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"I Am Not Alone": Supporting Teachers of Color through Affinity Groups

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"I AM NOT ALONE": SUPPORTING TEACHERS OF COLOR THROUGH AFFINITY GROUPS

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Abstract

"I AM NOT ALONE": SUPPORTING TEACHERS OF COLOR THROUGH AFFINITY GROUPS

MARISSA J. WHITE

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While research has indicated that teachers of color need to be better supported by building and district administrators to retain higher numbers, the literature lacks the best practices for targeted support specifically for teachers of color. This Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice utilizes a qualitative participatory social justice design to examine the efficacy of affinity groups as a viable practice to support and retain teachers of color. Through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework, this study also explores the reflections of teachers of color at a Pre-k – Grade 5 school in a large urban district in a Northeastern state. The teachers' accounts expose (1) their personal experiences with micro and macro aggressions these teachers endured from administrators and colleagues, (2) the specific type of support they are yearning for, and (3) the benefits they experienced from participating in the affinity group.

Through semi-structured focus groups and weekly reflections, the study results revealed that teachers of color required targeted support, including a safe space, validation, cultural understanding, and mentorship. Once the establishment of the pillars occur, teachers of color gain internal empowerment, turning into empowerment for advocacy. The combination of support and the desire for advocacy motivates teachers of color to desire to stay in the education

profession. Additionally, the study presents recommendations to schools and districts on how to

implement affinity groups within their organizations and navigate antagonism.

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Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your path. – Proverbs 3:5-6

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The recruitment and retention of teachers of color is a necessary endeavor towards promoting social justice and equity. Unfortunately, across the country, the demographics of teaching staff do not reflect the demographics of student populations. Educational institutions continue to promote equity and inclusion initiatives to strategize around recruitment and retention of teachers of color. However, retention of teachers of color remains the most significant disparity (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Dilworth & Colman, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). In addition, research suggests teachers of color express a lack of support from administration and other colleagues (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Kohli, 2018). The question of what specific support is warranted and effective for teachers of color is the basis of this Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice (ISDiP).

Background

Students of color in the United States will soon make up the majority of the student population (Schmitz, Nourse & Ross, 2020). However, the teaching force does not reflect the diversity embodied within this country. Having a diverse teaching force dismantles negative stereotypes, provides students with diverse role models, and brings a level of cultural capital to our schools, benefiting all students (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Kohli, 2018). However, numerous factors keep teachers of color out of the classroom: testing requirements (Ingersoll & May, 2011), lack of support and mentoring (Waddell & Ukpokodu, 2012), and lack of classroom autonomy (Ahmad & Boser, 2014).

Teachers of color are a necessity in the education profession. In the 2017-2018 school year, only 7% of teachers in the United States identified as African American/Black, 9%

identified as Hispanic/Latinx, and 2% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (Schaeffer, 2021).

However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), between the Fall of

2000 and the Fall of 2017, the number of Hispanic/Latinx students increased from 16% to 27%

while the number of European American students decreased from 61% to 48%. Demographers

project that the trend of diversification of the American student population will continue. As

students of color begin to make up the majority of school populations, the percentage of teachers

of color is declining. Most students of color do not have teachers that reflect their racial,

linguistic, or religious backgrounds (Moss, 2016; Schaeffer, 2021). Students of color need

teachers of color due to insider knowledge of similar cultural backgrounds and life experiences

(Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Teachers of color are necessary for our nation to reduce drop-out rates, close the

achievement gap, and compete with other countries academically (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Both

European American students and students of color need role models; adults they can relate to,

adults who carry cultural competence, and adults setting high expectations for them, pushing

them past their potential to succeed in such a competitive society (Ahmad & Boser, 2014;

Ingersoll & May, 2011). According to a report about recruiting and retaining minority teachers

published by the National Education Association (NEA),

>Educators who are grounded in the day-to-day experiences of their students and
>communities have more favorable views of students of color, including more positive
>perceptions regarding their academic potential. They frequently teach with a greater level
>of social consciousness than others, appear to be more committed to teaching students of
>color, more drawn to teaching in difficult-to-staff urban schools, and are more apt to
>persist in those settings. The research also implies that same-race teachers are more

effective in teaching students of their respective race (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014, pp.1-2).

Additionally, teachers of color can positively combat stereotypes by diversifying school faculty and exposing all students to culture, race, language, and religion (Ahmad & Boser, 2014).

Having teachers of color in classrooms leads to the social-emotional development and growth of all students. Students of color, as well as students of European descent, will benefit from having a diverse teaching staff as they will be able to interact and engage with teachers of color that may, in turn, result in helping all students to develop cultural competency, which is inclusive of the ability to understand and respect the beliefs and cultures of others. Cultural competency is also directly tied to social-emotional competencies such as social awareness. According to Domitrovich et al. (2017), students are more successful in life when they know themselves, manage themselves, take the perspectives of others, and make sound personal and social decisions.

