RESPONDING TO THE "TRUMP EFFECT"
Using Transformative Leadership and Critical Race Curriculum to Uplift One Middle School's Racialized Climate

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Since the U.S. presidential election of 2016, educators across America have reported an alarming increase in racialized incidents and harassment in schools, referred to as the "Trump Effect" (Costello, 2016). In response, this qualitative study investigates 1 predominantly White middle school's attempt to respond the Trump Effect era through the practices of transformative leadership (Shields, 2018). Through the partnership of an administrator, teacher, and university researcher, a social studies unit was taught to 27 sixth-grade students, utilizing the tenets of critical race curriculum (Yosso, 2002). Data collection for this study incorporates components of qualitative research methodology, including participant observation notes, student artifacts, and semistructured interviews. The findings indicate that the practice of transformative leadership helped facilitate opportunities for students to act as agents of change within their own school community, while incorporating the historical legacy of race in contextualizing the current racialized climate in their school.

INTRODUCTION

Since the U.S. presidential election of 2016, American society has been confronted with a barrage of overt racist rhetoric dehumanizing historically marginalized groups, largely perpetrated by the current president, Donald Trump. Consequently, over 10,000 surveyed American educators have reported an alarming increase in racialized incidents and harassment in schools, referred to as the "Trump Effect," and nearly 90% of survey respondents believe the election has negatively impacted their schools' climates (Costello, 2016). These claims are substantiated in the surveys by the nearly 2,500 specified incidents that seemingly mimic Trump's campaign rhetoric, including statements like "go back to Mexico" (p. 69), "make our country White again" (p. 74), "Muslims need to be dead," (p. 75), and "If

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The SoJo Journal: Educational Foundations and Social Justice Education, Vol. 4(2), 2018, pp. 41–56 ISSN 2381-5183
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Trump gets elected president, all of us Black people are going to have to go back to Africa" (p. 78) (Teaching Tolerance, 2016). The perpetrators of hate and oppression appear to have been emboldened by the political context, and as a result, schools have become hostile environments, particularly for vulnerable groups of students.

Despite the recent uptick in documented racialized incidents in public education, the era of the Trump Effect is merely a catalyst to investigate the pervasive and historical nature of the racial discourse of Whiteness that has long dominated schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Leonardo, 2009). In such a context, *Whiteness* is defined as forms of oppression that are based upon a hierarchy of socially constructed racial discourses, which should not be conflated with the racial category of "White people" (Leonardo, 2002). Whiteness has consistently remained an invisible form of "normal" operating within the system of education in America (McIntosh, 2010; Perry, 2002).

Educational leaders need to confront Whiteness in education to not only improve the learning environment for all students but for the betterment of society as well. Although most educational leaders in America explicitly denounce racism in schools (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015), research indicates that school leaders tend not to notice or attend to issues of race and racism (Lipman, 1998; Ryan, 2003; Taylor, 1998). For example, in the wake of the Trump Effect, students who have faced harassment and intimidation report being dismissed and even told by their school leaders to remain silent about their experiences (Pressler & Weissman, 2016). Further, Rogers et al. (2017) investigated education in the age of the Trump administration and found that only 28% of school leaders took proactive measures to ensure inclusive and respectful school environments. Additionally, leaders in predominantly White schools were the least likely to implement preventive actions, despite reporting higher rates of political polarization among students (Rogers et al., 2017), thus leaving many White students insufficiently prepared to not only discuss issues of race but combat the current uptick in racial bigotry in schools.

During this era of heightened awareness and highly publicized racial harassment in schools, educational leaders are uniquely positioned to address the current issues of bigotry as well as the historical nature of racism in education. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to utilize the Trump Effect as a catalyst to investigate one predominantly White (PW) middle school's attempt to combat Whiteness through the practice of transformative leadership by a school administrator, a teacher, and a university researcher. For the purposes of this study, *transformative leadership* (TL) is defined as educational leadership practices that foster inclusive and socially just learning environments and equitable academic outcomes for all students while remaining inextricably linked to the wider social context (Shields, 2010). As an initial attempt to respond to the era of the Trump Effect and create sustainable changes in this school community, we implemented a social studies unit focused on the historical construction of racial categories in the United States, developed with the tenets of critical race curriculum (Yosso, 2002). As educational leaders, we were acutely aware that this unit was merely a first step in the aspirational goal of eradicating Whiteness in this educational setting.

