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Let's Talk About It: Encouraging Dialogue about Race in the Classroom

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Service Learning Capstone Project
Dr. Jeff Kerssen-Griep
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Abstract

In this article, I examine the institutional discrimination against immigrant students that exists within many school systems in the United States. Drawing on my own experiences with immigrant and refugee students, I highlight the impact the discrimination has on their learning experiences and self-identities and propose a solution to help local teachers encourage dialogue about race in the classroom. With the help of this training module, teachers will not only learn more about their own racial identities, but they will learn how to help other students grapple with racism and questions about race.

Let's Talk About It: Encouraging Dialogue about Race in the Classroom

Students attending public schools in the United States have more than likely heard the phrases “celebrate diversity” or “zero tolerance for intolerance” on more than one occasion. With the increasing numbers of immigrant students and non-English speaking students entering the public school system in the United States over the last several decades, administrators and teachers have had to come up with new ways to integrate the different cultures and languages of students into their curriculum and classrooms (Garcia, 2005). Research conducted in 2004 revealed that about one in 10 students in prekindergarten through grade 12 across the nation are English language learners, indicating that their numbers have more than doubled since 1990 (Gershberg, Danenberg & Sanchez, 2004). Promoting phrases similar to the ones above are one of the ways teachers have attempted to get students of all different races to “tolerate” one another. However, simply tolerating individuals who are different because of their skin color, race, language or cultural background is arguably not enough.

Although many would argue that education in the United States has come a long way since the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling in 1954 (Fishman & McCarthy, 2005), this proposal will attempt to show that institutional discrimination against immigrant students is still very prominent within the public school system (Fishman & McCarthy, 2005). While many schools have attempted to acknowledge factors such as race, historical backgrounds, languages and immigration experiences through programs such as Dual Language programs, English as a Second Language programs and multicultural education programs, merely acknowledging these factors is not enough to address the needs of immigrant children. According to Gopaul-McNicol and Thomas-

Presswood (1998), in order to fully address the educational and social needs of immigrant students, it is critical that we not only acknowledge but understand the impact of factors such as race and language on educational functioning. The lack of understanding by teachers and administrators of the varying cultures that exist within their classrooms continues to widen the gap between white students and immigrant students (Gopaul-McNicol et. al, 1998, p. 42). Additionally, the tendency for schools to normalize and idealize white, middle class, heterosexual experiences and world views excludes those who are outside of those boundaries and sends the message that being different is “undesirable,” (McMahon, 2007).

The remainder of this proposal will explore how the inability to recognize and understand the impact race, language and background have on the education of children has failed to prepare immigrant students to take advantage of the opportunities afforded to white children. In addition, the proposal will attempt to justify a detailed training module for elementary and secondary teachers designed to help them encourage dialogue about race in and out of their classrooms, and to overcome the idea that “colorblindness” will cure the racial discrimination that exists within and limits our education system.

Background

For the purpose of this project, I chose to volunteer at Hacienda CDC’s afterschool program, Expresiones. At the afterschool program, I had the opportunity to work with Somali and Mexican youth, ages five-12, and assist them with homework and any other issues they were dealing with. The program is designed for low-income immigrant students, and attempts to give them a warm, safe place to study and form positive, supportive relationships after school. My experiences at Expresiones prompted

my interest in the problem of institutional discrimination in the school system. Over the last several months, my observations of the students attending the afterschool program reveal that the needs of these students are not being met through the elementary and secondary schools they attend. Although my experiences with the students occurred at the afterschool program rather than in the classroom, the attitudes, study habits and work of the students at the program reveal that many of these students lack the skills necessary to succeed in school. In addition, their attitude toward other races suggests a significant degree of intergroup bias and a negative bias toward cultural differences.

One of the central observations I made while volunteering at *Expresiones* was that the children revealed a significant lack of knowledge and tolerance for different cultures and races. My first experience with this occurred on my first day of volunteering. Katie, an eight-year-old student, approached me and said, "I want you to help me with my homework because you are smarter than Muna and Chris." Muna and Chris, the instructors at the program, are both immigrants from Somalia and Mexico. They are both very smart and capable of helping the students with their work. I looked at Katie and asked her why she would say such a thing, and her reply was that I looked just like her teachers. Research suggests that the majority of teachers in the United States are white Americans (Gershberg et al., 2004). Katie's teachers are white, and she indicated to me that she has never had a teacher that was not white. The only interpersonal contact Katie receives with white people on a daily basis is at school, with her teachers. Because of this, she automatically assumed that because I was white, I would have all of the answers just as her teachers do.