Research indicates that educational leaders make concerted efforts to recruit teachers of color (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kohli, 2018). For example, government and non-government organizations such as the National Education Association, Education Commission of the States, and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education have put forth significant effort toward recruiting teachers of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Moreover, the rate of teachers entering the field of education has outpaced the growth of students of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011). According to Ingersoll (2005), the core of the problem is retention. As more minority teachers entered the profession, a more significant percentage of those individuals also left the profession. For example, minoritized teachers left the profession at a rate 24% higher than European teachers (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014). Thirty-

three percent of minority teachers left the profession after three years, and 50% of minority teachers left after five years of teaching (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006). As one example, the number of African American teachers shrank from 77% to 49% from 2003 to 2011 in Washington, D.C. (Layton, 2015). Teachers of color leave the profession at much higher rates than White teachers due to various challenges such as salaries failing to increase rates comparable to other occupations and overly strenuous working conditions (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). As a result of the decline in the number of teachers of color, a greater proportion of European American teachers took assignments serving high-poverty urban schools. Quite often, European American teachers exited these assignments as soon as possible, which contributed to an increase of the turnover rates for all teachers in many of where there existed the greatest need. In addition, the lack of cultural awareness from coworkers excluded people of color from their work environments and ultimately caused them to leave (Gomez, 2014). Research suggests that the identification of policies and practices through additional research will help to keep effective teachers of color in the classroom (Carter Andrews et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed in this study is the large percentage of teachers of color leaving the Parkside Public School System. In the 2019 - 2020 school year, 38% of teachers hired by Parkside Public Schools were teachers of color. However, the overall percentage of teachers of color in the district was 27%.

There are multiple strategies that educational leadership can implement to increase and maintain the number and proportion of teachers of color within school systems. Recruitment, the act of finding candidates of color to fill classroom teacher positions, is often the primary strategy. However, retention, the collective actions of keeping classroom teachers of color in the

districts and schools, is just as necessary as recruitment. Without effective strategies for retention, rate of attrition, a district's or school's loss of teachers of color, increase at rates for teachers of color higher than rates for their colleagues of European descent.

Through literature, end-user consultation, and exit surveys of teachers that leave the classroom, the prominent theme that contributes to the low retention rates of teachers of color out of the classroom is the lack of support from district and school administrators, as well as colleagues (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Kohli, 2018). Unfortunately, notwithstanding the current understanding of why teachers of color leave, there is little indication of what specific support looks like for teachers of color compared to European American teachers. One effective strategy, affinity groups, or groups created by a common thread, such as race, have been used to build a positive culture and supportive climate in various organizations (Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Additionally, many organizations also use unconscious bias training for all staff members to reveal micro and macro aggressions within an organization, a district, or a school.

In this study, the population targeted for support will be the teachers of color at Stanley Jerome Elementary School. The school is in a large urban district in a Northeastern state. The selection of this school for the study grounds itself in the demographic distribution of the teaching staff in comparison to the students, which is suitable for an investigation of support for teachers of color. Within the teaching staff of Stanley Jerome Elementary school, 55.3% of teachers are of European descent, 27.7% identify as Hispanic/Latinx, 14.9% identify as African American, and 2.1% identify as Asian/Pacific Islander. Table 11 displays the comparison of teacher and student demographics in the school, along with the discrepancy for each group. This study may be significant for other schools and districts interested in recruiting and retaining teachers of color to diversify their staff. Having strategies that support teachers of color will help

sustain the number of teachers of color in classrooms, therefore adding to the overall culture and climate of a school building and promoting the social-emotional needs of students of color, as well as European American students.

Table 1

Participant Racialization & Ethnicity

	Teachers	Students	Difference
Native American or Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0%
African American	14.9%	14.9%	0%
Hispanic or Latinx	27.7%	77.9%	-50.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2.1%	4.2%	-2.1%
European American	55.3%	3%	52.3%

The research elucidates the issues impacting the retention of teachers of color, including micro and macro aggressions, hired in hard-to-staff buildings, defined as schools with a high concentration of low-performing students, low-income students, and with the perception that these schools are unsafe. These issues include micro and macro aggressions, lack of autonomy, and lack of support (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Dee, 2004; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kohli, 2012). However, this study will engage with teachers of color to determine what specific supports are needed to keep teachers of color in the field of education.

Currently, Parkside Public Schools is engaging in anti-bias and anti-racist work through race and equity professional development for teachers and administrators and evaluating current practices and procedures that may hinder cultural competence, as well as practices and procedures that may increase cultural competence and true equity for students and the community through The Leadership Academy, an organization dedicated to assisting school districts in disrupting systemic inequities and creating culturally competent schools. As Parkside Public Schools begin to take steps to improve its staff diversity and inclusion through the state Workforce Diversity Plan (an initiative in the state to increase diversity within school systems),

the attrition rate of teachers of color is an area of concern. The attrition rate of teachers of color not only has harmful effects on all students, but The Learning Policy Institute also estimates turnover costs up to $20,000 or more for every teacher who leaves an urban district (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Undoubtedly, diversifying the teaching staff and committing to retaining teachers of color benefits all students, especially students of color. Students of color will be able to see themselves within a profession and have direct access to those professionals (Vilson, 2015).

Root Cause Analysis

The root cause analysis case study was guided by the theoretical proposition that the lack of retention of teachers of color is a problem of practice for a school district that can be intervened upon once the causal mechanisms are deeply understood and verified (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the design of this study collected data to inform the retention of teachers of color within the field of education.

An exploratory case study provided the platform to access this information. Yin (2014) suggests that evidence for case studies may come from many sources. Consistent with a case study design, the primary sources of information for Phase 1 of this improvement science inquiry were interviews with various stakeholders and documentary information (Yin, 2014). Through semi-structured interviewing, the study extracted insights on the perceived reasons for the attrition of teachers of color at the study site (Yin, 2014). The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average and transpired in English. In addition to interviews, the research employed systematic document analysis as a method of triangulation to seek convergence and corroboration of the findings. Finally, the utilization of methodological triangulation offered confirmation of the

consistency of the findings between the semi-structured interviews and document analysis

(Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999).

   Interviews with district leaders, school principals, and teachers. Interviews with the

school principals and teachers consisted of an elementary principal from the research site, that is,

elementary, as well as school leaders from surrounding districts. Table 2 **2** provides a description

table of the partners in the environmental scan interviews.

