Performance Spaces as Safe Places for Students of Color

Capstone Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Master of Education Degree in the
College of Education and Human Service Professions

By

James M. Carlisle

University of Minnesota Duluth

April 26, 2019

Committee Signatures:

Chair: 

Member: 

Graduate Program Director: 
Acknowledgements

This project was possible only by the grace and support of the students, faculty, and administration of the participating School. Likewise, the guidance from University of Minnesota Duluth faculty was an overwhelming advantage in the design and implementation of the research.
Dedication

This thesis/project is dedicated to my husband who knows me better than I can ever know myself. Without his constant care and support I would not have the courage or tenacity to tackle a Masters degree.
Abstract

This study describes the experiences of Students of Color in a theater program absent Faculty of Color. Through interviews with Students of Color the study recognizes how faculty identity can affect academic and social success. The study pays particular regard to the complex intersections of racial, theatrical, and academic pedagogies in the construction of positive social emotional capacities, and especially the effect on Students of Color who work with a racially White faculty.
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Chapter One
Introduction

Background and Significance of the Study

In her classic, bestselling book on the psychology of racism, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations About Race*, Dr. Beverly Tatum (2017) reasons that honest discourse about our racial identities is critical for empowering communication across racial and ethnic divides. Dr. Tatum wisely chose the school as her setting for unpacking the experiences of parents, faculty, children and adolescents. As students develop racial and ethnic identity, a constructive context for that growth is essential for positive self-identity. As a comment on race and education, this is powerful. Discussions of ethnic identity, diversity, and equity in schools have only become more urgent as the national conversation about race turns increasingly bitter. Classrooms in diverse schools engender opportunities for students and faculty alike to share ideas and compare perspectives. The theater, often the largest classroom in a school building, offers a unique space for dialogue. On stage and in theater classrooms students are not just discussing and debating identity; students are trying on the identities and experiences of others and enacting or sharing that presumed identity. The theater educator is uniquely positioned at the convergence concerning two powerful pedagogies. The theater teacher’s own identity, in opposition or convergence with students’ identities, has significant impact on the teacher’s ability to connect with, support, and teach Students of Color.

The purpose of the present study was to uncover the experience of Students of Color who encounter a lack of representation in faculty racial diversity in a theater program, and to
describe how these students perceive this racial deficit, and finally how students navigate programs that do not fully represent their experience at an independent K-12 school in suburban Minneapolis. Further, the study will unearth the experiences of Students of Color to recognize and appreciate how acting and playmaking facilitate a climate of mutual trust in multicultural classroom theater spaces. Faculty identity can affect academic and social success, with particular regard to the complex intersections of racial, theatrical, and academic pedagogies in the construction of positive social emotional capacities, and especially the effect on Students of Color who work with a racially White faculty. In a multicultural classroom a student’s counter narrative will guide relationship building. It is important to understand the experiences of Students of Color as they navigate coursework and artistic processes which require the construction of trust with faculty and formation of relationships in predominantly White contexts.

The current landscape of racial and ethnic diversity of faculty and students in Midwestern Independent schools are assessed via data shared by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). A report by NAIS for the Independent Schools Association of Central States surveyed 133 schools with a total enrollment of over 65,000. The report shows that although Students of Color constitute 28.4% of total enrollment, Faculty of Color are at half that, 14%, and Administrators of Color narrowly match at 13.9% of total administrators (Facts At a Glance ISACS 2017). In short, there are twice as many Students of Color on these campuses that there are Faculty of Color. This lack of representation in learning spaces means that as Students of Color move through a school day they are not seeing People of Color in roles of authority, nor are they experiencing the same opportunities as their White peers in building relationships with trusted adults who share their lived experience. As Dr. Tatum’s
(2017) work attests, these students will however gather in associations and friend groups that mirror and reinforce their identity. The theater is often one of these safe places for students of many diverse backgrounds to work, learn, and grow together.

Tina Packer, Founding and Artistic Director of Shakespeare and Company in Massachusetts, states “A theatre is more than a Theatre. It is a place for debate and exchange. It is a place for education. It is a place for community. At its core is humanity and understanding. Its contribution is creativity” (The Boston Foundation, 2005, p.1). The common perception that theater is merely entertainment is a curious, shortsighted, and sometimes dangerous misunderstanding. Historically, theater has been an exercise for making visible the invisible worlds within and without us. It has been a laboratory setting for creating an experience of the ineffable. It is where communities have identified developed, and presented the taboo and transgressive. Therefore, theater is an art that suggests rather than depicts. The producing and viewing of theater can be the one transcendent, collective experience for a community. Students working in a theater curriculum find space to explore, examine, and develop their sense of identity in this community as Youth of Color. Yet, Students of Color seeking community in theater spaces often confront a reality wherein their identity is a counter narrative to the predominantly White canon of plays.

As students take on roles both different and similar to their own experience, they break down personal and interpersonal barriers in ways that are impossible in the more rigid academic settings of their respective classrooms. In this context, the boundary management for student actors has a significant impact on the student performers’ personal lives and, the actor’s ability to control that blurring influences whether an acting experience leads to growth or emotional distress (Burgoyne, Poulin, and Rearden, 1999, p. 157). The context of theater,
acting, and performance makes an ideal area of study for relationship building and trust development in Youth of Color. Yet too little has been written about this interplay.

The question that will guide this study is: How do Students of Color experience the theater and acting curriculum as a political space of shaping and expressing racial identity when their teacher is White?

**Setting /Context**

**Setting**

The participants in this study were 9th to 11th grade students participating in an extracurricular theater arts program at a Pre K-12th grade Episcopal school in a suburb of Minneapolis, henceforth referred to in this study as the School.

**Context**

The School is a predominantly White institution. Students of Color experience a lack of representation in faculty racial diversity in the theater program. Students of Color perceive this racial deficit, and the students persist in programs that do not fully represent their experience.

According to Lee (2012), the student population is rapidly becoming more diverse. Lee (2012) also describes the shortage of diverse teacher role models for Students of Color as a large issue in American education. There exists a plethora of research that supports the notion that many White preservice teachers are not competent or comfortable teaching diverse populations (p. 50). It seems feasible that due to this disparity, Students of Color will continue to experience otherness and outcomes of racial climates that do not promote transformative or inclusive efforts.

**Role of the Researcher**

I am a gay White cisgender man, I have been teaching in public or independent schools
since 1997. When I first started teaching I was in the closet, and working at a school where I could not safely be out. I found myself a tacit resource for closeted students.

I was then and am now a theater teacher, a teaching artist. I teach acting classes to 5th to 12th graders, and direct and produce extracurricular theater at the same school for those grades as well. I have been doing a lot of work the last 10 years around addressing my own privilege as an educator. I have had the pleasure of working with a broad spectrum of students in these two plus decades. The vast majority of the students in my program are White, however and I have found myself talking a more critical lens at my own work with Students of Color.

I have the further hampering of working in an artistic milieu dominated by Western/White narratives. The canon of plays centers on the great white Bard, William Shakespeare. So, I feel hampered in relating effectively with Students of Color both from my own affect and in respect to the plays we are working on. I have taken care over the last seven years to address my own privilege through reading, workshops, professional development, and conferences. The work of preparing and fulfilling this research study has resulted in a synthesis of my personal and professional work on race, theater, and the student experience.