Through this study, our leadership team explored the following questions: (1) How do White middle-school students describe race, racism, and racial color blindness as a result of learning through a transformative leadership team and critical race curriculum?; and (2) How do White middle-school students perceive their own racial identity upon completing a unit of study that incorporates the tenets of critical race curriculum and is taught by a transformative leadership team? Ultimately, this study aims to employ TL practices to foster the racial consciousness of White students operating within the Whiteness of schooling in response to the era of the Trump Effect.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

This study builds on the literature and previous research regarding Whiteness and racial color blindness in education, the tenets of TL and its use as a tool for facilitating social justice-oriented education, and White students and Whiteness.

Whiteness and Racial Color Blindness in Education

Whiteness continues to dominate American society and has been described as a socially constructed ideology and epistemology that often produces racism, all the while normalizing such oppression as a means of maintaining White supremacy (Matias, 2013; Picower, 2009). In America, the categorization of skin tones and the investment in Whiteness affords Whites the most privileged racial identification (Lipsitz, 1998). Yet for most Whites, the privileges of Whiteness are frequently invisible, unearned, and not consciously acknowledged (Picower, 2009). Whiteness is also operationalized in everyday strategies that incorporate the following core characteristics: (1) an unwillingness to name attributes of racism; (2) the avoidance of racialized experiences of others; and (3) the minimization of the historic legacy of racism (Frankenberg, 1993; Leonardo, 2002). According to Leonardo (2002), under the realm of Whiteness, social inequities—such as education, employment, housing, and wealth—are frequently justified by factors other than those attributed to race and racism. Those who subscribe to the ideologies of Whiteness often disregard race and racism as deeply embedded social constructs that are structural and institutional and relegate them to irrelevant excuses used to justify the unachieved dream of meritocracy. Ultimately, Whiteness operates as an ideological system that perpetuates White power and privilege while making it look like that is not what is happening (Allen, 2004).

Despite Whiteness' domination of the American racial discourse, the characterization of such ideology has evolved. Traditionally, within the sphere of Whiteness, racism has been narrowly characterized as overt and visible acts of prejudice perpetrated by racist individuals, largely in the past (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Tatum, 2004). However, more recently Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2011) described a broader definition of racism as a system of "attitudes, actions, or practices by an individual or institution, backed up by societal power, that undermine human and legal rights, economic opportunities, and cultural expressions of people because of their racial or ethnic identity" (p. 310). Further, researchers have suggested that modern Whiteness and racism—in this supposed postracialized society—are invisible and harder to detect because they are dominated by the notion of color blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Crenshaw, 1997; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). Bonilla-Silva (2014) refers to these subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial beliefs and practices as "color-blind racism" (p. 3). For these reasons, color blindness and color-blind racism act as salient features of Whiteness that strategically ignore and dismiss the influence of racism in society (Allen, 1999). Picower (2009) describes this racial silence as one of the *tools of Whiteness* that maintains and supports hegemonic narratives and dominant ideologies of race, which in turn uphold structures of White superiority.

Racial color blindness is pervasive within the system of education, as evident in formal policies and practices, as well as informal social norms (Gillborn, 1992; Lewis, 2001; Pollock, 2004; Sleeter, 2004). Since race is often perceived as a taboo topic in education, proponents of the color-blind ideology try to ignore—whether consciously or unconsciously—the existence of race and the devastating impact of racial injustice in education (Husband, 2016; Milner, 2010; Tatum, 2007). As a result, the racial color-blind ideology glosses over educational inequities currently impacting the lives of students of color, clinging to the idea of equality or sameness. Freire (2000) characterizes such a phenomenon as the

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"culture of silence," wherein educators reproduce the dominant culture and maintain social order while ignoring the lived experiences and cultures of the oppressed.

Additionally, research has informed us that much of the mainstream curriculum used in the United States is racially color blind, dominated by a Western-centric and male-centric perspective, referred to as *Eurocentric curriculum* (Au, 2014; Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Such curricula upholds hierarchical social and economic power for White children (Yosso, 2002) and protects White advantage in education, economics, politics, and so forth (Asante, 1991; Yosso, 2002). Consequently, Whiteness is perpetuated in curriculum as White narratives become normalized as the standard, again creating a false narrative for White students and ignoring the identities of students of color.