Another noteworthy experience that revealed the students' intolerance for other

racism occurred on my fourth visit to the program. Monica, a 10-year-old Somali, created a chart and went around the room asking each of the students who they would vote for if they could vote. As Monica walked around the room she managed to get all of the kids riled up about voting for Obama and yelled several times about how much she loved him because he was black. She asked me who I would vote for, and when I told her I did not feel comfortable talking about politics, she instantly came to the conclusion that I was voting for McCain because I was white. "I know you're voting for McCain," she said. "He's stupid and you're stupid for voting for him." Monica's passion about Obama revealed a deep inter-group bias. She is clearly too young to completely understand his political beliefs and values, yet she felt very strongly that he should be the next president of the United States.

According to McMahon (2007), "Race is significant to the way we see ourselves and the way others experience us, and it is perhaps, second only to gender in terms of salient identities used in interpersonal relating," (p. 2). Monica's attitude revealed just how important the concept of race is when it comes to the way she observes and understands others. In terms of race, Obama was the perfect candidate for presidency in her eyes. This also supports Tatum's (2006) research which suggests that adolescents of color in the U.S., because of their minority status, are more likely to be actively engaged in an exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than are white children. For that reason, this experience reveals just how important race can be for elementary-aged children. If teachers are unprepared to help students talk about race, children are left without expert guidance to grapple with questions about race on their own and learn what it means to be a member of a certain group.

I spoke with Muna, an instructor at the program, about her experiences as an immigrant from Somalia. She said, “When I came to America, I looked and dressed differently than everyone else. When I sat down in my seventh grade classroom on the first day, I knew at that point that I was “different” than the other kids. And when I sat on the bus for the first time, people looked at me like I was a terrorist because of the clothing I was wearing.” She explained that it was these instances, which made her feel uncomfortable and out of place, that forced her to identify with race in such a powerful way. When I asked her about Katie’s behavior, she said, “these kids are dealing with the same experiences that I dealt with on a daily basis, and they have absolutely nowhere to turn.”

Because race is such an important factor when it comes to the way we see ourselves and the ways others experience us, pretending as though it does not exist in the classroom does little to upset the balance of power that remains in favor of whites (Fishman & McCarthy, 2005). Fishman & McCarthy (2005) analyzed a high school classroom of predominantly white students which adopted multicultural curricula and encouraged students to talk about their own experiences with racism. The study found that using these two recommendations to promote productive exploration of race was insufficient due to the teacher’s and students’ own personal white biases. Fishman, like many teachers, thought of his classroom as a neutral space for open discussion, but he later found that it was highly biased. His research revealed that what he was actually looking for initially was a very limited sort of give and take, and discussions that followed his ways of thinking, not conversations that allowed for oppositional discourse. “Fishman’s failure to see his own white privilege made it impossible for him to recognize

the ways that the preferred language and manner of debate in the classroom worked to the advantage of the white students,” (Fishman & McCarthy, 2005). Similarly, the white students in the classroom invoked the “color and power evasive tale,” which attempts to say that although whites thought themselves superior to people of color in the past, the times have changed and everyone is now being treated equally (Fishman & McCarthy, 2005). This type of “colorblindness” discussion aggravated the students of color in the classroom, who argued that they do not enjoy the same privileges as white people do today. After analyzing the conversations that occurred in the classroom, Fishman et al. found that the students were as far apart in the end of the conversation as they were at the beginning.

A similar study conducted by Vaught and Castagno (2008), which examined teacher attitudes toward whiteness and white privilege, found that the majority of teachers interviewed expressed a resistance to the concept of white privilege, therefore failing to recognize the ways in which power over others benefits whites individually and collectively. Those who did identify racism and white privilege as a problem in the schools attributed them to problems of individual teachers. Their attitudes revealed “a collective misconception in the creation of and response to the larger, collective structural practices of the district,” (Vaught et al., 2008, p. 9). In an attempt to respond to a persistent racialized achievement gap in the Jericho and Zion school districts, both districts adopted professional development trainings aimed at increasing racial, ethnic and cultural awareness among teachers. However, the study revealed that while the trainings raised individual awareness of racism, they failed because the teachers felt as if they were being held singularly responsible for the problems that exist within the

structure. Vaught et al. (2008) concluded that the trainings “reflected the district’s liberal interest in promoting a discursively moral critique of racism, but maintaining the larger structures that fail to promote true equity for children of color,” (p. 11).