Table 2

Demographic Data for District Leaders in the Neighboring Districts

Participant (Pseudonym)	Role	Education Level	Age Range	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Role	Years in Education	School Affiliation
Obadiah	Director	Master's	45-54	African American	1	20+	Elementary, Middle, High Schools
Earl	Board Member	PhD	55-65	African American	5	30+	Elementary, Middle, High Schools
Ziyah	Assistant Superintendent	Master's	50-60	European American	5	20+	Elementary, Middle, High school
Aubrey	SPED Supervisor	Master's	37-47	African American	2	11	High School, Middle Schools

   Document Review. Documentary information explored was in the form of the Parkside

Public School district's strategic operating plan for the years 2021-2024, Parkside Public School

district's planning template for increasing educator diversity, Parkside Public School district's

statistics for recruitment, retention, and attrition rates, and Parkside Public Schools district's

2020-2021 Culture, Climate, and Equity Surveys. The researcher, therefore, used a consistent

protocol to review documents. Based on the purpose of the research, the areas of consideration

included (a) the goals and strategies the district has in place to retain teachers of color; (b)

feedback from teachers pertaining to support from leadership; and (c) trends in the district's

recruitment and retention efforts.

The purpose of investigating historical, attitudinal, and behavioral evidence and artifacts was to corroborate the same phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The advantage of using multiple sources of evidence was to develop converging lines of inquiry and enhance the ability to find conclusions that were more convincing (Yin, 2014). Rossman and Rallis (2016) explain that using multiple sources also allows the reader to interpret and decide the applicability of the case learnings to another setting.

Confidentiality

The researcher conducted the study with care and sensitivity by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the partners (Yin, 2014). The researcher approached the partners with respect and dignity and provided assurance that all information would be non-identifiable. Partners received an explanation of the purpose of the study, along with the study procedures. Additionally, partners received information about the process of the interview that included information about recording and transcription safeguards as well as measures for confidentiality and security through the storage on a passcode-protected electronic device. The partners were also informed that taking part in the study was not mandatory, and withdrawal could occur at any time without penalty.

Data Analysis

The root cause analysis case study was guided by the theoretical proposition that led to the lack of retention of teachers of color is a problem of practice for a school district that can be intervened upon once the causal mechanisms are deeply understood and verified. (Yin, 2014). Rossman and Rallis (2016) present a generic process for the analysis of data: organizing the data, becoming familiar with the data, generating themes, coding the data, interpreting, searching for alternative interpretations, and finally, writing the report.

Organizing the Data. The researcher used several methods to keep data organized throughout the collection process. As each interview was completed and partners departed, the researcher immediately recorded field notes on the End-User Semi-Structured Interview Protocol. Additionally, the researcher typed and time-stamped the field notes with information about the place and date of the interview, and partners were given a pseudonym (see

Appendix B

End-User Interview Protocol). Organization of the recorded interviews included information about the pseudonym of interviewee, date, and time after which storage on a secure and password-protected device occurred. Arrangement of the reviewed documents were according to where they were obtained, from whom, date of preparation, and purpose.

Generating Categories and Themes. The researcher began by reading through the printed transcripts for each interview, after which engaging in a process of extracting significant statements that pertained to the research questions, and the formulation of implications. Next, the expressed meanings were sorted into categories and themes using the literature review as a guideline. The difference between categories and a theme is that the category provided direction for the gathering of data while the theme emerged as a sentence, word, or phrase that described the subtler and tacit processes (Rossman & Rallis, 2016).

Discussion

Through conversations with end-users (current and former teachers of color), the root causes contributing to the lack of retention of teachers of color emerged, including (1) lack of support from district and building administrators as well as colleagues, (2) a toxic culture and climate within buildings and districts, and (3) lack of engagement for teachers of color within buildings and districts (culturally aligned feedback, development, and leadership opportunities). In addition, teachers of color often do not feel connected to their school community, colleagues, or administrators. The feelings of alienation, including being stereotyped and feeling a lack of respect from colleagues pertaining to educational expertise, take a toll on the mental and emotional well-being of teachers of color (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Root Cause #1: Lack of Support. The first root cause contributing to the low retention percentage of teachers of color in the Parkside Public School district is the lack of support from building and district administration. The Parkside Public School system creates professional development district-wide for all teachers. There are also coaching cycles led by literacy and numeracy coaches tailored to inexperienced and struggling teachers. The Parkside Public School system also requires all staff members to participate in race and equity training that is continuous throughout the school year. However, teachers of color identify lack of support as one of the top reasons for moving from school to school, district to district, or leaving the profession altogether.

According to Carver-Thomas (2018), African American teachers felt they were used as the disciplinarians for African American students and not supported in other areas of expertise. Furthermore, African American teachers also felt an overwhelming burden to support African American students due to the lack of support for those students within the school system. Likewise, Latinx teachers reported feeling inferior to European American teachers. Latinx teachers stated they felt criticized for the culturally relevant materials being used in their classrooms and for encouraging Latinx students to speak Spanish in the classroom. This lack of support from administration and colleagues adds another layer of stress and burdens onto teachers of color.

In the 2020-2021 Culture, Climate, and Equity Survey from Parkside Public Schools, one teacher indicated,

> The impact of systemic racism is rampant in this district. Between the rucks that mostly impact the BIPOC communities and the constantly changing curriculums that aren't as culturally responsible as they could be, our students are at a disadvantage.

We need to teach the students we have rather than the students we want to have.