**Assumptions**

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) posited, “Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist” (p. 44). Grounded in Critical Race Theory, this study addresses racial climate as a means to examine true inclusivity in theater spaces. Whether we refer to them as mono vocals, master narratives, standard stories, or majoritarian stories, it is important to recognize the power of White privilege in constructing stories about race (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). In using a CRT informed curriculum, an educator can provide Students of
Color the means to construct their own stories of race and work towards developing a vision for new constructs.

Critical Race Theorists such as Solórzano, Yosso, and Ceja (2001) have discussed, through their research and literature, the significance of counter-narratives and racial climate at the post-secondary level. Art educators and teacher researchers such as Kraehe (2015), Lee (2012) discussed the importance of using identity, social justice and race as motivators in the classroom. Theater-making is a creative process that requires problem-solving skills, and calls upon cultural inferences. Art educators Acuff and Pfeiler-Wunder (2015) call for a culturally responsive curriculum, while educators Hayes and Juárez (2012) call for a use of CRT in teacher pre-service.

Further, an assumption is that theater spaces provide students a context through which experience and examining their race/cultural identities happens differently than in other school contexts. Theater education is unique because it allows students to explore and experience the politics of race in a space that is supportive, exploratory, and ensemble based.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study includes only a handful of Students of Color in one theater program at one school. Therefore, the study circumscribes and describes only the experiences of those participants. Students in other contexts may have different experiences; including other students’ experiences is an area of future research.

**Summary**

This chapter introduced the theater, education, and race as the core topics of the present research study. The study will unearth the experiences of Students of Color to recognize and appreciate how acting and playmaking facilitate a climate of mutual trust in multicultural
classroom theater spaces. In the chapter that follows I cover three principal themes in the literature: understanding and deployment of Critical Race Theory is essential; segregation by race is an ongoing social issue in schools; and, teacher training for support of People of Color in schools is a still developing field. Key points of focus are Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of the present study was to uncover the experience of Students of Color who encounter a lack of representation in faculty racial diversity in a theater program, and to describe how these students perceive this racial deficit, and finally how students navigate programs that do not fully represent their experience at an independent K-12 school in suburban Minneapolis. The associated question which guided this study was: How do Students of Color experience the theater and acting curriculum as a political space of shaping and expressing racial identity when their teacher is White? A review of some literature shows that race still matters in educational environments and that the complex systems that students engage with must be responsive to the individuals in those systems. Further, there are three principal themes in the literature that frame our understanding: that understanding and deployment of Critical Race Theory is essential; that segregation by race is an ongoing social issue in schools; and, that teacher training for support of People of Color in schools is a still developing field. Key points of focus are Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Schools Are Institutions Which Serve Individuals

As secondary and post-secondary institutions grow increasingly pluralistic, teaching diverse issues to these diverse learners is important. Many faculty members continue to teach in the ways they learned, which likely resembles a racially White status quo. In this vein, teachers may presume that what works for White students works for all students (Hawley and Nieto, 2010). Research has shown students who experience a curriculum that resembles their racial background are more likely to exhibit higher levels of entitlement, ownership, and confidence in the classroom (Ocha and Pineda, 2008). Moreover, culturally responsive pedagogies were
beneficial to all students, both White and Students of Color, as students were better able to conceptualize diverse experiences including People of Color versus limited constructions of individuals (Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson, 2011). Consistent in the literature, culturally responsive teaching pedagogies were beneficial for all students regardless of race, and faculty need specific transracial understandings to assist with this development for students.

Race related course content is challenging when systems of power and oppression are in play, as when White teachers are working with Students of Color. There are individuals, teachers, and students alike who believe that race is no longer a factor (Campbell, 2010). Some teachers would suggest that in a “post-racial” society one’s race or the race and ethnicity of one’s students is no longer a factor in education. Some individuals have adopted a color-blind paradigm (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005) which, rather than creating equity, only reinforce the privilege of these White educators and school administrators (Katz, 2005). Making the classroom a safe space for discussion is essential for overcoming students’ fears about breaking the race taboo, and for reducing later anxieties about exposing one’s own internalized racism. Establishing the guidelines of confidentiality, mutual respect, and speaking from one’s own experience on the first day of class is a necessary step in the process (Tatum, 1992, p.18).

Exploring strategies to empower students as change agents is thus a necessary part of the process. Palmer (2007) states, “we teach who we are” (Forward). One must be able to express the genuine self; people need to know who they are, which is self-awareness. Every instructor must be aware of their own identity and how it can impact the learning community. Teachers and students alike should engage in an identity development process, in addition to acknowledging how others view identity. Being cognizant of how social identities can impact the learning environment, one must be aware of the campus culture and the issues that impact students’
understanding that can place constraints on teaching. To take it one step further, one must acknowledge the societal issues that impact students. Creating a safe learning community will facilitate the practice of identifying issues within the classroom. In this vein, an effective, culturally responsive teacher will create a classroom where not only the students share their experience but also the instructor shares her or his experiences with the class (hooks, 1994). Individuals characterize school systems, and individuals have personal stories and backgrounds that both bear on their learning and inform how they move through learning spaces. As students and faculty work together and build an academic and social culture together, these narratives mingle, bump up against one another, and shift.

Tierney (1997) states that socialization is a process where individuals create meaning by using their own background to gain an understanding of an organization and its culture. The individualistic academic identities of all members form and change the culture of an organization (p.6). Individuals bring their own unique background and insights to an organization and the challenge of socialization is to use these attributes to build a collective culture rather than having people simply fill a particular mold (Tierney, 1993 as cited in Tierney, 1997). Inclusive pedagogy and teaching strategies provide a framework to kindle one’s sense of authenticity. Inclusive pedagogy advocates teaching practices that embrace the whole student in the learning process (Tuitt, 2003). When educators embrace the whole student, they allow students to express their identity. Classrooms can provide a framework for teaching that incorporates: the curricular and pedagogical, the interpersonal and intrapersonal, and the learning environment. Inclusive pedagogy increases opportunities for student interaction during the learning process and creates a sense of community in the classroom (Zimmerman, 1991). As a response to the increasing diverse student body in secondary and post-secondary education, scholars have developed
pedagogical models that enhance learning for Students of Color. In particular, inclusive pedagogical models allow Students of Color to understand, obtain, and co-create knowledge in the classroom (hooks, 1994; Tuitt, 2003). Towards this end, inclusive pedagogy is a pedagogical construct that “advocates teaching practices that embrace the whole student in the learning process” (Tuitt, 2003, p. 243).

**Critical Race Theory Framework**

Instructors and school staff uphold counterfeit racial perception with the misguided belief that working in a diverse institution or classroom spontaneously generates a culture of inclusivity for all students. One might presume that educators in schools with broad racial or cultural demographics would promote inclusion for all cultures; however, they often assume that schools are working and that students, parents, and community need to change to conform to what educators falsely believe effective and equitable system (Yosso, 2005). The truth is that Students of Color experience microaggressions, subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward People of Color often automatically or unconsciously as a result of deficit thinking in administrators, teachers and peers (Yosso, 2001). An understanding and application of Critical Race Theory is essential to the equitable work of educators working in classrooms with diverse student populations and is thus the framework by which I developed this study.

