competence in the Curriculum Questionnaire (BICCCQ)</td>
<td>Tulman and Watts (2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring Efficacy Scale (CES)</td>
<td>Coates (1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Client Perceptions of Care Providers Cultural Competence</td>
<td>Pacquiao et al. (2021)</td>
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<td>Clinical Cultural Competency Questionnaire (CCCQ)</td>
<td>Echeverri et al. (2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Color-Blind Racial Attitude Scale (CoBRAS)</td>
<td>Neville et al. (2000)</td>
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<td>Communication Climate Assessment (C-CAT) Toolkit</td>
<td>AMA Ethical Force Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication, Curriculum and Culture (C3) Instrument</td>
<td>Haidet et al. (2005)</td>
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<td>Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI)</td>
<td>Kelly and Meyers (1993)</td>
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<td>Cross-Cultural Care Survey</td>
<td>Weissman et al. (2005)</td>
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<td>Cross-Cultural Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Questionnaire</td>
<td>Guiton et al. (2007)</td>
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<td>Cross Cultural Evaluation Tool</td>
<td>Freeman (n.d.)</td>
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<td>Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Tool (CAST)</td>
<td>Pasricha (2012)</td>
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<td>Cultural Awareness Scale (CAS)</td>
<td>Rew et al. (2003)</td>
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<td>Cultural Capacity Scale</td>
<td>Perrng and Watson (2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Compatibility Measurement Tool</td>
<td>West et al. (2017)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competence Assessment (CCA)</td>
<td>Schim et al. (2003)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competence Assessment Instrument from the University of Illinois at Chicago (CCAI-UIC)</td>
<td>Balcazar et al. (2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Competence Assessment Tool</td>
<td>Dodd (n.d.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Cultural Competence Clinical Evaluation Tool (CCCET)</td>
<td>Jeffreys and Dougan (2013)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competence Continuum (CCC)</td>
<td>Wong (n.d.)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competence Improvement Tool (CCIT)</td>
<td>National Black Child Development Institute (2012)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competence Item Set (CAHPS CC)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competence OSCE (ccOSCE)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competency Assessment Tool for Hospitals (CCATH)</td>
<td>Weech-Maldonado et al. (n.d.)</td>
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<td>Cultural Competency Organizational Assessment – 360 (COA360)</td>
<td>LaVeist et al. (2008)</td>
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<td>Cultural Diversity Awareness Questionnaire (CDAQ)</td>
<td>Lazaro and Umphred (2007)</td>
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<td>Cultural Diversity Questionnaire for Nurse Educators (CDONE)</td>
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<td>Cultural Intelligence Scale (CIS)</td>
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<td>Cultural Sensibility Survey (CSS)</td>
<td>Curcio et al. (2013)</td>
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<td>The Diverse Community Questionnaire</td>
<td>U.S. Administration on Aging (n.d.)</td>
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<td>Diversity and Cultural Awareness Profile: Online Assessment</td>
<td>Warner (n.d.)</td>
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<td>The Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS)</td>
<td>Williams et al. (1997)</td>
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<td>Faculty Engagement with Underrepresented Minority Nursing Students</td>
<td>Moreau (2015)</td>
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<td>Health Care Justice Inventory-Provider (HCJI-P)</td>
<td>Fondacaro et al. (2005)</td>