Pollock (2008) argues that schools need to directly talk about race and racial disparities—specifically causes and solutions—in order to eliminate such inequities. If not, educators who maintain a color-blind mentality will unknowingly default to a reliance on stereotypes and cultural explanations for students' lack of achievement. Members of the educational community often perpetuate the notion that minority cultural values are inherently dysfunctional (Solórzano, 1997). This bolsters stereotypical and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students, and therefore, members of the educational community lower their expectations of students accordingly (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Gay, 2010; Ullucci & Battey, 2011; Villegas, 2007). Educational leaders need to instead foster racialized consciousness within other educators, as well as students, in order to combat the visible and invisible forms of racial bigotry.

Transformative Leadership

According to Shields (2010), the theory of TL begins with questions of justice and democracy, strong critiques of inequitable educational practices, and the possibility of hope for the individual as well as the greater society. The underlying principles of TL are grounded in Freire's (1970) notion of *conscientization* or the need for understanding, reflection, analysis, and action (Shields, 2018, p. 19). Thus, the goal of TL is to not only critique societal norms that foster inequitable educational outcomes but also take action to foster equalizing opportunities as a means for quality education and civic engagement for all.

Shields (2018) further details eight interdependent tenets of TL that focus on both intellectual achievement and social justice: (1) TL aims to effect deep and equitable change; (2) TL needs to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge paradigms that reinforce inequity and injustice; (3) TL must confront the inequitable distribution of power; (4) TL must emphasize the individual and collective good; (5) TL should focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice; (6) TL must call for interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness; (7) TL needs to balance critique with promise; and (8) TL must exhibit moral courage.

Ultimately, TL implores school leaders to enact more inclusive, equitable, and democratic conceptions of education (Shields, 2010). School leaders can cultivate TL through critical reflection and analysis to move toward action that circumvents systemic historical marginalization and creates a level playing field to ensure academic, social, and civic educational outcomes.

White Students and Whiteness

The scholarship of examining White students and Whiteness is a developing area of research, which has largely focused on students in higher education. For example, in his seminal work on color-blind racism, Bonilla-Silva (2014) surveyed 627 White undergraduate students attending American universities, using the Survey of Attitudes of College Students and semistructured interviews. His findings indicate that White students frequently demonstrate color-blind race talk, avoiding

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racist terminology while using rhetoric and semantics that maintain the socially constructed racial order in America. For these reasons, Bonilla-Silva contends that color-blind racism is not only widespread among White college students but also mirrors the dominant racial ideology in American society.

In another example, Todd, Spanierman, and Aber (2010) conducted a large study of 275 undergraduate students, who were predominantly White. The aim of the study was to examine how students' racial color-blind beliefs and racial affect might predict positive and negative emotional responses to racial discourse. Through semistructured interviews and written responses, the findings suggest that the interaction between racial color blindness and racial affect is important when predicting students' emotional responses, especially when students reflect on their Whiteness. This research underscores the importance of unpacking students' racialized beliefs as a means for tackling the broader topic of Whiteness.

Additionally, some research has focused on the experiences of White secondary students, suggesting several common findings including the impact of school racial demographics on racial consciousness, the avoidance of discussion of race so as not to appear racist, and the conscious or unconscious maintenance of Whiteness (Bolgatz, 2005; Haviland, 2008; Lewis, 2001; McLaren, 2015). Researchers have pointed to a significant gap between White students' assessments of their schools' racial climate and those of students of color (Lewis, 2001). For example, Perry's (2002) work with White youth in two high schools with racially different demographics proposes that the proximity of Whites to people of color greatly impacts how they form White identity, conceive of White culture, and possess or exercise power. Perry found that, in the predominantly White school, White students experienced themselves as normal, color-blind, and race neutral. Conversely, in the multiracial school, White students were forced to confront the complexity of race, racial identity, and culture. Research has also indicated that many White students avoid discussions regarding race for fear of appearing racist or offending others, even when race is relevant to the topic at hand (Bolgatz, 2005). In their study of White teachers and White eighth-grade students, Haviland (2008) found "word avoiding" and "joking" to be techniques of Whiteness used to maintain the power of Whiteness. Scholarship has further suggested that color blindness plays an important role in White racial identity because it fulfills the desire of Whites to appear nonracist while simultaneously dismissing the effects of Whiteness (McLaren, 2015).

This study is uniquely poised to contribute to several voids in the current literature. First, this study documents the implementation of curriculum as a means for addressing the historical silence around the topics of race and racism in education. Second, the research reports on a practical application of TL that moves beyond just the theoretical. Finally, this work archives the practices of engaging White middle-school students in topics of race, racism, and racial identity, which is largely lacking from current literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As mentioned, this research aims to understand the racialized consciousness of White students through TL practices. We posit that the theoretical framework of critical race curriculum (CRC) offers an effective means for analyzing White students' racial consciousness.