**Critical race theory**

This understanding of Critical Race Theory, herein referred to as CRT begins with the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, primogenitor of the eponymous institution, Theatre of the Oppressed. Brazilian education activist and theater practitioner Paulo Freire (1970) argued that to create social change, oppressed people must have critical consciousness about their conditions, and that this consciousness develops through dialogue. He theorizes that dialogue allows for
reflection and unity building, tools needed to transform society. When considering racial oppression in K-12 schools, racial minority teachers have an often-untapped insight and power to transform classrooms and schools (Kohli, 2009). Connected through a commonality of racial oppression, it is important for Teachers of Color to engage in cross-racial dialogues about manifestations of racial injustice in K-12 schools and to develop strategies for change while utilizing Freire’s conceptual lens in a CRT framework.

Critical Race Theory within this study centralizes the role of race and racism in the experiences of People of Color within teacher education. Solorzano (1997) describes CRT themes related to stance, research, and pedagogy in education as focusing on the: (1) centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) challenge to dominant ideology; (3) commitment to social justice; (4) centrality of experimental knowledge; and (5) interdisciplinary perspective. The framework developed in the 1970s amongst legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberley Crenshaw and Richard Delgado to highlight race, racism, and its intersections with other forms of oppression (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001; Bell 1980; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Harris 1993). CRT helped bring racism into central focus through the experiences of People of Color. As it extends into other disciplines, including education, it shifts analysis of racism from an individual problem to a structural issue, replicated by institutions within our society. The following five tenets (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001) guided CRT in education:

(1) Centrality of race and racism. All CRT research within education must centralize race and racism, as well as acknowledge the intersection of race with other forms of subordination.

(2) Challenging the dominant perspective. CRT research works to challenge dominant narratives, often referred to as majoritarian stories.
(3) **Commitment to social justice.** Social justice must always be a motivation behind CRT research. Transforming the education of racially marginalized youth requires the development of a racially diverse and racially conscious teaching force. This can only occur, however, if teacher education is addressing the needs of Teachers of Color. Critical race theorists define social justice research as work that (a) responds to the oppression of People of Color, which includes intersections between racism, poverty, sexism, and dehumanization; and (b) aims to eliminate those oppressive conditions; and (c) centers around the empowerment, healing, and liberation of People of Color (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

(4) **Valuing experiential knowledge.** CRT scholars believe in the power of story. Building on to the oral traditions of many indigenous Communities of Color around the world, CRT research values the experiences and narratives of People of Color when attempting to understand social inequality. I collected all data in this study through qualitative interviews. This research project centers the experiences and narratives of Students of Color to better understand racial inequity in schools.

(5) **Being interdisciplinary.** The final tenet of CRT research is to be interdisciplinary. CRT scholars believe that the world is multi-dimensional, and similarly, that research about the world should reflect multiple perspectives.

Over the last ten years, Critical Race Theory has started to extend into various disciplines, including education wherein it heightens awareness about racism and educational inequity. Toward the last decade of the twentieth century, key education scholars and leaders such as Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) and Daniel Solorzano (1997) began examining CRT as a useful conceptual framework for theorizing and understanding race and racism in education (Ladson-Billings 2013). In an effort to clearly assert what critical theory is
and is not, Ladson-Billings (2013), citing Delgado and Stefancic (2001), identifies the following hallmarks of Critical Race Theory: the belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrant, in US society; interest convergence; race as a social construction; intersectionality and anti-essentialism; and voice or counter-narrative. These five tenets are useful in engaging the voices of People of Color in challenging racism.

**Perspectives and insights**

The plurality of individuals leads inexorably to a diversity of perspectives in any classroom. A student’s experience is not merely the practice of existence within and from classroom to classroom; indeed the many before and after school offerings (extra-curricular, in the argot) in sports and arts spaces offer opportunity to build relationships with peers and faculty. According to Park, “…the diversity of a student’s precollege friendship group was a significant predictor of interracial friendship in the fourth year of college” (Park, 2014, p. 654). This observation is not groundbreaking perhaps, but it is a significant reason to encourage investment and engagement by Students of Color in arts programs in high schools. Duckworth, Allen, and Williams identify six skills that high-school students acquire when participating in a theater arts “peace education” program:

- Think systemically and strategically,
- increased empathy
- the meaning of diversity,
- relationship and community building,
- creative self-expression
- personal to social transformation (Duckworth, Allen, and Williams, 2012).

A creative and socially aware process can bring a diverse group of students together. The importance of empathy seems universal but may be effortlessly forgotten in favor of producing a
show. CRT affirms the primacy of empathy, as relationship building is essential to the progress of community building.

Except for elite independent boarding schools, most secondary institutions rely on their geography when seeking students. Likewise, the local or neighborhood school model has been a perennial American convention. Hiring of staff, in contrast, invites broader access to national and international candidates. Yet, there remains a dearth of Teachers of Color in institutions whether the student population is a primarily White institution, or racially and ethnically diverse. The relative low numbers of Teachers of Color, despite a steady increase in representation over the past 25 years persists: e.g., Teachers of Color in 1987–1988 were 12.4% of the teaching workforce, 327,200 in total; in 2011–2012, they were 17.3% of the teaching workforce, 666,200 in total representation (Ingersoll and Merrill 2017). This smaller proportional representation in the teacher populace often positions Teachers of Color at the margins and contributes to difficulty in extending and integrating their shared knowledge within the field of education. The dominant narrative with respect to teachers and the teaching profession centers on a White female audience despite the increasing attention to Teachers of Color through various platforms (e.g., The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce; U.S. Department of Education 2016) (Sleeter, 2017). One example of the inadequacy of centering the broader field’s teacher development concerns is that school systems dismiss the culturally and linguistically diverse pedagogical perspectives and practices of Teachers of Color. To speak to this obstacle, cooperative stances are regularly taken up to disassemble and re-form conventional conversations in order to move social justice work forward. For Teachers of Color, this process of re-forming involves opposing the sidelining of nondominant standpoints of education and knowledge acquisition (Gist 2014).
One avenue that highlights nondominant perspectives is research. Research on Teachers of Color (TOC) has highlighted scholarship, leadership, and instructional strengths for students, as well as high-expectations (Irvine 2003). Teachers of Color possess an “equity mindset” and actively address race and racism in the classroom (Grissom and Redding 2016; Villegas and Irvine 2010), serve as racial and linguistic bridge builders (Villegas and Davis 2008), and have a meaningful sway on academic and non-academic approaches (Dee 2004; Eddy and Easton-Brooks 2011; Egalite et al. 2015). In supporting Students of Color, institutions should strive for positive racial climate to combat deficit thinking and racial microaggressions. Byrd and Chavous (2011) confirm that students who perceive positive attitudes around race and from teachers and their staff reported a higher intrinsic motivation and were more likely to succeed.