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<td>Health Education Latino Cultural Competency Scale</td>
<td>Rojas-Guyler et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Health Professionals’ Self-Assessment of Cultural Competency (HPSACC) Questionnaire</td>
<td>Waugh et al. (2016)</td>
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<td>Health Research and Educational Trust Disparities Toolkit (HRET)</td>
<td>Hsain-Wynia et al. (2007)</td>
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<td>Implicit Association Test (IAT)</td>
<td>Project Implicit (n.d.)</td>
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<td>Infant/Toddler Caregiver Cultural Rating Scale (ITCCRS)</td>
<td>Obegi and Ritblat (2005)</td>
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<td>Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS)</td>
<td>Matsumoto et al. (2001)</td>
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<td>Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)</td>
<td>Bennett et al. (2003)</td>
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<td>Intercultural Readiness Check (IRC)</td>
<td>Van der Zee and Brinkman (2004)</td>
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<td>Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI)</td>
<td>Olson and Kroeger (2001)</td>
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<td>Lee Cultural Sensitivity Tool: Hispanic Version</td>
<td>Lee et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Meeting the Food Needs of Queensland’s Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Aged Survey</td>
<td>Millichamp and Gallegos (2011)</td>
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<td>Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (M-GUDS)</td>
<td>Miville et al. (1999)</td>
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<td>Multicultural Assessment Questionnaire</td>
<td>Crandall et al. (2003)</td>
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<td>Multicultural Personality Questionnaire</td>
<td>Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000)</td>
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<td>Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire (MASQUE)</td>
<td>Munroe and Pearson (2006)</td>
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<td>Nurse Cultural Competence Scale (NCCS)</td>
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<td>The Openness to Diversity and Challenge Scale (ODCS)</td>
<td>Pascarella et al. (1996)</td>
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<td>Organizational Assessment Toolkit</td>
<td>AMA Ethical Force Program (n.d.)</td>
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<td>Patient Report Measure of Provider Cultural Competency</td>
<td>Lucas et al. (2008)</td>
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<td>Patient Reported Physician Cultural Competency (PRPCC) Scale</td>
<td>Thom et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Prior Cultural Experiences (PCE)</td>
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<td>Public Administration Cultural Competence Scale (PACCS)</td>
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<td>Quick Discrimination Index (QDI)</td>
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<td>Race Matters: Organizational Self-Assessment</td>
<td>Annie E. Casey Foundation (n.d.)</td>
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<td>Relational Humility Scale (RHS)</td>
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<td>Social Desirability Scale (SDS)</td>
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<td>Sociocultural Attitudes in Medicine Inventory (SAMI)</td>
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<td>Sociocultural Thought Process Assessment (STPA)</td>
<td>James Madison University faculty (2008)</td>
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<td>Transcultural and International Nursing Knowledge Inventory</td>
<td>Baldonado et al. (1998)</td>
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<td>Transcultural Humility Simulation Development</td>
<td>Hamilton (2016)</td>
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<td>Tucker-Culturally Sensitive Health Care Inventories (T-CSHCl)</td>
<td>Tucker et al. (2007)</td>
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*Assessments in gray are those utilized in this study*
APPENDIX K