McMahon’s study (2007), which looked at the intersections of whiteness, anti-racism and social justice in educational administrators, focused on 10 white teachers from three different school districts. The study was conducted through a series of interviews. McMahon found that when the interviewees were asked about whiteness and white privilege they showed serious discomfort and none of them identified whiteness as something embedded in the policies and practices of schooling. According to the White Racial Identity Theory, white individuals often claim to be “color-blind” in the initial phases of coming to terms with whiteness as a way of demonstrating that they believe everyone is equal (McMahon, 2007, p. 3). McMahon observed that the teacher’s narrow views of what constitutes racism, combined with their desire to project a positive image of themselves and their school community, rendered them blind.

Fishman and McCarthy (2005), Vaught et al. (2008) and McMahon’s (2007) studies reveal that teachers must understand the power and privileges that come with being white in order to promote positive and unbiased interactions and discussions about race in the classroom. Researchers of the White Identity Development Theory (WIDT) believe that White counselors and teachers are unable to fully comprehend or accept their clients of color without knowing themselves as racial beings and how race influences teaching processes, relationships and outcomes (as cited in Pack-Brown, 1999, p. 3). In order for one to be racially aware, the WIDT contends that “one must have an understanding that his or her racial group membership can and often does influence his or

her psychological (what one thinks about race), emotional (what one feels about race), and physical (what one does about race) functions,” (Pack-Brown, 1999, p. 2).

The students at Expresiones spend hours each week with white teachers who do not look at themselves in terms of race. Unlike many of their students, these white teachers do not have to view themselves in terms of race because they are not constantly reminded of their race on a daily basis. Therefore, the following plan details a training module for teachers that should enable them not only to be racially aware, but also to encourage dialogue about race in their classrooms. If teachers and students are able to successfully talk about race and racism together, they will achieve a deeper understanding of racial differences as well as their own personal racial identities.

Proposed Approach and Work Plan

The following proposed plan will address both the needs of the teachers and instructors of public elementary schools as well as the needs of recent immigrant students attempting to assimilate and become successful in their new surroundings. The plan maintains a central focus on recent immigrant students rather than non-English speaking students. While both groups experience a similar number of problems, according to Gershberg et al. (2004), “it is clear that there are particular challenges--academic and social--arising from teaching recent immigrants, and these challenges are distinct in many ways from the challenges of teaching English language learners--from translation to social welfare needs,” (p. 92). Therefore, the proposal will maintain a narrower focus by focusing primarily on recent immigrant students.

In an attempt to target an entire school district, this training module will aim at helping all teachers in the Portland Public School District. Racism is a pervasive,

systemic condition and not merely an individual pathology (Vaught et. al, 2008) and therefore should be confronted at the systemic level rather than on an individual level. For that reason, this module will attempt to tackle racism by focusing on the entire school district and the classroom practices, school structures and district policies of the Portland Public School District. Vaught et al. (2008) analyzed the professional developments of two school districts that aimed to increase racial, ethnic and cultural awareness among teachers. This study found that the trainings failed to address the achievement gap as a structural issue, allowing an individualized understanding of the sources of the gap to persist. “The teachers and principals that attended the training were neither encouraged nor invited to think about how classroom practice, school structure and district policies might be interconnected forms of white race power that function in concert to perpetuate schools’ failure to adequately educate children of color,” (Vaught et al., 2008, p. 9). For that reason, the training module will focus on encouraging dialogue around the ways the school structure promotes racism in school.

The first part of the training module will focus on helping teachers recognize how race has and continues to affect them. Rose’s (1996) research reveals that “whites have to locate their own sites of oppression to see that both target and non-target are dehumanized by oppression, to understand that oppression is universal and to see that, on the receiving end, pain is not black or white or brown, or any other color. It is pain,” (as cited in Denevi & Pastan, 1996, p. 1). Every human being has experienced “pain” on more than one occasion due to their race and her research suggests that open dialogue about these experiences enables people to really understand the other side of the spectrum. Her research also suggests that while whites are good at identifying themselves

as individuals, they struggle to see themselves as members of a group.