**Students of Color in Predominantly White Institutions**

Students of Color at independent schools often experience tension between their racial identity and the culture of the school. For example, Students of Color experience microaggressions, subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward People of Color often automatically or unconsciously as a result of deficit thinking in administrators, teachers and peers (Yosso, 2001). This racial dissonance can and often does negatively impact their feelings of belonging to the school. Because belonging is strongly correlated to positive social and academic outcomes, it is essential to query and understand how students create and maintain connections to their schools and the classes and activities they encounter everyday (Allen et al., 2015; Goodenow, 1993; Hughes, et al. 2016).

The literature tells us that a student’s sense of community and their reciprocal membership to an institution is important for their engagement, their vigorous participation, and their commitment to school. “If students do not initially identify with the inherent significance or
worth of school, then they are less likely to express the desire to become a part of the school community” (Booker, 2006, pg. 5). Further, how the school environment includes or alienates students of particular backgrounds reinforces an absence of belonging. Engagement rises when students see themselves as important to the community (Booker, 2006; Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000). Numerous situational and systemic inconsistencies in the experiences of Students of Color provokes this inhibition to or absence of belonging. Scholars identify the following: disproportionate discipline against Students of Color; distance from culturally relevant experiences, resources, and needs; and lack of representation in the student body and faculty as key inhibitions to connecting fully with learning institutions (Allen et al., 2015; Hall and Stevenson, 2007; Hughes, et al. 2016). Supportive and collaborative teachers (which might include diverse faculty representation,) along with positive racial messages and multicultural perspectives will all contribute to a greater connectedness for Students of Color in independent primary and secondary schools (Allen et al., 2015; Hall and Stevenson, 2007; Booker, 2006; Hughes, et al. 2016; Rosenbloom and Way, 2004). This study seeks to describe the perspectives of Students of Color who experience a lack of faculty representation in hopes of appreciating more deeply their experience. Segregation by race is an ongoing social issue in schools. Teacher diversity and agency are core to understanding the experiences of students.

**Segregation by Race is an Ongoing Social Issue in Schools**

**Teacher diversity and agency**

Over the past decade, recognition of and need for Teachers of Color has increased (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Villegas and Irvine, 2010). Teachers of Color comprise a mere 10% of the teaching workforce in the United States, and Teachers of Color are severely underrepresented even in districts that serve primarily Students of Color (National Collaborative on Diversity in
the Teaching Force, 2004). Scholars have frequently verified the paybacks of incorporating Teachers of Color in schools that serve Students of Color, which include amplified cultural knowledge, links to the neighborhoods, and greater community, and culturally responsive pedagogy (Kambutu, Rios, and Castaneda, 2009; Martinez, 2000; Quirocho and Rios, 2000; Williams, Graham, McCary- Henderson, and Floyd, 2009). Sleeter (2008) contends that when students encounter teachers from like races and cultures, they experience more racially and culturally pertinent and significant schooling. These cultural-education balances connect to sundry benefits, in particular improved equity for multilingual students, and greater postsecondary access for marginalized and underrepresented student populations (Cammarota, 2008). Although primary to secondary schools may frequently be places of racial, economic, and ideological hegemony, they are certainly also contested sites where individuals and collectives locate and deploy agency in countering the systemic and cultural domination of education.

Research on resistance has focused on student agency. It has examined the ways young people develop a schema wherein instruction is a generator of discrimination and inequity, and then engage in opposition against administration’s beliefs and methods (Aggleton, 1987; MacLeod, 1987; Ogbu, 2008). They can willfully repel the schedules or designs of schools, or cast off the traditionalist knowledge, social norms, and achievement philosophy of their school (Aggleton and Whitty, 1985). Conversely, students can subvert the social reproductive nature of school by deliberately succeeding educationally thereby opposing expectations of failure. Students can then deploy this subversive success as an apparatus for social justice (Carter, 2008; Solorzano and Bernal, 2001).

The literature speaks less about teachers' roles in the process of reproduction (Tyson, 2003). Principally, how can teachers engender agency in opposing racial domination in their
workplace? There are increasing instances of teachers resisting through critical and racially pertinent pedagogy. Teachers engaged in critical instruction create the conditions for students to acquire an analytical awareness about racial inequity, injustice, and systemic oppression. Teachers deploy critical literacy, reflection, and action to empower students to come to understand their society fully and thus emboldened to work toward change concerning social justice (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2014). There is no best or single means to employ critical pedagogy, according to critical theorists. The theory deploys via diverse methods and approaches toward the eventual target of social justice and a critical democracy (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres, 2009; Giroux and McLaren, 1986).

**Racism still exists for POC teachers & students**

_Brown v. Board of Topeka_ (1954) ruled that schools segregated by race were incapable of being equal, and students in those schools must integrate. Desegregation of these schools allowed students from marginalized communities admission to institutions with greater resources, with many schools serving only Students of Color being shuttered. The People of Color who taught there were dismissed. As there were White parents who still despised non-White teachers, a frequently disregarded unintentional consequence of _Brown_ was that many Teachers of Color were fired (Bell 2004) and were suddenly absent or marginalized in the schooling of Students of Color. The landmark case transformed only the law, not the racist mood of the nation.

The unintentional consequence continues. In 2004, The National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force found that 90% of all public-school teachers are White, and that more than 40% of schools do not even employ one Teacher of Color. As a result, most youth may go through their entire academic career with limited access to minority teachers, or in fact

Scholars emphasize that when students from marginalized groups encounter educators from similar ethnic and racial and cultural backgrounds, the more culturally relevant and meaningful their educations will be. (Villegas and Clewell, 1998). Research validates this. While White educators do not inherently comprehend the hurt of racism (Ladson-Billings, 2001), racial minority teachers are characteristically conscious of racial trauma and racism. Unfortunately, very little research or curriculum recognizes these racialized experiences and understanding.

As sociopolitical establishments of the government, schools reproduce the dominant cultural experiences, literacies, and norms (Althusser, 2001; Freire, 1970). These are potent institutions for the maintenance of class, racial, and gender norms. Through school resegregation, academic tracking, disparate race and gender discipline policies, schools contribute to the reproduction of marginalization of People of Color. At their guiltiest, educational institutions are the drivers in the school-to-prison highway (Noguera, 2003). Social reproduction through school cannot occur without the contribution of institutional agents such as teachers (Tyson, 2003).

Critical theories examining schooling have generally described schools as contested locations of social and cultural reproduction (Apple, 1982; McLaren, 2014). They are institutions controlled by dominant groups designed to meet the needs of a capitalist society by reproducing a differentiated workforce and an economically stratified society (Bowles and Gintis, 2002; Gatto, 2010). In other words, schools contribute to the raced, classed, and gendered hierarchies of the culture they inhabit and the procreation of White bourgeois dogma. People of Color
encounter structural barriers of race and class when they are segregated within a school via ability tracking or if they attend resegregated schools. (Kalogrides and Loeb, 2013; Orfield and Lee, 2007). Neighborhood ghettoization and ability-tracked isolation generates discrepancy in contact and engagement with knowledge when the programs and pedagogy diverge in respect to the race and socio-economic nature of the institutions (Anyon, 1981; Gatto, 2010; Oakes, 2005).