FIELD NOTES PROTOCOL

Adapted from Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), and Sacred Heart University Library (2020)

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<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on Research Question - How does the observation reflect what I want to know or what I’m measuring?</td>
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**Descriptive Notes:** (document factual data: settings, actions, behaviors, and conversations observed). Include:
- The physical setting (layout of room, layout of tables/seats, diagram)
- The social environment & how participants interact within the setting (patterns of interactions, frequency of interactions, direction of communication patterns including non-verbal communication, and decision-making patterns)
- The participants and their roles in the setting
- The meaning of what was observed from the perspectives of the participants
- Quotes or close approximations of comments that relate to the purpose or RQs
- The impact I might have had on the situation I observed

**Reflective Notes:** (document my thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns while making observations). Include:
- Ideas, impressions, thoughts, and/or any criticisms about what I observed
- Any unanswered questions from analyzing the observation or any thoughts regarding future observations
- Clarify points and/or correct mistakes and misunderstandings in other parts of field notes
- Insights about what I observed and speculate why I believe that specific phenomenon occurred
## APPENDIX L

### BASELINE SURVEY OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>I am sensitive to the use of certain words or slurs found in some pieces of literature, even when they are important to the authentic voice of an author, poet, playwright, or character... Anchor texts: A Raisin in the Sun, A Lesson Before Dying; I don't avoid addressing topics of race when they come up. I work towards involving students in an open and safe discussion; Not that I can think of – if the subject comes up in class, it deserves to be acknowledged in an appropriate manner; I work hard to understand all sides of any given issue or situation and to keep any potential biases at bay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>Being aware of the cultural differences and how race is depicted or lack of depiction in literature impacts my teaching when facilitating class discussions or approaches to analytical writing; I recall discussing how color is represented symbolically through history and is reflected in writing. For example, white may represent purity, goodness, and light; whereas, black may represent evil, badness, and darkness. Red may represent blood or power, etc...A former student wrote an analytical essay about the systemic discrimination of people of color since the early beginnings of recorded literature; I try to ensure the conversation stays on topic with the application to literature and try not to let personal bias influence the conversation to go off topic; Yes, I have avoided talking about race as it can be a very sensitive topic, especially in American literature and the role of the Southern Planters in early Americana; I would describe my level of racial/cultural competence as Moderate, but I would love to learn more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>In the past I have not really considered it other than trying to steer conversations away from it. I have been mindful of the presence of minority students in my classroom but not how what I say, do, or teach affects them; None; I divert the conversation; Yes, I’m scared of what may happen. I am unsure of what may be offensive to some. I fear my own lack of knowledge on the subject when I’m supposed to be the expert in the room. The subject tends to make people feel uncomfortable, so I try to avoid it. Low to medium. I am becoming more aware and knowledgeable and interested in learning more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icarus</td>
<td>I have difficulty understanding speech patterns, pronunciations, and other verbal communications; BLM, but also on a local level, why there are so few black guys on the basketball team; I mediate the discussion, model appropriate ways to disagree with someone; sure, it’s uncomfortable and I don’t want to cause tension, create chaos or offend; beginner to intermediate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>As an English teacher, text[s] used for discussions become a critical element in teaching real-world concepts. Diversity in my class brings diversity to background knowledge, understanding of real-world issues and perspectives that help develop empathy toward people; Stereotyping as well as the impact certain minorities have contributed to quality literature that sometimes is overlooked due to the provocative themes written about in their work; Honest discussion and also journal writing for encouraging their independent voice; Yes! The pushback from parents, and administration and worrying the support is not in place to deal with discussions/text etc. that may not be accepted by others. In all honesty, both jobs and negative publicity can be on the line; Still learning…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Race impacts my teaching in the language I use and expect in my classroom. It affects the texts and materials I use. It affects my approach to historical contexts. It affects the demographic of my classes. It affects my relationships with parents and with my coworkers. It is hard to know what my teaching or my education as a whole would be like if race were not a factor given that it affects most elements of life; I have taught the 1619 Project before and that allowed for a ton of discussion about the effects of race on the world we live in but in more recent years I have not really felt safe or comfortable teaching or talking about race in the classroom. I have taught texts written by authors of varied races that comment on the effect their race has had on them but I often do not comment on my personal view of the subject. I have talked about the way that race affects power dynamics and motivation for characters in literature but the depth of those conversations is limited; Very delicately. And fearfully. I tiptoed around them and try to make sure that everyone is comfortable and safe but that often means being very surface level. Yes. I do not wish to offend anyone. I do not wish to learn things about people that may make me judge them. I do not want to ruin a dinner party. I do not wish to cause animosity at work. I do not wish to look stupid or uninformed; I think that I am sensitive to racial disparities but I do not feel confident saying that I am a highly culturally competent person.

Note. Participant responses indicating pre-competence characteristics are highlighted in pink. Participant responses indicating competence characteristics are highlighted in turquoise. Responses which could indicate either level of cultural competence are highlighted in gray.
# APPENDIX M