The module will be conducted over a three month period and will be split into three-two hour sessions, with the first session focusing on helping teachers see themselves as a part of a group and understanding the ways race affects them both positively and negatively. The Critical Race Theory suggests that encouraging students to talk about their own experiences with racism in the classroom is one of the first steps to confronting racism (Fishman & McCarthy, 2005). However, Fishman and McCarthy (2005) found that this strategy will be insufficient to promote productive student exploration of race unless teachers are “more self-reflexive about their own white biases and have a heightened self-reflection about white privilege,” (p. 2). When teachers achieve this heightened awareness, they will be more successful in leading healthy, unbiased discussions about race.

The sessions will be mandatory for all of the 2,586 teachers in the Portland Public School District. Vaught et al. (2008) revealed that the trainings in Jericho and Zion were not mandatory and participation was not expected, and consequently, very few teachers throughout the districts attended. As a result, it is recommended that these sessions be mandatory for all teachers in order to promote attendance. A flyer could be passed out in advance of each session to inform teachers about the trainings and to encourage them to attend. Because there are so many teachers within the district, they could be split into evenly distributed groups based on their school location. Each group will include no more than 100 teachers. The school district will also have to hire several facilitators for each session. The facilitators should have a deep understanding of not only the education system, but of racism and white privilege. However, they must also be someone from

outside the school system so that teachers do not feel threatened or discouraged to speak out. Their main task will be to keep the groups on topic and to encourage participation from each and every teacher. The sessions will not be productive unless the teachers are willing to be open and honest about their own experiences with race.

First Session Description

When the teachers arrive to the first session, they will spend the first 20 minutes participating in a meet-and-greet session. This will break the ice and allow them to get comfortable with the other teachers and their surroundings. Next, teachers will be further broken up into four groups of 25 people and they will disperse into four separate rooms for brainstorming sessions. The smaller groups will hopefully make teachers feel more comfortable and willing to talk openly with their colleagues. Each group will include a facilitator as well.

The facilitator will ask all of the white participants to talk about the effects of white privilege on white people and the people of color (if there are any) will be asked to talk about the ways racism has affected their lives. After participants have had about 20 minutes to discuss the question with their colleagues, the facilitator will ask people to share their experiences and ideas and he or she will write them on large paper that is hung from the wall for everyone to see. The experiences will be split onto two separate boards, one with positive experiences and the other with negative experiences. The groups will reconvene in the main room for an hour-long discussion about what was discovered in the brainstorming sessions. The papers from the brainstorming sessions will be hung in the main room and participants will be asked to move around the room to look for similarities and differences that exist between each group's experiences. By focusing on

similarities and differences, teachers will be able to see that racism is bigger than an individual problem, but rather that it is something that all individuals experience, despite color, ethnicity or background. It is imperative that teachers realize this in order for the training session to be successful.

The facilitator will then lead a discussion about the similarities that existed and reiterate the point that racism cannot and will not be cured at an individual level. At the end of the session, teachers will be asked to write a two to three page reflection, for their own use, about what they learned from the session. This reflection will force them to sit down and reflect about their experiences rather than simply forgetting about it until the next session. They will be asked to bring the journal to the next session to use as a guide.

First Session Rationale

The purpose of this first brainstorming session is to get teachers to talk openly about race. Research conducted by Raby (2004), found that the respondents who participated in interviews about race held an underlying belief that by speaking about race and racism they created or reproduced it. Many of the respondents tried to present themselves as non-racist by not seeing race at all. “Even talking about examples of racism may be seen as creating it: perhaps by speaking about it, some of the girls believe they are giving it solidity,” (Raby, 2004, p. 9). These findings are significant because they reveal that many teachers may have a hard time opening up about race because they feel uncomfortable with the subject. That is also the reason why most teachers do not feel comfortable including discussions about race in their classrooms with students.

Tim Wise, one of the most prominent anti-racist authors and activists in the United States, conducted a session at the National White Privilege Conference and

offered a simple yet critical model for dialogue to help teachers open up about the effects of racism and white privilege. The session, led by Wise, was very successful in getting participants to talk openly about white privilege and racism (as cited in Denevi et al., 1996). His model offered a way for people to look at oppression head-on, and gave them the opportunity to recognize the way social oppression works. For that reason, the initial brainstorming session will follow Wise's dialogue model. "Talking directly about white privilege was the jump those who had trouble recognizing privilege and put up walls to keep out any feelings of accountability needed to make," (Denevi et al., 1996, p. 2).