Implications for Performing Arts Pedagogy

Teacher training for support of People of Color in schools is still a developing field with implications for performing arts pedagogy. Implications for Acting Pedagogy present key methodologies for boundary awareness when working with student actors. “The theory [emerging from the study] suggests that the blurring of boundaries between actor and character may be a significant condition for impact, and that the actor’s ability to control that blurring may influence whether an acting experience leads to growth or emotional distress. Since some inside-out approaches to acting encourage the actor to use her own personal experience in building a character, thus facilitating boundary blurring, this theory has major implications for theatre pedagogy” (Burgoyne, et al., 1999, p. 157).

It is imperative to value the perspectives of Teachers of Color in teacher training. There has been a lot written about the need for People of Color in education. Thirty-six states have adopted policies since the early 1990s in order to enlist POC into teaching (Villegas and Davis 2008). This generates from teacher diversity curricula initiated during 1980s with funding by non-governmental foundations; the Ford Foundation and the DeWitt Wallace-Readers’ Digest Fund (Clewell and Villegas 1998). An impetus to build diversity in a teaching work-force first received national attention in the early 1980s. Academics, educational organizations, and teacher leaders forewarned the broadening social/racial gap between Students of Color and their White

Mercer and Mercer (1986) voiced this alarm plainly. They argued that absent substantial mediation, the racial/social divide they catalogued in schools would develop further in the decades to come. Consequently, Students of Color and White students both would only seldom encounter a Teacher of Color in the classroom. Further, Mercer and Mercer (1986) emphasized that the races and ethnicities of educators centers the distribution of power in American society to students in a White hegemony. When students do not see People of Color in professional positions but experience them over-represented in non-professional and paraprofessional positions, they indirectly understand that White people are more appropriate than POC to access positions of power in the culture at large. Teacher diversity supporters maintain that a democratic society dedicated to equity must not excuse exposing children to too few People of Color positions of authority in schools (“Excerpts from the Carnegie Report on Teaching,” 1986; Matcznski and Joseph 1989). According to Cole (1986), many Students of Color from socio-economically underprivileged circumstances may encounter few examples (in their communities) of prosperous professionals who racially and ethnically resemble them. These students gain distinctive profit through contact with Teachers of Color.

According to Egalite, students who are White also gain advantages through contact with racially and ethnically varied teachers (Egalite, et al. 2015). People of Color who work at professional positions connect the idea, especially for White students, that adults from racial/ethnic marginalized groups are positive fellow participants in a just and equitable society.

The centrality and power of Faculty of Color is essential for developing and sustaining powerful and constructive learning environments. Integration of spirituality to research is
essential to establish an anti-oppressive tone. Quote “[to] center equity in higher education, we need to embrace not only diverse bodies, but also the multiple ways of knowing and being (which include the spiritual) that are connected to these diverse bodies.” (Shahjahan, 2010, p. 506)

**Theoretical Framework**

This study will utilize Critical Race Theory to explore trust and connectedness in my classroom and its effects on my students. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define the CRT movement as a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. Although CRT began as a movement in law, it has rapidly spread beyond that discipline. Today, many educators consider themselves critical race theorists who use CRT’s ideas to understand issues in school (p. 3). CRT calls for informed theory and practice in teaching Students of Color. CRT can be the theoretical backbone to practice as an arts educator.
Chapter Three
Methodology

The purpose of the present study was to uncover the experience of Students of Color who encounter a lack of representation in faculty racial diversity in a theater program, and to describe how these students perceive this racial deficit, and finally how students navigate programs that do not fully represent their experience at an independent K-12 school in suburban Minneapolis. The associated question which guided this study was: How do Students of Color experience the theater and acting curriculum as a political space for shaping and expressing racial identity when their teacher is White? In what follows, I discuss the research design, the setting and participants of the study, and the data collection and analysis. The present study adopts a phenomenological research design.

Research Design

I chose phenomenology as the approach to this qualitative research as it focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the phenomenology approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular experience (Creswell, 2013). Typically, a researcher conducts interviews with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or experience. The interviews attempt to answer two broad questions: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situation have typically influenced your experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013)? Researchers may also employ other forms of data such as documents, observations, and art. The data is then read and reread and culled for like phrases and themes that are then grouped to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Through this process the researcher may construct the
universal meaning of the event, situation, or experience and arrive at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

**Setting and Participants**

The School is a Pre-K through 12th grade Episcopal school located near Minneapolis. The School is accredited through the Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS). Among other values, the School emphasizes character and service learning education as well as diversity and community. The School emphasizes a rigorous pre-college program. Among the academic and extracurricular programs offered are state- and nationally-recognized Robotics, Hockey, and Visual Arts programs. The school community is largely White in regard to race/ethnicity. Thirty percent among the student population, self-identify as People of Color, coming from a wide geographic area compromising one hundred sixteen ZIP codes. In contrast, faculty and staff are predominantly White; however, the Heads of School over the last several decades have been Persons of Color. As of this writing the School is in the midst of a strategic school-wide enterprise to recruit Teachers of Color. Finally, the School supports diversity, equity, and inclusion through clubs, affinity groups, and councils available variously to students, staff, and parents.

Early in the study I identified participants from the full cohort of 9-12 students engaged in the theater program during 2018 to 2019 school year. An invitation was made to all of the students who had participated in the theater program, and sought students self-identifying as People of Color to reply if they were willing to participate in a series of dialogues about their experience in the program. Although the researcher has worked with the participants, for the purposes of reporting the results of this research the participants will remain anonymous. From the group described above, eight students volunteered to participate in this study. Of those eight,
five elected to follow-through and meet for conversations. The five participants were one male and four females and ranged from ninth to eleventh graders; they have all participated in the theater program during the 2018-2019 school year. All students identified as People of Color; in particular, two participants self-identified as biracial, one female identified as multiracial, one female is transracially adopted.

**Data Gathering and Analysis**

I collected data with the five participants through individual, 40-minute, semi-structured interviews with the researcher. Please see the Appendix for Interview Questions. The interviews took place during late February and early March within school hours in a readily accessible conference room located in the Upper School. I asked participants to share their experiences and thoughts about working with an exclusively White faculty. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.

I applied thematic analysis to the interview data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Within each interview I first identified emerging topics and cataloged topically what participants shared. Next, I coded these emerging topics, paying particular attention to redundancy, emphasis, recurrence, saliency, and other cues for all five interviews individually. Next, I conducted an across interview analysis to identify patterns of topics in order to develop emergent themes from among the patterns; these themes constructed in the analysis process provided a description and an explanation of participants’ experiences in regard to the research question and purpose of the study. Participants spoke about their enjoyment in working and learning in the theater program; they identified their peers as a primary source of engagement; and they characterized the theater program as a positive and affirming community. Four themes emerged during this process and the results of this analysis comprise the bulk of the next chapter.
Summary

This chapter described the phenomenological research design, school setting and participants. Following this, I outlined the thematic analysis methods in brief. I will discuss four themes in detail in Chapter Four.
Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

Chapter Four introduces and discusses four themes that emerged during analysis of the interview process described in the previous chapter. I name each theme, explicate them briefly, and connect them to the literature. The themes constitute the labels of the four major subheadings of this chapter.