## ENDLINE SURVEY OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>I’m grateful for the opportunity to learn different points of view from our discussions and the materials I read and viewed. Staying vigilant and aware of racial and cultural diversity in the classroom is a must (a priority) as we move forward; One change I’ve made...is to refer to ‘slave’ (as mentioned in the stage directions) as servant. As mentioned above, staying vigilant and adapting appropriately along the way will be a priority for me as we move through different texts; I'm still chewing on this idea. When the issue comes up, I’m not uncomfortable to speak in context. I’ve not had the opportunity since our Focus Group meetings to personally broach the subject with my students; I believe other changes will happen organically as I interpret students’ reactions to certain pieces of literature; The ability to “see the other guy’s point of view...” Continuing to learn about race and culture and gracefully, graciously, and articulately responding to questions or situations with appropriate sensitivity; As a result of our Focus Group discussions, as well as what I read and viewed as part of this esteemed company every two weeks, I feel optimistic and empowered to respond to issues of race and culture in the classroom, albeit I still have plenty to learn!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoCo</td>
<td>Our focus sessions have impacted my views on racial and cultural diversity in my classroom by raising my awareness so that I am more conscious of the cultural sensitivities my students bring with them to the classroom experience; I have noticed a change to my teaching approach as a result of participating in the study in that I have offered a more diverse selection of short readings and discussion topics; Yes, I do feel more equipped to talk about race in my classroom because many of the TedTalks and readings provided ample strategies for how to address racial/cultural conversations in the classroom; Yes, [a book] is in the review process as an option for [a literature unit]; I would define racial/cultural competence as the awareness and knowledge of the hidden assumptions about race and culture that may be present in one’s preconceived mindsets about other races or cultures; My level of racial/cultural competence has been raised as the topic has been at the forefront of my awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiAnna</td>
<td>It was helpful to listen to my colleagues and see what they do and how they do it in the classroom. It’s extremely beneficial knowing that I’m not the only one with this struggle – and that I do have colleagues who I can talk to about this struggle and how to be better with incorporating diverse literature and in teaching a diverse population of students; I feel like I have more confidence, more support if I were to change some things in my curriculum, more knowledge to back up my classroom decisions, and I feel like I am willing to try to make changes; Somewhat. I can’t say that I feel extremely knowledgeable or comfortable, but I also feel like I’m not as scared to engage in that discourse or would not actively try to divert the conversation if it were to come up in my classroom; I would like to add in [book] and go from there. I see this as a first step to incorporating more diverse literature – but I am thinking through and questioning where else in the curriculum I can include more diverse literature but other measures as well that would speak to a more multicultural friendly classroom; Your knowledge of and awareness of cultural and race related biases, topics, and issues. Where racial and cultural knowledge is considered at the forefront of decisions in the classroom (and in life, really) instead of an afterthought. It’s a skill, not an attribute that can grow in its understanding and of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Icarus</strong></td>
<td>They have helped me be more sensitive and aware of how I can improve my relationship with my students; I am less afraid or hesitant to acknowledge cultural differences and attempt to use what I have learned to inform my reactions to student behaviors; I feel more comfortable and honest; My team needs to make changes in our literature choices; Understanding, acknowledging and voicing that there are differences which cause people to react, respond, and behave the way they do and that those are not wrong, just different; Much improved.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Luna</strong></td>
<td>Wonderful to collaborate with colleagues and have open honest discussions. My views continue to be broadened and reframed as I learn more and more; Yes. I am trying to become more aware, more honest, more inclusive in my language, texts, and expectations for all my students. Awareness has been the key and will continue to help guide my instruction; Yes, but still not enough. I feel creating an environment where all students feel seen and heard is important before I can delve even further into these discussions. No, due to district constraints and pacing we follow. We tried adding more diversity to our authors, yet conversations need to continue and learning still needs to be developed for educators to effectively be the messengers; The awareness of understanding how complex and misrepresented history has been and how as educators we should feel enabled to become the mediators of accurate and honest conversations about racial/cultural competence; Evolving. Long way to go.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Opal</strong></td>
<td>I was given tools that I can actually use and more confidence to address some of my concerns knowing that I have people on my team. I do not think my views have changed much but I think they have become more focused; I do not think I have made any major changes yet but I hope that moving forward I will have the drive to make the changes I keep thinking about; I think maybe a little bit. Honestly, the TED talks were really helpful in giving me some good vocabulary to use but I want to spend more time with them; I have not, but I think rather than just complaining about [book] I will be able to use it in a different way this year. Rather than just resenting that it exists in my classroom I can use it as a talking point. Have them think about why this book may have been banned vs why many people think it should no longer be taught; A willingness and ability to participate in culturally diverse situations with empathy and consideration; Medium-low. I could be more educated for sure; I need to take the time to really educate myself.</td>
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*Note.* Participant responses indicating pre-competence characteristics are highlighted in pink. Participant responses indicating competence characteristics are highlighted in turquoise. Responses which could indicate either level of cultural competence are highlighted in grey.