Critical Race Curriculum

In this study, the educational experiences of the study participants were examined through the theoretical framework of CRC. The tenets of CRC were first introduced in a seminal piece by Tara Yosso (2002), where the core components were informed by critical race theory (CRT). CRC builds upon the work of

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CRT, which begins with the notion that race and racism are deeply embedded social constructs that are normalized in American society (Bell, 1992; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2013). In addition, CRT views disparities in educational achievement as the result of historically inequitable access to resources (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Stovall, 2013). Despite the scientific evidence that race is not a biological concept, race continues to be a powerful social construct and signifier in American society (Ladson-Billings, 2013). As such, racism becomes a structure that infiltrates society at the social, economic, and ideological levels and shapes opportunities for many people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

CRT takes issue with the notion of color blindness, which ultimately undermines efforts to address race-based problems in education (Crenshaw, 2001; Hosford & Grosland, 2013). From the CRT lens, history and education have been constructed from a limited point of view, informed predominantly by White, Eurocentric, middle-class norms at the expense and oppression of others (Hosford & Grosland, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, Solórzano (1997) describes CRT as "a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of racism in U.S. education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in education" (p. 7).

Yosso (2002) defines the guiding tenets of CRC as (1) acknowledging the central roles of racism and other forms of subordination in perpetuating inequality in curricular structures, processes, and discourses; (2) challenging the dominant social norms and assumptions related to culture, intelligence, and meritocracy; (3) directing curriculum toward critical consciousness and social justice to challenge the hidden curriculum; (4) developing counterdiscourses through storytelling and historical narratives that draw on the lived experiences of students of color; and (5) integrating historical and contemporary analysis to develop the linkage between educational and societal inequities.

According to Yosso (2002), CRC can operate as a theoretical framework to analyze and challenge racial color blindness in the context of schooling and in the curricular structures, processes, and discourse. Under such conditions, CRC has the potential to challenge racism, provide students with oppositional language to counteract deficit ideology, and focus on community strengths to combat racism. Additionally, CRC can cultivate critical consciousness among students inside and outside classrooms as a means to promote social justice.

METHODS

For the purposes of understand the phenomenon of PW middle school students' racial consciousness, we formulated our leadership team to develop and implement the CRC-unit as well as document the students' experiences. Through the utilization of qualitative research methods—participant observation notes, student artifacts, and semistructured interviews—we attempted to capture the students' experiences and expressed understandings. Finally, we used a multicycle analysis to generate our research findings.

Leadership Team

For this study, our leadership team was formed using the guiding tenets of TL. As an administrator, a teacher, and an educational researcher, we sought to create deep and equitable changes at one PW middle school that was struggling to respond to the highly racialized context of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Both the school administrator and the teacher acknowledged their school's political progressiveness but "so White" reputation and were concerned with the how the Trump Effect was manifesting at their school and their students' lagging skills in talking about race. For example, a small group of students had recently started a Black Lives Matter club at the school, and the members began wearing

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Black Lives Matter shirts. The shirts caused a stir among the students, backlash employing the All Lives Matter narrative ensued, and ultimately the Black Lives Matter club was undermined. Additionally, the administrator and teacher spoke of a pervasive "joke" perpetuated by the students, where the phrase "that's racist" was being used in everyday interactions, even if the topic was not related to race. The administrator and teacher were eager to support conversations about race and racism with students as a means for improving the overall racial climate of their school in the time of the Trump Effect.

Through several months of face-to-face dialogues, emails, and phone calls, our team decided to focus on deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge paradigms regarding the social construction of race. We centered our lessons around the examination of the racial categories used in the U.S. Census since its inception in 1790. Our aim was to have students confront the inequitable distribution of power coalesced from the racial categorization of citizenship in order to scrutinize democracy, equity, and justice. Our formal lesson plans were coconstructed among our leadership team and formulated with the tenets of CRC (many of which replicate the tenets of TL). The hope of this unit of study was to empower the students to consider concepts of race, not only for themselves but for the greater collective society.

For the purposes of fostering a safe classroom environment for racial discourse, it was imperative that we share with the students our own racial identities and experiences as White females of European descent. Our forthrightness about our racial identities became an integral component of the implementation of this unit of study, which fostered rich discussion among the students.