(Gregory, 2021)

Another teacher expressed Black and brown students are still not receiving the support needed in order to engage them in the learning process successfully. As a district/school, we still fall short of this goal. (Janae, 2021)

Root Cause #2: Culture & Climate. The second root cause contributing to the low retention percentage of teachers of color in the Parkside Public School district is the toxic culture and climate within buildings and districts. Through literature and through end-user consultation, teachers of color express feeling alienated, believe there is little regard for their racial identity, and feel a sense of responsibility to challenge stereotype threats for themselves and their students (Kohli, 2018). Stereotype threat theory suggests that African American/Black students underperform due to negative thoughts of confirming the stereotype of Black intellectual inferiority (Whaley, 2018). This theory has expanded over time and includes all students and teachers of color. In an end-user consultation, one teacher of color stated,

Many of the teachers refer to our students as these kids. Or refer to our parents as these parents. It gives a sense that our students are the other to them. That this community (a poor, urban community) is inferior and not capable. That just because the children and parents need resources or are struggling with what they think they shouldn't struggle with that they don't care and that our students won't be successful. That hurts me, and I try so hard to advocate for my students and to help my parents the best way I can. (Amanda, November 2019)

There are districts that have been exploring ways of advancing cultural competency for all staff; Parkside Public Schools has been exploring this through the professional development of race and equity. All teachers and staff members that Parkside Public Schools employ are required to participate in the race and equity training. These meetings happen at the building level each month after district administrators have trained and experienced in race and equity training. The training includes book studies paired with conversations led by the administrator of each building. The conversations begin with a recap of the chapters required to be read for that session and follow up with the whole group and small group discussions. There are conversation protocols and norms established at the beginning of each session. Race and equity training or unconscious bias training often can improve student experiences and working conditions for teachers of color (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Root Cause #3: Lack of Engagement for Teachers of Color. The third root cause contributing to the low retention percentage of teachers of color in the Parkside Public School district is a lack of engagement for teachers of color. Research suggests that teachers of color can be renewed and re-empowered through engagement with like-minded and purpose-driven educators (Santoro, 2018). In addition to building and district support systems, engaging teachers of color to be a part of curriculum writing, professional development, and professional growth can aid in retaining teachers of color. Unfortunately, teachers of color have reported feeling left out of pedagogical conversations and receiving treatment as if their role in the school is used only for discipline. Additionally, teachers of color express concerns that European American school leaders and teachers overlook the students of color social-emotional needs. Collectively, these feelings are lead to demoralization, "a form of professional dissatisfaction that occurs when

teachers encounter consistent and pervasive challenges to enacting the values that motivate their work" (Santoro, 2018, p. 2).

Implications

The current study suggests there are implications regarding policy and practice. As mentioned in the statement of the problem, school districts need to explore and develop a culture around retaining teachers of color. After analyzing the data gathered for this root cause analysis, several recommendations are relevant to the school district as it considers retaining teachers of color, including race and equity training, culturally responsive mentorship, opportunities for leadership, and individualized professional development. These recommendations are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two in relation to literature and current practice under the strategies for retention section.

Introduction to Research Methodology and Design

A participatory-social justice design is the methodological framework for this study. A participatory-social justice design focuses on opportunity disparities and invites stakeholders into the design process to better understand the issue and be a part of the strengthening systems. Bal (2012) states, "Participatory social justice honors the complexity and diversity in the lives of non-dominant groups and explores the social, cultural, historical, and institutional processes that produce and maintain those outcome disparities and socially unjust spaces where minority groups from non-dominant racial, economic, linguistics, and ability groups are excluded and negatively positioned through deficit-oriented views" (p. 9). The lack of diversity within the teaching force is a social justice issue. There is not an equal distribution of races and ethnicities

of teachers within the teaching profession in the United States that reflects students of color, which has an adverse effect on students of color. Participatory-social justice research designs focus on opportunity disparities pertaining to race, ability, and class. This ISDiP focuses on the disparity of teachers of color in classrooms, therefore a participatory-social justice design will be appropriate for this ISDiP. Allowing students, the opportunity to have access to professionals of all colors, religions, and creeds contributes to students' social and emotional well-being and development. Studies have found that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color, students of color experience social-emotional and non-academic benefits, and teachers of color are a resource for students in hard-to-staff schools (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Allowing students of color to have access to professionals who look like them and understand who they are is also part of the distribution of opportunity, access, and privilege that embodies social justice. Partners worked with the researchers to create recommendations for retaining a diverse teaching force in Parkside.

Research Questions

RQ1

- How do teachers of color perceive the impact of the support received? – Problem of practice – retention of teacher of color

RQ2

- Are affinity groups a viable practice for schools and districts to use as support for teachers of color?

Research Partners

The target population was teachers of color at Stanley Jerome Elementary School. Six partners of color engaged are study partners through purposeful sampling. Due to the nature of the percentage of teachers of color at Stanley Jerome Elementary and the researcher's access to teachers of color, recruiting teachers of color to participate in this study was the strategy used to

gain partners. All teachers received an email explaining the study with information that the invitation was for teachers of color to participate in an affinity group for teachers of color.

This Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice consisted of interviews, focus groups, and reflection responses. Appendices A, B, and H are samples of questions used in interviews with individual school leaders as well as focus groups with teachers of color.

Significance of the Study

This research provided additional insights into the retention of teachers of color and the support needed to maintain a diverse teaching force. Through this research, the educational community will further realize the importance of a diverse teaching force and the power of affinity groups. In addition, people and educational institutions may also consider affinity groups as a best practice in the endeavor to address social injustice within school systems. Moreover, the analysis presented in this study conveys valuable information for future research that will explore the various benefits of retaining teachers of color in the classroom and the benefits of affinity groups.