Results

As discussed previously, the purpose of the present study was to uncover the experience of Students of Color who encounter a lack of representation in faculty racial diversity in a theater program, and to describe how these students perceive this racial deficit, and finally how students navigate programs that do not fully represent their experience in an independent Pre K-12 school in suburban Minneapolis. The concomitant question which guided this study was: How do Students of Color experience the theater and acting curriculum as a political space of shaping and expressing racial identity when their teacher is White? Five students participated in this study through individual interviews. These students were 9th – 11th graders. They have various backgrounds from “lifers” at the school to those starting in 9th or 10th grade. All self-identify as People of Color, three self-identify as “mixed,” and one was transracially adopted. All have participated in the theater program at the School at different levels and lengths of engagement. I held interviews with these students over the course of two weeks in mid-March 2019 on campus during the school day during common free time. I analyzed the data using the Constant Comparative Method through which themes emerged. Analysis of the interview data suggests there are four concomitant themes in my research. However, each of the themes is distinct as each theme (unto itself) is part of the answer to how students experience theater
curriculum when the teacher is White. Moreover, the analysis showed the shared and contrasting attitudes of participants toward race and theater-making.

**The Theater Program is an Affirming and Uplifting Experience.**

Students characterized their program as an effective means of uplifting them and engaging them in meaningful activity overseen by qualified professionals. They affirmed that the program empowers them, fosters self-esteem, strengthens connections between peers and the school community, and provides a venue that values creative self-expression that works toward a common goal.

Duckworth, Allen, and Williams (2012) identify six skills that high-school students acquire when participating in a theater arts program. This section highlights and points to what Duckworth called “relationship and community building,” an essential learning skill for adolescents in any environment (p.92). It is through building relationships and community among the cast that the inevitable conflicts may be more readily resolved when they arise. The participants shared that they enjoy their theater program and are deeply involved in a reciprocally positive learning experience. Despite a lack of Faculty of Color in the program, the participants engage in playmaking, in learning aspects of acting and technical theater, and feeling ownership of both the processes and program. One participant stated that the program, “...uplift[s] every-single student regardless of who they are...”; others offered equally profound descriptions of their experience in the theater program with one 11th grader saying that in her experience, there are “a lot of compassionate people in theater.” A participant who left her other after-school commitments (two seasons of sports) to make a more concerted commitment to the theater program had this to say: “You can tell that everyone in the room feels safe, everybody is free...powerful, and [it is an] important space in the community.” Another said, “When I'm in
other clubs I enjoy doing those but I don’t get a sense of belonging as I do in theater.” A ninth-grade student, new to the program but a student at the school since pre-kindergarten, put it this way when describing her peers in the program, “There’s a common weirdness, no facade of greatness.”

The participants conveyed the esprit de corps that comes from working together on a production, from rehearsing to community building activities. The friends they meet and relationships they build are the ways they feel the program constructs a sense of belonging and community. The experiences of these students in a theater program without Faculty of Color is affirming and uplifting. As the program director, this made me feel really happy. My colleagues and I work hard to cultivate a sense of community through rehearsal and production traditions, peer-mentoring for new students, and normalizing open and honest dialogue. The five participants are broadly affirming of their positive experience in this theater program. These participants feel connected to the program and their peers. They are generally pleased with the way the program is running and with their experience of playmaking. I explore this sense of connection in the following section.

**These Students Experience Strong Connection to Peers in the Theater Program.**

Students went beyond stating subjectively that they enjoy the program. They were able to offer specific narratives about how they connect to their peers through and because of their respective involvement in playmaking at this School. These participant Students of Color are engaging in the curriculum, making new friends in the program, and building and deepening established friendships with both White peers and peers who are Students of Color. Although they are connecting through the shared experience of playmaking, and the mutual gratification that arises from that play, race matters when they build these connections. As stated in Chapter
Two, positive racial messages and multicultural perspectives all contribute to greater connectedness for Students of Color in predominantly White institutions (Allen et al., 2015; Hall and Stevenson, 2007; Booker, 2006; Hughes, et al. 2016; Rosenbloom and Way, 2004). In the above section wherein one participant described the common “weirdness” of her peers in the program, these students reported that the community building in the program acts as a personal bonding agent. One participant characterized it as a “really good community and one of the most welcoming that I have seen; you get brought in and you feel like you’ve been there forever.” That sense of welcoming acts as a connector for these students. Another gave this example of why she feels connected to her theater peers: “in theater program it is safer to not be perfect. You can be more vulnerable and open to make mistakes.”

One 11th grade female participant acted as a Show Captain for a recent production. The Show Captain is responsible for various duties including supporting ensemble morale, leading warm-ups, acting as student liaison to the faculty, and mentoring new or first-time ensemble members. In short, Show Captain is the student most responsible for guiding community building and connection making. She had this to say about leading and building connections as a Person of Color: “Nobody looks at me as ‘she’s not good enough because she’s a POC.’ The cast is receptive to my leadership [which is] a powerful thing for me to be a leader in a predominantly White space.” So, despite her racial or ethnic minority identity in this program, she found affirming and constructive connections with her peers. Another conveyed how she felt about the lack of Students of Color in the program when she spoke about connecting to peers. This 11th grade student said, “There’s not a lot of People of Color in theater and looking around and seeing a lot of White faces I feel isolated, I would appreciate more Kids of Color.” Another student had this to say about connecting to her White peers: “It is truly a difficult thing to not
look like everybody else.” In the context of the affirming and uplifting experiences explicated in the previous section, it is notable that these participants share that they still only feel partly connected to their White peers. These participants tell us that they are actively and deeply connected to their peers. Participants characterized their peers as open and approachable, offering help, guidance, mentoring, and just general commiseration. However, we see that race and ethnic differences persist in diminishing connections in this theater program. Ocha and Pineda (2008) report that students who experience a curriculum that resembles their racial background are more likely to exhibit higher levels of ownership and confidence in the classroom. Curriculum encompasses the course of study, the academic context, and the faculty. Here we see that for these participants the lack of representation in the program inhibits connection. Likewise, and as explored in the next section, the White-only faculty can hamper deep and ongoing connections.

The Absence of Representation in the Faculty is Keenly Felt.

Whereas participants felt strong connections to their peers in a positive and affirming theater program, they also expressed clearly that their racial and ethnic identity as People of Color positioned them differently from their peers. Despite this, they are still engaged members of the program. This peer connectivity with White peers but especially with other Students of Color, offers them some reward in the foundation of support. Where this connectivity and their affirming experience begins to falter is in the realm of faculty representation.

Mercer and Mercer (1986) emphasized that the races and ethnicities of educators centers the distribution of power in American society to students in a White hegemony. When students do not see People of Color in professional positions, they indirectly understand that White people are more appropriate than People of Color to access positions of power in the culture at large.
This was the core question for this study, and the stories that these students shared are enlightening. When asked directly about the lack of People of Color in the faculty one student said, “It is different because there are no Faculty of Color in theater program. I have felt uncomfortable when I have a concern about race in show/casting.” She went on to describe the lack of connection and barriers to easy or immediate connection with White faculty. Here she related the core of the issue as I see it; these participants who have concerns about the curriculum are at a greater deficit to discuss these issues openly with White faculty. She said, “It’s not something I can ask of a White faculty member. I think, ‘maybe I should be okay with it and move on’ as I am less inclined to unpack a discomfort with White faculty.” One 10th grade student detailed the difference between her experience with White faculty and faculty who are People of Color, “I can connect more with teachers or faculty who are POC and I can to talk them about different problems I’m having with my skin color.” Another participant addressed the issue and spoke of the White theater director’s responsibility in working on shows that touch on race or address issues of race. She said it is essential to have the outlook of a director who is a Person of Color. She commented, “It’s not your perspective. It would help to have a perspective of someone who is facing it.” This sentiment was echoed and extended from another participant who said, “If it was a POC [as director] I would probably take into account everything they say because you belong more.”