Instructional Setting

This study was conducted during the 2016 presidential election season at an urban middle school that serves approximately 900 students in sixth through eighth grade, in a large, politically progressive city in the western United States. According to the school's reported demographics, less than 10% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, receive English language services, and/or receive special education services. The majority of students identify as White (71%), with smaller populations identifying as Latina/o (9%), Asian (9%), Multiracial (9%), and Black/African American (1%). As previously stated, our leadership team facilitated the social studies lessons with the sixth-grade students in two language arts/social studies block classes, whose teacher was part of our leadership team. Between the two classes, 27 students chose to participate in the research study via written consent from their families and themselves. The racial demographics of this self-selected group mirrored that of the school's overall demographics.

Procedure

The CRC-designed unit of study was cotaught by our leadership team over three 90-minute class periods for each of the two language arts/social studies block classes. Throughout these lessons, the concepts of race, racism, and racial color blindness were grounded with working definitions that acknowledged the impact of race in society. Race was defined as, "a socially constructed way of sorting people into groups based on skin color," whereas racism was defined as, "discriminatory or abusive behavior toward members of another race based on a belief of being superior." Finally, racial color blindness was defined as the denial that race, especially skin color, has consequences for a person's status and well-being (Rosenberg, 2004).

To begin this unit of study, students were asked to investigate several myths and misconceptions about race, including the claim that racial categories are biological realities, through the documentary *Race: The Power of An Illusion* (California Newsreel, 2014) and a video segment called *The Cost of Racial Color-Blindness* (Harvard Business Review,

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2013). Then, students participated in an activity that allowed them to explore every racial category used by the U.S. Census from 1790 to the most current census in 2010. Both the activities and the lively class discussions that followed allowed students to grapple with the concepts, ask questions, and draw their own conclusions about the social construction of race. Finally, semistructured interviews were conducted in order to hear the voices and perspectives of the participating students as a means for gaining an understanding of how they experience explicit conversations about race and racism.

For this research, the qualitative methodology of case study research was employed, and the data collection comprised multiple sources of evidence in order to sufficiently envelop the students' perspectives (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Yin, 2014). The data collected included participant observation notes, which were electronically recorded throughout the implementation of the lessons (Krathwohl, 2009; Yin, 2014). In addition, research artifacts were gathered—in the form of photographs, students' self-portraits, and students' written reflections—as a means for capturing rich descriptions of the students' experiences. Finally, semistructured interviews were conducted with research participants in small groups of three to five students, each approximately 30 minutes in length. The predetermined interview protocol asked *opinion-value* questions, which were intended to be flexible, open-ended, and focused on gaining a deeper understanding of students' perspectives (Krathwohl, 2009; Seidman, 2013). These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, with pseudonyms assigned to participants.

The transcribed semistructured interviews, participant observation notes, and research artifacts were analyzed to establish thematic codes as a means for organizing the data into broader themes (Glesne, 2016; Saldaña, 2015). The initial analysis began with open coding, as organizational categories were created as bins for sorting the data for further analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). The second round of coding used axial coding, which consisted of identifying thematic relationships between the open codes (Saldaña, 2015). Ultimately these thematic codes were comparatively examined through the framework of CRC, specifically noting if the thematic codes reinforced the tenets of CRC.

FINDINGS

As stated previously, the aim of this study was to investigate through TL practices the racial consciousness of students attending a PW middle school during the era of the Trump Effect. Therefore, we implemented TL practices with White middle-school students who ultimately expressed racial consciousness with race, racism, and racial color blindness, as well as their own racial identity.

Themes

Upon analysis, we identified four interrelated themes from the transcribed interviews and relevant data, which in turn correlate with CRC: (1) acknowledging race and racism; (2) the impact of color blindness; (3) comparing the past and present racial discourse; and (4) racial identity development. It is important to note that, although not all the student participants were White (approximately 70% were), the majority of student responses were remarkably similar. This seems to indicate that Whiteness in this educational community has been widely internalized by most students.

From Avoidance to Acknowledgment, Defining Race and Racism

Overall, students eagerly defied the protocol of racial color blindness by openly talking about race and racism in the United States, and many demonstrated growing racial consciousness throughout the unit of study. However, initially, many students appeared to hold narrow definitions of race and racism while

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substantiating the claim that race and racism are not taught in their school. This insight provides evidence of the existence of Whiteness and color blindness in this school community, which largely mirrors the pervasive epidemic in America's education system (Gillborn, 1992; Lewis, 2001; Pollock, 2004; Sleeter, 2004). Within the context of Whiteness and color blindness, students are often forced to formulate their own definitions of race, racism, and discrimination. This void in racialized knowledge leads to confusion about the defining characteristics of racism, creating overgeneralizations of racism and inciting fear at the mere mention of race and ethnicity. For example, some students reported feeling that saying "Black" or "Mexican" was racist, and race-neutral statements are preferred. In addition, many students referred to the ongoing "joke" prevalent throughout their school, where students respond to each other, regarding any topic, by saying, "That's racist!"