Summary

Retaining teachers of color is difficult for school districts across the country. Literature tells us that teachers of color leave the profession due to being placed in hard-to-staff schools with a lack of resources, the negative climate and culture of school buildings, and a lack of support from school and district administrators (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kohli, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2004). The environmental scan conducted revealed leaders of various districts believe teachers of color need more support, including networking, mentorship, and leadership opportunities – a finding that supports the literature reviewed. This ISDiP aims to

find the significance of affinity groups as a means of support for teachers of color and their

effectiveness.

Definitions of Key Terms

Affinity Groups

Affinity groups are a group of people having a common interest or goal or acting together for a specific purpose. For the purpose of this ISDiP, affinity groups will be defined as groups used within organizations to bring people with a common identifier together (i.e., race, gender, religion, etc.)

Attrition

Attrition is a reduction in numbers, usually due to resignation, retirement, or death. For the purpose of this ISDiP, the term attrition will be defined as the reduction in the number of teachers of color in the classroom or district.

Culturally Informed

For the purpose of this ISDiP, the term culturally informed refers to the understanding of various cultures and ways of interacting, disciplining, teaching, and interacting with families of a community.

Engagement

Engagement is the state of being engaged. For the purpose of this ISDiP, the term engagement means providing teachers of color with culturally informed and culturally validating feedback, opportunities to give input into curriculum, policies, and practice, and intentionally developing the craft of teachers of color.

Microaggression

Microaggression refers to a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a marginalized group member (such as a racial minority). The exact definition will be used for this ISDiP.

Retention

The term retention refers to the act of retaining **or** the state of being retained. For the purpose of this ISDiP, the term retention means the action of keeping teachers of color in the same school for a more extended period of time.

Social Justice

Social justice refers to the equal distribution of opportunities, privileges, and support within a community or society.

Teachers of Color

The term teachers of color refers to teachers who identify as a race other than White or European American (i.e., African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian/Pacific Islander, Indigenous, etc.). The term teachers of color derives from the term "people of color," which was created by Black, Latina, Asian, and Indigenous women (Smith, 2021). The term "people of color" takes a political stance as it embraces unity among those who do not identify as European American, fighting against the political system built to suppress people of color.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines the existing literature around the retention of teachers of color. The literature examines the broader lens of recruitment and retention of teachers of color. The review begins by breaking down the importance of retaining teachers of color for the benefit of students of color who make up the majority of the student population. It then discusses the issues of retaining teachers of color and actions districts and organizations have taken in an attempt to increase and sustain the number of teachers of color. The review further discusses the researcher's working theory of improvement based on literature and includes a driver diagram detaining the primary and secondary drivers that hinder the retention of teachers of color. Additionally, according to the literature, the review proposes high leverage strategies that can be used to retain teachers of color. One of the high-impact strategies, or empowerment mechanisms, will be further discussed and concludes the chapter.

Impact of Teachers of Color on Students

Teachers of color are beneficial for the academic and social-emotional needs of students of color as well as students of European descent. Although research has shown when taught by teachers of color, students of color have better academic performance, increased graduation rates, and are more likely to attend college, all students reported feeling cared for and academically challenged by teachers of color, according to a Learning Policy Institute report (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Drawing on their knowledge of the students' cultural backgrounds, teachers of color featured in studies successfully established helpful bridges to learning for students who might have otherwise remained disengaged from schoolwork (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Promoting effective teachers of color holds potential for

reversing the persistent racial/ethnic achievement gap. Given that the student population in the United States is rapidly changing and becoming more racially and ethnographically diverse, there is a need for additional efforts to diversify the teaching force (Murray & Jenkins-Scott, 2014).

According to Villegas & Irvine (2010), many students of color from economically impoverished backgrounds tend to have few models in their communities of successful professionals who are racially/ethnically like themselves, so they derive special benefits from exposure to teachers of color. Furthermore, as role models, teachers of color are believed to boost the self-worth of students of color (Cole, 1986; King, 1993; Waters, 1989), motivate this population of students to strive for social success (Smith, 1989) and decrease the sense of alienation many students of color experience in schools and classrooms (Graham 1987).

Students of color need to see examples of themselves in professions and have direct access to those professionals. Villegas & Irvine (2010) suggested the racial and ethnic composition of the teaching force sends strong messages to students about the distribution of power in American society. For example, suppose students fail to see adults of color in professional roles in schools and instead see adults of color over-represented in non-professional positions. In that case, students implicitly learn that people of European descent are better suited than people of color to hold positions of authority in society. Students of color need to see examples of themselves in professions and have direct access to those professionals.

Additionally, teachers of color serve as role models emotionally and socially for students of the same racial and ethnic identities (Ayalon, 2004). The teaching force should reflect the community in which these professionals serve (Murray & Jenkins-Scott, 2015). Students of color need examples from adults who relate to how students feel and show students how to respond,

move forward, and advocate for themselves (Gordon, 2002). Teachers of color believe that teaching students of color successfully requires more than just mastery of the subject matter (Foster, 1990). It requires engaging students of color in dialogue that continuously questions and challenges the status quo (Foster, 1990).

Students of color are not the only ones that benefit from teachers of color. Students of European descent are also able to gain from having teachers of color (Anderson, 2015). Additionally, students of European descent will encounter and interact with people of color within their lives. Having a diverse teaching staff with teachers of color who are knowledgeable and competent is essential for all students' growth (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Dee, 2004, Dee, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Having teachers of color will help all students become comfortable with people of different backgrounds and will aid in producing citizens that are tolerant and able to work with others from all different backgrounds (Anderson, 2015). Additionally, increasing teacher diversity will provide students of color with personal and professional models of success (Ahmad & Boser, 2014).