Second Session Description

The first 20 minutes of the second session will focus on why approaching race from a colorblind point of view is ineffective when dealing with racism. The participants will then be broken into four groups of 25 (the same groups from the first session) for the next hour of the session. Each small group will be asked to discuss the ways classroom practices, school structures and district policies of the Portland Public School District both perpetuate and resist forms of racism. Participants will be encouraged to discuss personal experiences as well as observations about the practices themselves. Similar to the first session, the facilitator will encourage participation and he or she will write the shared experiences on the wall for everyone to see.

The idea of this brainstorming session is to help teachers understand that racism within the education system is not a result of individual teachers' poor teaching skills or racist ideologies, but rather that racism is embedded in the core of the education system. This will prevent them from feeling individually blamed for the problems that occur within the classrooms and schools, as they did after the trainings in Vaught et al. study.

For the remaining 35 minutes of the session, participants will gather in the main room for a larger discussion about the findings from each group. The facilitators from each group will give a mini presentation on what their small groups discussed to the large group and then teachers will be asked to share any similarities they see and to point out any overriding themes discussed within the groups. This process will give participants a guide to use as they discuss ways to encourage dialogue about race in the classroom in the third and final session. If teachers are made aware of the ways the system promotes racism, they can use this knowledge to prevent it from occurring.

An example of a topic that may arise during this brainstorming session is the idea that recent immigrant students are oftentimes stigmatized upon entering the school systems. Gershberg et al. (2004) suggests that stigmatization occurs when the school district automatically sees recent immigrant students as a deviation from what is normal simply because they speak a different language. “Stigmatization occurs through the process by which students are placed in the “ELL” category. It includes not only the literal labeling, but also placement in a language curriculum different from that offered to the native-born students—a curriculum that is often devalued locally by the school and generally by society at large,”(Gershberg et al., 2004, p. 100). If participants are exposed to topics similar to this, they will have a better understanding about the ways the system continues to discriminate against recent immigrant students.

Second & Third Session Rationales

The second and third sessions will focus primarily on the students’ experiences within the classroom and ways to promote healthy dialogue about race between students. Dutro, Kazemi and Balf (2006) found that “whereas there is no doubt that explicitly

raising race as a topic of inquiry is fraught at all educational levels, it is also necessary if children are to learn to question their own and others' assumptions about race and the underlying systems of power and privilege that prevail in the United States society" (p. 4). So, although talking about race may be complicated, teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to lead these discussions. Recent non-European immigrants tend not only to look different, they also tend to speak a different language, have very different cultural backgrounds from whites, and maintain different learning styles than those more commonly supported by United States education systems. Many of the students at Expresiones wear traditional Muslim clothing and are mocked at school because of it. It is clear to most that they are different, and acting as though these differences do not exist can have serious consequences on their learning and social experiences inside and out of the classroom (Gershberg et al., 2004).

Many researchers have found that teachers throughout the United States use the colorblind approach to teaching so as to not appear racist and to portray a positive outlook about racism to their students (Fishman et al., 2005; Juarez, 2008; McMahon, 2007; Vaught et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important that the first part of study focuses on reasons why this approach is not effective. Statistics show that there are large numbers of recent immigrant students that attend Portland Public Schools (Portland Public School District Report Card, 2008) and ignoring their existence is the too-easy way out.

Third Session Description

The third and final session will last three hours and will focus on the recent immigrant students within the school district and why and how teachers should promote dialogue about racism in the classroom. The first hour of the session will take place in the

main room with all of the participants. A member of the school board will give statistics about recent immigrant students, including the percentage of students in the school system and a brief breakdown of the different ethnicities that exist. Next, the facilitator will use Tong, Huang and MacIntyre's (2006) study on promoting a positive cross-cultural identity as a guide to share with participants seven ways to reach immigrant students and help them reach their full academic and social potential. The following are the seven suggestions:

- **Learn about the cultures of the students in your classroom:** According to Tong et al. (2006), an awareness of different values and practices promotes understanding, awareness and celebration of diversity. The study suggests that teachers go beyond the surface level (i.e. foods, clothing and ceremonies) to deeper levels of what it means to be a member of that culture. An example of this would be to find out which "right ways" in their group might contrast with expectations of American institutions.
- **Adjust your teaching style to match the learning styles of students:** Tong et al. (2006) suggests that culture may be the greatest influence on one's learning styles. Therefore, if an immigrant student's preferred ways of learning contrast with the typical learning styles used in the United States, this can negatively affect the learning rate and classroom behavior of that student. This is important for teachers to know.
- **Question whether a student's actions truly constitute "misbehavior":**
"Immigrant students often operate under a great deal of anxiety and stress and this pressure can result in emotionally charged responses," (Tong et al., 2006). It is

important that during assessment, teachers make distinctions between behaviors that are “disordered” and those that are “different”.