After the unit of study, students used their newly acquired racialized understanding to articulate their emerging understandings of race as a means to critically examine the role of race in society. For example, one student stated, "I would define race as the outer shell and how you are presented to the world, your skin color and your facial features and how you do things in life," while several other students incorporated presented terminology, such as "socially created" or "socially constructed." "My definition of race, it is a socially constructed way of understanding people and putting people in categories," suggested one male student. Another student commented,

> To me it is a way for people to try to understand other people, based on their appearance, and it stereotypes as well. It is trying to see, trying to understand a person, even without having one conversation with them. Oh, you are this race, so you have these qualities.

When pressed about the idea of taking their new understandings of race and racism and talking to their peers about what they had learned, one student noted,

> I feel like a lot of kids in this age, they don't really know the difference between race and racism. They don't really know how to go about conversations with it. I think it is good that, when someone brings it up, then we kind of know how to maneuver around the conversation respectfully, and still be able to voice our opinion.

Additionally, several students began to see racism in their current context. As such, many students expressed a desire to "shut down" awkward racialized conversations with their peers by using the terminology and definitions they learned throughout the lessons. One male student stated, "I learned that a lot of people are hesitant to talk about Black people if there is a Black person around, because they might think it is racist." "It is okay to say that they are Black, because being racist means that you are discriminating against them, like we are superior. So it is okay to say they are Black, because that is not saying anything mean or abusive," stated a female student.

In cooperation with the tenets of CRC, this theme noted students' abilities to centralize the concepts of race and racism in discussions as a means for contextualizing the social construction of race. Further, students developed specific language and key terminology for engaging in race-related conversations and appeared empowered to utilize such language to challenge the dominant racial narratives in their school and society.

Awakening From Color Blindness

In addition to a willingness to talk about race and racism, most students also expressed emerging knowledge regarding racial color blindness and its associated negative consequences in society. In one of the interview questions, students were asked to describe their understanding of the definition of racial color blindness. As students described their conceptions of racial color blindness, many

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confessed that they previously regarded color blindness as a "good thing." These honest revelations mirror the color-blind rhetoric often present in the educational system, believing color blindness to be the most effective way to deal with race, racial inequalities, and racial diversity in schools (Banks, 2006; Husband, 2016; Milner, 2010).

After the lessons on racial color blindness, students began to recognize the negative aspects of racial color blindness and its impact on individuals. For example, one student stated, "At first, when I saw that word, and when we started talking about it, I thought it was a good thing, and then I realized that it is not good, but actually it is very offensive to people." Furthermore, many students could see the good intentions behind the desire to look beyond race in the fight for equality, yet many students were left with the sentiment that color blindness' attempts to ignore color simply creates a false notion of equality. As one male student suggested,

> Being color-blind is just being blind to what other people, other races are going through. Great, you think they are equal, but at this point they are not, so by ignoring that, you are not making them become equal. You are making them stay in the position that they are.

Another participant added, "I think that sometimes people who want equality so much, and they are trying, they really want equality, but they are going about it by ignoring the problems rather than facing them." One student recalled,

> It is kind of a bad thing that people say, "Everybody is equal." I mean, that's good, but saying that you don't see their color is kind of bad, because they are saying, Oh, I don't see you. Because you are of color, I don't see you, but that is who they are, that color.

Students also began to entertain color blindness' impact on the larger society and to call out the need for further introspection and action. One female student noted,

> I thought it was great people can identify by race, but then they think, Oh, everyone is treated equal. We are all an equal society, and then I am thinking that is not true. There are issues where White cops are just shooting Blacks, and that is huge, because even though it may not be true and it is a rumor going around, that is serious, killing people for their race.

Still another student remarked,

> You really need to realize that there are issues with race and you have to get it together and learn about it, since it is a big issue. To just think that we are equal, that was maybe, this is what this country was intended to be, but it is still not there yet.