All participants expressed in some form or another a clear void in their experience due to a lack of representation in the theater faculty. Moreover, even a participant who said that lack of representation “doesn’t really affect me” expressed a desire to see People of Color on faculty because, “Kids of Color might feel more comfortable.” This reflects back to what we know of the role of People of Color in education. Teachers of Color possess an “equity mindset” and actively
address race and racism in the classroom (Grissom and Redding 2016; Villegas and Irvine 2010),
serve as racial and linguistic bridge builders (Villegas and Davis 2008), and have a meaningful
sway on academic and non-academic approaches (Dee 2004; Eddy and Easton-Brooks 2011;
Egalite et al. 2015). Participants touched on these topics and shared that none of these things are
approachable with White faculty even when the program and curriculum are uplifting and
affirming. The student who hoped for more Students of Color to join the program directly
addresses what we know about the boost to engagement when students see themselves as
important to the community (Booker, 2006; Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000). No matter how
robustly uplifting and affirming a theater program is, when the students don’t see themselves
reflected and represented in the faculty, they feel a void in their experience.

**The Void of Faculty Representation Resonates Throughout.**

Resonance emerged as a key finding in this study. I’ll begin this section with an
explication of why I chose resonance to describe these participants’ experiences. In terms of
audio quality, resonance describes the intensification of a musical tone by supplementary
vibration. (“Definition of RESONANCE,” n.d.) This is describing how sounds act on each other
in complementary ways to create new sounds. One may also use resonance to describe how
experiences or media affect one personally; a novel may resonate with the reader. Resonance
best describes the experiences of these participants because the void of faculty representation
acts on their daily engagement with the theater program. In short, the voids in representation and
connection as named above echo or reverberate through the participants’ program engagement,
informing their relationships and involvement broadly.

Critical Race Theory names the centrality of experiential knowledge, i.e., personal story,
as a key tenet. In this study (grounded in CRT) the student story centers as core to answering the
research question. Participants’ stories, as responses to questioning, characterized the theater program as deeply personal. Relationships establish quickly through mutual investment in the production process, and close work on stage and in-rehearsal activities offer opportunities to grow and deepen these relationships. Participants talked about theater program peers as “more understanding” than other school peers, and that they feel more comfortable in the program than they do in other learning spaces. All disclosed that they are willing to be fully present in the program. However, when it came to applying these same experiences to the relationships with White faculty, students were sharp in their naming of a distinct void. Participants said the program “uplifts” and that it is “powerful” and “empowering” yet said that they felt uncomfortable or unable to discuss issues of race with White faculty; this is a distinctly disempowering state of being. One student named this void in relationship to her connections to Faculty of Color in other classes, “I have an extra level of comfort with them that I don’t have with White teachers.” Another student said that she feels that if a teacher is a Person of Color, she would probably consider everything they say more fully. She added that she belongs more immediately but that it takes more effort to get into a belonging state with White faculty. Another participant illustrated his experience with faculty who are People of Color thusly, “…[the] rapport is different and I have an immediate connection and build relationships far quicker.”

The White-only faculty in this theater program is constructing a void of experience for these participants. Sleeter (2008) contends that when students encounter teachers from like races and cultures, they experience more racially and culturally pertinent and significant schooling. These results support a counter-perspective, namely, that via an absence of representative faculty diminishes the student experience. Despite being leaders in their theater community and naming
it one of the safest and most welcoming activities they participate in; this lack of representation affects these students; the void resonates in their engagement and in their ability to connect to their directors and other faculty.

**Summary**

Analysis of the interview data suggested there are four concomitant themes in my research. However, each of the themes was distinct as each theme unto itself is part of the answer to how students experience theater curriculum when the teacher is White. Moreover, the analysis showed the shared and contrasting attitudes of participants towards race and theater making. Participants experienced a noticeable absence resulting from the lack of People of Color in the faculty of their theater program. Participants in this study expressed their positive experiences of play-making and learning as well as the affirming connections they made and built with their peers. However, they were acutely aware of the lack of representation in the faculty and thus were unable to make full investment in the program.
Chapter Five  

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to uncover the experience of Students of Color who encounter a lack of representation in faculty racial diversity in a theater program, and to describe how these students perceive this racial deficit, and finally how students navigate programs that do not fully represent their experience at an independent K-12 school in suburban Minneapolis. The associated question which guided this study was: How do Students of Color experience the theater and acting curriculum as a political space of shaping and expressing racial identity when their teacher is White? Five students participated in this study through individual interviews. These students were 9th–11th graders; no 12th graders volunteered to participate. The present study deploys a phenomenological research design. The following themes emerged: the theater program is an affirming and uplifting experience wherein these students experience strong connection to peers, and the dearth of representation in the faculty is keenly felt and resonates throughout the student experience. This chapter reviews significant findings, educational implications, recommendations for future research, and limitations.

Significant Findings

Participants feel a palpable void resulting from the lack of People of Color in the faculty of their theater program. Although participants expressed that they value the shared experience of play-making and learning, as well as the connections they make and build with their peers, they are acutely aware of the lack of representation in the faculty and thus they are unable to make full investments in the program. Four themes emerged from the analyses that characterize the experience of the study participants. Participants experience a broad spectrum of interactions in the theater program from seeing shows in the audience to working and acting in the program.
to participating as a student-leader on and off stage. Their connection to peers emerged as one significant theme. Connection for these participants blends their relationships to peers and staff, as well as to the program itself. Relationship building was thus named as a key benefit and an inability to fully connect to staff emerged as a void in the program. This lack of full connection to the program is in itself a result of the lack of representation in the staff and means that participants are at a loss when involved in theatrical learning and play-making. Resonance emerged as a key finding and is challenging to explicate. In short, the experiences named above (and the associated voids of experience) echo or reverberate throughout the participants’ program engagement, thus informing their relationships and involvement broadly. This shared experience in community building and maintenance connects to Tatum’s description of establishing mutual respect, and speaking from one’s own experience (Tatum, 1992, p.18), as well as Tierney’s admonishment to construct a collective culture from the varied attributes of many individuals (Tierney, 1997). Likewise, what these participants experience reinforces what Zimmerman (1991) says about how an inclusive pedagogy increases opportunities for student interaction during the learning process and creates a sense of community in the classroom.