Many classrooms and schools across America disseminate Eurocentric attitudes and beliefs through curriculum, standards of behavior, and policies (Ladson-Billings, 2015). Diversifying the teaching force will help to eliminate "one-sided portrayals of the world" (Kohli, 2012, p. 182) and eliminate the lack of representation in the curriculum. Studies showed that teachers of European descent were uncomfortable with having conversations about systemic racism with their students in the classroom (Dee, 2004; Kohli, 2012). Instead of addressing racism, equity, and inclusion issues and embedding them within the curriculum, teachers of European descent avoid these difficult conversations altogether. European middle-class teachers tend to understand diversity as a deficit to be overcome and often have low expectations and

fears about students who are different from themselves (Benz, 2017; Farag, 2021). Teachers of color are said to be able to tackle the issues of racism, equity, and inclusion by having conversations with their students. They are also able to contradict many of the stereotypes by being present and competent (Maury & Jenkins-Scott, 2015).

Diversifying the teaching force is a vital endeavor in order to keep the academic and social-emotional needs of all students first. The benefits for students of diversifying the teaching force include closing the achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for students of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), increasing social success for all students (Smith 1989), and aiding in breaking stereotypes of people of color in society (Anderson, 2015).

Retention of Teachers of Color

The factors preventing students of color from entering the teaching profession include low salaries and requirements to become a teacher (Rich, 2015). These factors were significant issues to getting students of color into the teaching profession. However, studies have shown that the problem may not necessarily be recruiting teachers, as the number of minoritized teachers recruited has doubled since the 1980s. In fact, the rate of minoritized teachers has outpaced the growth of minoritized students (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Instead, according to Ingersoll (2005), the core of the problem is retention.

As more minoritized teachers entered the profession, a more significant percentage of those individuals also left the profession. As one example, from 2003 to 2011 in Washington D.C., the number of African American teachers shrank from 77% to 49% (Rich, 2015). Furthermore, minoritized teachers leave the profession at much higher rates than teachers of European descent due to a variety of challenges, such as salaries failing to increase at rates comparable to other professions and overly strenuous working conditions (Ahmad & Boser,

2014). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2017–2018, about 79% of public-school teachers were European American, 9% were Hispanic/Latinx, 7% were African American/Black, 2% were Asian, 2% were of Two or more races, and 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native; additionally, those who were Pacific Islander made up less than 1% of public-school teachers.

This decline in the proportion of teachers of color resulted in the assignment of teachers of color often to high-poverty urban schools, which had increased the turnover rates in many of those schools. High turnover leaves many high-poverty schools understaffed and under-resourced (Writ et al., 2004). Minoritized students with high academic and social-emotional demands tend to populate these schools. Additionally, the education students in high poverty schools receive is substandard to the education in which their suburban peers have access (Hudley, 2013).

Another factor hindering teachers of color in the classroom is that teachers of color may know the consequences of racialized students receiving an insufficient education, which intensifies the pressure for teachers of color to be effective at their job (Machado, 2013). There are multiple methods to record and keep track of teachers leaving. Some moved from school to school (i.e., migration), some moved up and out of the classroom (i.e., not leaving the profession altogether, upward mobility), and others left the profession for another career (Ingersoll & May, 2011). The first two are not a loss to the profession, although still problematic in the retention of classroom teachers of color. However, only the third counts as 'leaving the profession.' When considering why teachers of color leave the profession at such a high rate, teachers identified issues with classroom autonomy, organizational management, and leadership (D'Amico et al., 2017; Irvine, 1988; King, 1993).

In 2012-2013, 17% of minoritized teachers retired, 25% left for school staffing reasons, 46% left for family or personal reasons, 30% left for other careers, and 50% left due to dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 2015). Of the teachers that left due to 'dissatisfaction,' 81% of those teachers claimed they were mostly dissatisfied with administration. Other reasons for dissatisfaction included testing, discipline issues, lack of influence and autonomy, poor working conditions, and poor salary (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Kohli, 2018).

Teachers of color are usually placed in hard-to-staff schools and encapsulated into the role of disciplinarian (D'Amico et al., 2017; Gomez & Rodriguez, 2011; Irvine, 1988; Robinson et al., 2003). This placement becomes difficult due to the lack of resources in hard-to-staff schools, which affect test scores interconnected to teacher evaluation and tenure for teachers (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010). This issue is part of the structural racism still embedded within the school system, making it difficult for teachers of color to want to stay in the classroom (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Teachers of color have expressed that their colleagues and leaders do not include teachers of color in "expert" conversations such as curriculum, systems, or student engagement. Additionally, teachers of color do not receive opportunities to enact leadership (Kohli, 2016). Schools and districts should be looking at ways to systematize opportunities to further their career into leadership roles.

Additionally, according to Dilworth and Coleman (2014), factors contributing to teachers of color leaving the profession were being disproportionately assigned to schools with large populations of low-income students, being subjected to student discipline problems, lack of resources, and frustrations with administration. Teachers of color in low-performing schools were 50% more likely to leave than teachers in high-performing schools. Finally, Ahmad and

Boser (2014) asserted that the number one reason teachers of color left the profession was a lack of help and support. The variety of reasons why teachers of color left the teaching profession are consistent themes within the literature.