Through the lens of CRC, students' developing ideas regarding the impact of color blindness once again signals an emerging awareness about the centrality of race and the perpetuation of inequality in society. One of the participants described the act of color blindness and its effects as, "like a pebble thrown into a lake, all the ripples. But it gets all the way to the shore." Ultimately, students began to foster a critical consciousness and challenge the dominant discourse, especially with regard to the acquisition of equality and the false narrative created by racial color blindness. Although the students' budding awareness regarding color blindness was limited in scope, it seemed to demonstrate a willingness to deconstruct the color-blind ideology within their White context of schooling.

Contemplating the Past, Considering the Present

Throughout this project, many students noticed the remarkable similarities between historical and contemporary conceptions of race. In particular, during the specific activities where students explored the U.S. Census'

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racial categories over the last 220 years, several students began to recognize the historical legacy of the social construction of race and societal inequities. During an interview, one male students said,

> That White has been the category that has been on the census, every single census, which I find ridiculous, because Native Americans have been here longer than us, so why aren't they on the census? Are they not people? And also for blacks, why are they even here? We brought them over to work, worked them to death, and they should be at their home and with their families, and here working to death for us. I thought that was pretty ridiculous. They didn't have any rights, and yet we had to count them for work.

Furthermore, a few students noticed how the categorization of race has remained rather stagnant. As one student suggested,

> I learned that they categorized people by their race and not who they were. That is kind of what we still do today, we categorize people about what we think they are. It doesn't really matter where they lived, just what they look like and what they identify as.

Most notably, one female student remarked,

> I think also it is kind of shocking to see how the past, slaves, White and other, those three categories, it almost reflects today. Because slaves and White, basically Black people were inferior to White people and White people were superior at the time. I think that reflects with modern-day problems, such as police brutality and education systems on the graduation rates, as you said. Not a lot of Black children are graduating because of the discrimination that they are faced with. I think that sometimes that reflects toward today, a little bit.

In conjunction with CRC, some students further demonstrated their emerging critical consciousness by comparatively considering historical and contemporary social and educational inequities. In doing so, students began to question the dominant social and cultural assumptions, including that of meritocracy. Although some students seemed conscious about the historical inequities in society and education, others did not. Additionally, it is important to note that, even among the students demonstrating critical consciousness, there was a sense of *othering* when considering racial categories and experiences. As an example, one student remarked, "Native Americans have been here longer than *us*" and "*We* brought them over to work." These comments seem to stem from a place of remorse yet still center White as normal. While the students' comparative connections between the past and present social inequities were limited and sometimes problematic, such emerging insights of critical consciousness seem to indicate openings for further conversations and teachings.

Developing Racial Identity

During this study, students notably grappled with contextualizing their own racial identities, particularly since many of the students had not previously considered race as a part of their identities. This ignorance about racialized identity is consistent with the framework of Whiteness, especially among White students (Leonardo, 2009; Perry, 2002; Picower, 2009; Tatum, 2017). In her work with White preservice teachers, Tatum (2017) begins to recognize and identify evolving stages of racial identity, which she refers to as "White identity development." Tatum recognizes the unique needs of White students to not only recognize their racial identity (the *contact stage*) but integrate their racial identity as a positive part of personal identity (the *autonomy stage*).

Most students in this study indicated that they had not thought about their race as a component of their identity (the *contact stage*). "It was weird, though, because usually when you describe yourself you are saying what you like to do," noted one student as she considered

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how she usually describes her identity. Further, many students communicated that they had not previously contemplated the social construction of race or skin color: "I've never really thought about skin color. I just thought about how everybody has different skin colors, but I didn't really go into thinking why is this, or what makes this—I've never wanted to."

Moreover, students also began to contemplate the complexity of race through the lens of personal identity. One male student mentioned,

> If you are going to ignore someone's skin color, then you are going to ignore a whole part of them. It's like ignoring someone's hair color or something like that, or ignoring what type of things—what type of music you listen to, or what types of books you like to read. It is just ignoring a whole other part of somebody that helps define people.

In addition, some students began to unpack stereotypes that accompany specific racial groups. A female student stated,

> Sometimes people think that race is all that you are, that there is no other part of you. For example, I am a White girl, so sometimes people try and put stereotypes on me that really aren't accurate to my background. They think that my race is all I am. I'm just a White girl. I don't have a background. I don't have a history. I don't have a family, like, that is all I am. Race is only a small part of how you identify.