- **Consider whether a student’s failure to achieve is indicative of language or learning style differences rather than a learning disability:** Research suggests that differences in cognitive style between teachers and students may result in students being perceived as less competent than they are (Tong et al., 2006).
- **Develop personal relationships with recently arrived students**
- **Accept culturally based tendencies while promoting ability to be a “cultural chameleon”:** Research suggests that it is important for students to become culturally adapted to their new home but that they maintain pride and competence in their home culture (Tong et al., 2006). Teachers must reinforce the idea that the student’s home culture is accepted and valued by all.
- **Finally, keep expectations high:** Tong et al. (2006) suggests that effort by students is promoted by supportive teachers who create a welcoming, valuing and accepting educational environment.

After the facilitator shares these suggestions, teachers will have several minutes to discuss the information. Following this discussion, a different facilitator will share how these steps can help teachers lead discussion about race with their students. The facilitator should reinforce the idea that if teachers are equipped with more knowledge about the different cultures that exist within their classroom (as the model above suggests they should be) they will be able to help their students understand the differences that exist.

With the remaining time, the group will discuss how to raise the topic of race in the classroom. Wainer (2004) establishes several key ways to do this productively in his

study. Several schools that he researched used the following methods to encourage dialogue about race in the classroom and had success in doing so.

- **Role-playing:** This type of interaction puts non-immigrant students in the place of immigrant students for a day. The classroom is decorated in signage and written materials that are written in Spanish, and the teacher is a native Spanish speaker on that day. The lecture is done in Spanish, and visuals are used to help the non-Spanish speaking students understand what is being said. After the role-playing is finished, the teachers will lead a discussion with the students about the activity, highlighting the challenges immigrant students face on a daily basis in the United States. This promotes both understanding and knowledge about the differences that exist.
- **Promoting multicultural awareness:** Students are encouraged to do projects about their own cultures and those of others and to present them to the class. After presentations, students are asked to point out things they found interesting or neat about the differences in the culture. Students are also encouraged to perform skits, musical demonstrations and other forms of cultural demonstrations to the class. “Although these events may not make a deep and long-lasting change by themselves, they do serve as important “ice-breakers” and open the door to more sustained interaction and dialogue between members of different ethnic groups in the school environment,” (Weiner, 2004, p. 39). An example of this would be for the Somali students to give a presentation about the clothing they wear. They could discuss why they wear it and what it means to their culture. In doing so, the

students who may have thought it was “weird” before, can understand the true meaning behind the clothing.

Closing

As recent immigrants continue to enter the public school system, it is imperative that teachers and administrators find new and innovative ways to help them reach their full potential. ESL and ELL classes are a start for many school districts in the United States, but they are not enough to make these students feel welcome and assimilate to their new culture. My research has shown that schools today are not equipped with the resources necessary to do so. The teachers are not prepared to work with students from different backgrounds, there are very few resources available to parents of recent immigrant students and the teacher-to-student in the classroom ratio is extremely high. Additionally, recent immigrant students are criticized for being “different,” and oftentimes placed in lower learning tracks simply because they speak a different language or use different learning methods than those preferred by the teacher. All in all, there are many improvements that need to be made in order for recent immigrant students to have a fair shot at academic achievement.

This proposal attempts to challenge the racial discrimination that exists within the classroom and proposes that teachers not only have a better understanding of their own race, but of their students’ as well. Pretending race does not exist is not the answer to racism. Recent immigrant students and minority children are forced to deal with race on a daily basis. They cannot hide the fact that they have a different skin color or language than the majority of their peers. For that reason, this proposal recommends a training module for teachers that will give them sufficient knowledge about how to raise the topic

of race in the classroom. When teachers and administrators begin to see themselves in terms of race, they will be more successful in leading classroom discussions with their students. A key first step in ending the racism that persists in public schools today is helping participants have a wider and deeper knowledge about the differences that exist within the classrooms. The question is not whether the teachers are capable of making this happen, but rather whether or not they are supported in their willingness to go above and beyond standard operation procedures that are not changing the status quo enough to benefit everyone involved. The training ideas offered here are achievable means to make those inroads in Portland Public Schools' cultures.

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