Working Theory of Improvement

Root Cause Analysis

Retaining teachers of color in districts has been a significant problem since *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (Andrews et al., 2019). As a result, teachers of color either moved out of the classroom into administrative or coaching roles or left the profession altogether. Research has shown that teachers of color left because they were placed disproportionately in urban schools and heavily relied on to address behavioral issues of students deemed to be difficult (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Dee, 2004; Dee 2005; Ingersoll, 2001; Kohli, 2018; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Teachers of color that left the profession also claimed that lack of support from administration and lack of autonomy in their classrooms had driven them from the profession.

Figure 1

Driver Diagram
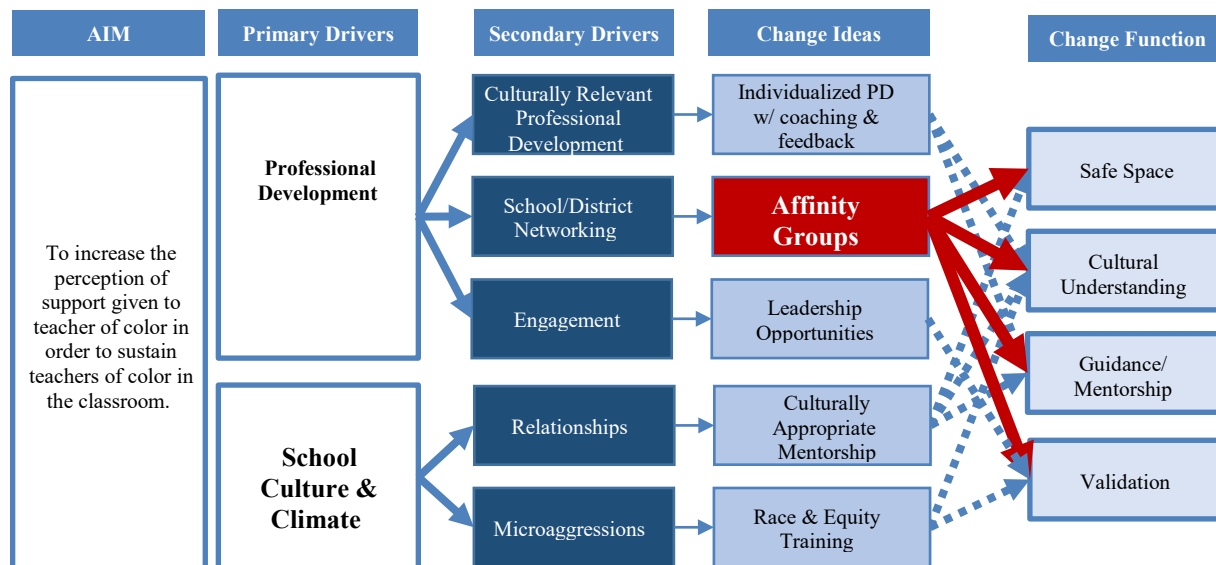
The research shows that teachers of color want and need more support (Kohli & Pizzaro, 2016). The driver diagram (Figure 1) shows support systems for teachers of color deriving from two areas: professional development and culture and climate, the two primary drivers. The secondary drivers that connect to professional development are providing culturally appropriate professional development for all teachers, school and district networking for teachers of color, and engagement for teachers of color. The secondary drivers for culture and climate include relationships and microaggressions. These drivers directly address the issues teachers of color are reporting when discussing the lack of support from schools and districts.

Strategies to Promote Retention

The strategies listed in the change ideas column represent suggestions to improve the primary and secondary drivers derived from the literature and end-user consultations. For example, providing race and equity training for all teachers, providing culturally appropriate mentorship for teachers of color, creating leadership opportunities for teachers of color, individualizing professional development with coaching and culturally validating feedback, and affinity groups are among the change ideas for supporting teachers of color. Change ideas ultimately support change functions, including teachers of color having a safe space, cultural understanding among their colleagues, guidance, and mentorship, and racial and cultural validation.

Race and Equity Training

Race and equity training encourage cultural competence, diversity awareness, and equity literacy across race, gender, sexual orientation, class, language, and other factors (Gorski, 2016). Race and equity training can help individuals within an organization to gain a better understanding of structural racism. Organizations that implement race & equity training

understand that these trainings can help eliminate discrimination and harassment, provide a safer workplace, and decrease conflict (Livingston, 2020). Race and equity training also educates employees on systemic issues that diminish the success of their racialized colleagues and the students they teach. Creating this awareness in schools helps to positively increase the climate and culture of a building as well as alleviate the feelings of isolation and being misunderstood experienced by teachers of color (Kohli, 2018).

Culturally Responsive Mentorship

Providing teachers of color with mentorship specific to their needs is a retention strategy identified as having a positive impact on the retention of teachers of color (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Carver-Thomas, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Mentorship for teachers of color is part of equitable practices that schools and districts should follow to retain teachers of color and build the skills necessary to support educators of color effectively. Research also suggests that culturally responsive mentoring is one way to help teachers put multicultural education into practice (Zozakiewicz, 2010). According to the Center for Improved Mentor Experiences in research, culturally responsive mentoring practices include mentors that recognize their own culturally-shaped beliefs, perceptions, and judgments and are cognizant of cultural differences and similarities between themselves and their mentees. Culturally responsive mentoring can assist all teachers in becoming critical thinkers about the cultural contexts in which they work. It also helps teachers in developing equitable and inclusive practices for their students.

Leadership Opportunities

Providing opportunities for teachers of color to be part of curriculum writing, policy changes, program development, teacher leadership opportunities, and leadership team opportunities is a powerful way to keep teachers of color engaged, validate the expertise of

teachers of color in the field and provide continuous growth for learning and development of their craft. In addition, leadership opportunities are an investment to recognize the sense of worth of teachers of color in the profession and showcase to their colleagues and students the ability of teachers of color within the profession.