With consideration of CRC and the theme of racial identity development, once again the centrality of race emerged as a focal point. In the context of this study, consideration of race as a factor of their identities was a new concept for many of the students. As such, their racial identities went glaringly unnoticed for the majority of their lives, which is a frequent occurrence for White people under the cloud of Whiteness. In exploring racial identity, students began to question the dominant social assumptions related to race and stereotypes. Ultimately, this emerging awareness of racial identity presented an opportunity to explore uncharted terrain in many of the students' lives, indicating an underdeveloped area of personal identity work among this group of adolescent students, which could be further explored.

DISCUSSION

In response to the Trump Effect era, the aim of this study was to utilize TL practices as a means for fostering PW middle-school students' racial consciousness with regard to their individual identities and the collective impact of racial identities in society. Through this research and the implementation of CRC, students engaged in the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge paradigms of the social construction of race, which frequently reinforce societal inequities and injustices. TL practices were able to further develop students' emerging racialized consciousness. As a result, this research exposed one of the underpinnings of Whiteness and color blindness, which is the widely accepted phenomenon of White ignorance about race (Leonardo, 2009; McIntosh, 2010). As stated, many of the participants indicated that they had previously given little credence to the idea of race, especially with consideration of their own identities. Leonardo (2009) pushes back on the ignorance claim and argues that White children are indoctrinated into the racial hierarchy as a social condition of knowledge, whether conscious or unconscious. Therefore, not only does this research speak to the myth of ignorance by corroborating previous scholarship regarding students' capacity for talking about race (Clark, 1988; Goodman, 1952) but it also calls out a sense of urgency for talking about race with all students, particularly White students. Historically, the burden of racial discourse has been placed on people of color (Matias, 2016) as "tutors for Whites" (Leonardo, 2009). This research suggests that White students need to be prepared with the terminology and social context for leading discussions

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about race in order to effect deep and equitable change, especially with the uptick of racialized incidents within this period of the Trump Effect.

The implementation of the CRC, which centralizes race as a focal point of discussion, seemed to facilitate students’ internalized reflection on their own racial identity development. Currently, color blindness in education normalizes Whiteness and creates a false consciousness among White students (Allen, 2004; Freire, 2000). In terms of curriculum, Matias (2016) proposes that distorted history leads to distorted identities. Similarly, this study suggests that curriculum that accurately portrays the historical context of race could foster healthy racial identity development among White students. Within this study, the idea of race was not portrayed as the “other” but rather consistently brought back to individuals’ conceptualization of such concepts. Many students appeared to awaken to the notion that their White identity had been lost in the oversimplification of the term “White,” and as a result, their own racial identities had been shortchanged and underdeveloped. It is important to note, though, that many of the students still articulated problematic racialized otherness when describing people of color, holding an “us” versus “them” mentality. Ultimately, TL practices and CRC hold the potential to cultivate rich curricular discussions around racial identity development and to push the racial consciousness, particularly for White students, which is of the utmost importance in the era of the Trump Effect.

Within this research, students saw themselves as agents of change, reflecting on the historical legacy of race and contextualizing the current political environment. As previously stated, Freire (1970) refers to such reflective and emancipatory actions as *conscientization*, wherein social conditions can be transformed through the process of applying critical knowledge into social practice. In this case, students began to imagine their own solution to the Trump Effect influenced “joke” happening within their school through the use of their newly acquired racialized knowledge and terminology. The students began to consider the potential collective good of their school climate through their own moral courage.

While this project offers the promise of deep and effective changes, the long-lasting impact of such promise remains uncorroborated within this work. Further substantiation would be needed through follow-ups with the schools’ administrators, teachers, and students to evaluate the sustainable impact of such curriculum. However, this research does offer the possibility that, through TL practices, the historical racial color blind silence can be broken and students can engage in meaningful conversations about racial inequities and injustices.

CONCLUSION

The Trump Effect has brought forth opportunities for educational leaders to centralize race in curricular implementation, discussions, and expectations. Currently, racial color blindness remains widespread and pervasive in education, though PK–12 students can and will discuss race and racism and apply such information with proper guidance. In order to change entrenched societal racial inequities and injustices, educational leaders need to employ TL practices to confront inequitable distributions of power and focus on emancipatory, democratic, and justice-oriented education. This study was an initial attempt to create lasting change at one middle school through the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge paradigms with PW students. Educational leaders are now called to utilize TL practices and explore how students’ voices can contribute to a broader discussion on race and racism in our classrooms and how to develop more historically accurate, race-centered curriculum in our schools for the purpose of establishing truly just and equitable educational opportunities for all students. In one of the student’s comments, racial discourse is likened to the quote by the Dalai Lama: “Just as ripples

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spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects." Educational leaders can initiate those ripples.

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