The purpose of the present study was to uncover the experience of Students of Color who encounter a lack of representation in faculty racial diversity in a theater program, and to describe how these students perceive this racial deficit. This study offered student perspectives speaking to this aim. Namely, these participants report that in the absence of representative faculty, they rely almost entirely on relationships with their peers in the program to maintain active engagement in this program. Participants characterized these relationships as understanding, absent in judgement, and affirming of personhood regardless of race.
The second objective of this study was to describe how these students perceive this deficit, namely the complete lack of People of Color in the faculty cohort. Participants perceived this as a void in relationship building with adults. In particular they described an inhibition to engage fully with White faulty, specifically citing race as a factor. They reported more robust connections with Faculty of Color in other spaces at school and were able to contrast those relationships with the White theater faculty. Participants delineated their reticence to address issues in the theater program such as casting and play choices that touch on race, both items that are the responsibility of the faculty. Gratefully for this program, participants related that the theater program is an accessible and supportive space; a space to learn and to connect with peers that provides affirming as well as educative and creative opportunities. Additionally, participants are self-selecting to join and then to persist in this program due to their dedication to theater as an art form and as an opportunity. They reported that through love of the work they are able to supersede hesitations about lack of representation in the faculty.

**Educational Implications**

Two implications arose from the above. Namely that a theater program must have Faculty of Color on staff in order to meet the needs of Students of Color. In the broadest and yet most personal terms, diversity is an asset and where we find a lack of diversity we experience a great privation. Faculty and staff who more closely mirror the demographics of their classrooms and theater spaces bring numerous educational benefits, including more culturally responsive instruction, greater student expectations, and perspectives that counter negative stereotypes. No doubt the educational institutions of U.S. Pre K-12 schools, colleges, and universities also benefit from faculty diversity because diversity enriches educational experiences and fosters creativity and the type of forward thinking that is essential for collaborative playmaking. If our
institutions of learning are to maintain inclusive, supportive spaces where all feel connected, then we need to leverage the inherent asset of a diverse population and draw upon the talent of all of our people, not just a select group of them.

A second implication this study revealed is that the theater program is doing what it is supposed to do, namely, it is creating a positive and affirming space for Students of Color to learn and to connect with peers in unique and genuine ways.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Gathering, recording, and analyzing the experiences of my students was a powerfully humbling experience. I undoubtedly benefited in our conversations from an established intimacy; we knew each other and I was able to engage with them on levels deeper than an independent researcher might have. However, the literature would benefit from a similar study administered by a Person of Color. The key finding that an absence of faculty of Color hampers these participants in connecting to the program fully implies that they have more to say and would be more at ease sharing with a researcher who shares more of their lived experience. Likewise, a study that discovers the attitudes and perspectives of White students is a worthy corollary to the information gathered in this study.

**Limitations**

The scope and timeline for this study limited me. This school has a limited number of Students of Color engaged in the theater program. Thus, I was never going to be able to interview a large cohort of over twenty students which would add deeper perspective to the results. Moreover, as I was on a tight timeline to analyze, draft, and submit this study for review, I was unable to interview students over the course of several months, gauging their attitudes over time. I was also limited personally. The limitation most present for me is that I am the specific
teacher and stage director for these participants, and, I am White. As stated above, I believe that these factors limited my ability to engage fully and uncover a complete picture of these students’ perceptions, attitudes, and experiences.

Summary

For Students of Color, the absence of representative faculty has potential to diminish the quality and intensity of their connections to the program at-large. This study contributes to the literature narrowly as an explication of the experiences of these five participants. However, the implications of this work for educators is that recruitment and retention of People of Color in faculty positions in theater programs is essential for the engagement and connectedness of Students of Color in these programs. Thus, the findings suggest the importance of the presence of People of Color in the theater faculty as a potentially important point of intervention for promoting adolescent engagement in secondary school theater programming. More research is needed to further explore the impact representation in theater faculty may have on Students of Color.
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[https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0454-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0454-0).


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https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203938690.ch33.


Yosso2.pdf. (n.d.). Retrieved from  
Appendices
Appendix I

IRB Approval Letter or Email
APPROVAL OF NEW STUDY

February 8, 2019

Lynn Brice

218-340-2618
lbrice@umn.edu

Dear Lynn Brice:

On 2/8/2019, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

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<th>Initial Study</th>
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<td>Title of Study:</td>
<td>Performance Spaces as Safe Places for Students of Color</td>
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<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Lynn Brice</td>
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<td>IRB ID:</td>
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Documents Reviewed with this Submission:
- Carlisle HRP-582-Consent Form February 7.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
- Carlisle HRP 580 SOCIAL TEMPLATE PROTOCOL WITH INSTRUCTIONS February 7.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;
- Carlisle Informational Letter UMD Letterhead January 2.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- Carlisle Addendum to Consent to Research from Breck School - Research Communications Request.pdf, Category: Letters of Support / Approvals (Location);
The IRB determined that the criteria for approval have been met and that this study involves No greater than minimal risk

This study was approved under Expedited Categories:

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<td>(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.</td>
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This study does not require continuing review. The revised Common Rule (2018 Rule) eliminated continuing review for most minimal risk research approved on or after January 21, 2019. The elimination of continuing review does not eliminate reporting requirements or submission of modifications for IRB review and approval. Information about 2018 Rule requirements and investigator responsibilities can be found in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103)

You must also submit a Modification in ETHOS for review and approval prior to making any changes to this study.

If consent forms or recruitment materials were approved, those are located under the Final column in the Documents tab in the ETHOS study workspace.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the HRPP Toolkit Library on the IRB website.

For grant certification purposes, you will need the approval and last day of approval dates listed above and the Assurance of Compliance number which is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003).
Sincerely,

Cynthia McGill CIP

IRB Analyst

We value feedback from the research community and would like to hear about your experience. The link below will take you to a brief survey that will take a minute or two to complete. The questions are basic, but your responses will help us better understand what we are doing well and areas that may require improvement. Thank you in advance for completing the survey.

Even if you have provided feedback in the past, we want and welcome your evaluation.

http://z.umn.edu/irbsurvey
Appendix II

Interview Questions
Research Question:
How do students of color experience the theater and acting curriculum as a political space of shaping and expressing racial identity when their teacher is white?

Beginning with a welcoming and thank you for helping me with my homework. A brief check in how they’re doing & small talk about the semester, etc. A reminder of what I’m doing and what this conversation will be about. And then into the warm-up & questions.

Warm up

As a member of this theater community, what do you get out of it? What does it do for you?

Primary Questions
Part 1
When you think about classes and other activities you’re involved in at Breck, what’s different about theater classes or the shows you’ve been a part of?
   a. Follow-up: Why do you think it’s that way?
   b. Follow-up: So, is Theater different for you than other classes or experiences at school because you are a person of color?

Part 2
I’m going to shift now to ask you to think and speak about your experience having only white faculty in the theater department. Only you know this and only you can teach me this & I’m having these conversations because I wanted to figure out how this works for our students of color. Tell me about how the absence of faculty of color in the department influenced your decision to join the theater community.
   c. Follow-up: How does this work for you when your teacher is white?
   d. Follow-up: Is there anything that changes when you have a white teacher vs. a teacher of color, or even a teacher who looks like you?

Part 3
Having had your experience with me as a white guy (and with our other white faculty), and given what we’ve talked about today, what would you say to an entering new student of color about the theater community?

Closing

Is there anything you would like others to know that we have not included here about you or your experience in Breck’s theater program?

Thank you and good bye.