Individualized Professional Development

Studies have found that teachers do not find professional development effective for improving practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon& Birman, 2002). The utilization of individualized professional development can support teachers with their individual areas of growth within teaching practices. Teachers of color also benefit from individualized professional development. Mentorship and leadership opportunities can be part of the individualized professional development process to help teachers of color grow their practice.

High Impact Empowerment Mechanism

Understanding the root causes of a problem and developing an intervention to disrupt the systemic structures perpetuating the problem are critical elements of science improvement. Because the problem of practice is grounded in systemic racism, implementing change structures to eliminate the impact of racism is a long-term solution that is not likely to create an immediate change. While it is imperative to intervene at the systemic level, it is also essential to provide teachers of color with mechanisms of empowerment to survive hostility, denigration, and exclusion.

An affinity group is a group of people sharing common interests with the intention of finding connections and support. Affinity groups are structured places where people within an organization can share openly, meet regularly, are optional, and are welcoming and private. According to Pour-Khorshid (2018), affinity groups provide the targeted and necessary support

to educators experiencing unique challenges due to their race. In addition, Pour-Khorshid (2018) states that affinity groups "collectively cultivate a critical, humanizing, and healing space for teachers of color sustainability" and help "navigate various positions within socially toxic education institutions and organizations" (p. 1).

Affinity groups are the one change idea that will help guide all four change functions: safe space, cultural understanding, guidance and mentorship, and validation. Affinity groups are private, are organized by similar interest, and are facilitated by knowledgeable professionals that can give specific guidance to help navigate the organization, validate the microaggressions and feelings of isolation staff feel in a particular organization, as well as provide tools and tips on how to advocate for themselves. Those in affinity groups have a place where they do not feel alone, can network, and build structures to help one another improve their craft.

Affinity groups must have a facilitator who is not a supervisor of the partners, preferably an individual from outside of the organization, to provide a structure allowing members to feel safe. In addition, the facilitator will assist in generating meaningful conversations and keep the sessions fun and welcoming.

Summary

The need for teachers of color within classrooms is evident for a multiplicity of reasons. Teachers of color serve as role models for students of color and give deeper insight into the cultures of minoritized groups for students and teachers of European descent. The literature also adds that teachers of color bring different perspectives and experiences to the teaching profession. According to research, teachers who mirror their students can improve student achievement by up to one additional month, thus helping to close the achievement gap.

The literature lacked information regarding what districts are doing to retain teachers of color and what supports are in place or needed for teachers of color. Much of the literature spoke about support for recruiting teachers of color, not the retention of teachers of color. There was also a gap in the literature regarding the awareness about the lack of diversity among teaching staff in schools throughout communities across the county. How does the lack of teachers of color affect a community, and are stakeholders of those communities concerned about the lack of diversity among teaching staff in their schools? Finally, the literature lacked information pertaining to how much the community is involved in challenging the lack of diversity of teachers within schools.

Based on the working theory of improvement, the high-impact strategy that aids in improving all four change functions is affinity groups. Due to this, the intervention of this ISDiP will be an affinity group.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter introduces the research methodology for this qualitative participatory-social justice study regarding the efficacy of affinity groups and what motivates teachers of color to stay in classrooms. A qualitative participatory-social justice approach allowed for a deeper understanding of teachers of color and provided a way to develop theory from the data to understand what support is needed for teachers of color to stay in the profession long-term. The applicability of the participatory-social justice design used for this study is discussed in-depth in this chapter. The research plan, including the methodology, study partners, procedures, method of analysis, and ethical concerns, are also primary components of this chapter.

Theory of Improvement

Based on the literature review and through conducting an environmental scan, the researcher concludes that through the implementation of an affinity group rooted in participatory action research design, teachers of color will feel a sense of empowerment within their profession, prompting teachers of color to stay in the classroom longer. In addition, affinity groups have the ability to guide partners to communicate their needs openly with one another and facilitators, build relationships that combat the feeling of isolation and allow for collaborative problem solving, as well as cultivate tools for self-advocacy (Noonan & Bristol, 2020). It has also notable that affinity groups can collectively foster a critical, humanizing, and healing space for teachers of color sustainability and help navigate various positions within socially toxic education institutions and organizations (Pour-Khorshid, 2018). According to research, the benefits of affinity groups include helping empower teachers of color by creating a safe space and providing racial affirmation, validation, guidance, mentorship, as well as cultural understanding (Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Kohli, 2019; Scott & Proffitt, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to implement a research-based intervention to mitigate one of the drivers of the problem of practice around the retention of teachers of color. Although it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of organizational interventions, process evaluations may proffer to answer the question as to why the intervention did or did not work as well as understand the impact of the outcomes of the intervention. Researchers can utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data to understand intervention outcomes and to evaluate the process. While engaging in research with traditionally marginalized communities, using a qualitative approach has a more significant potential to decenter hegemonic norms of whiteness that create and perpetuate the exodus of teachers of color from the profession as well as highlight the voices of those most impacted by the current system of inequality.

In order to understand how retention interventions can be effective, the research design must challenge current paradigms of whiteness with "social design experiments" (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) and "formative interventions" (Engeström, 2011; Engeström et al., 2014), that are likely to create transformative social change. Participatory action research (Fine et al., 2003; Whyte, 1991) serves to change the traditional power dynamics between the researcher and the researched. Partnering in research is a process that critiques the normative hierarchies of power that suppress alternative visions of possible futures. It counters the prevalence of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) that is endemic in the American school system's white space (Anderson, 2015). Additionally, it is a process that partners with the people impacted by the problem to create the desired social change.

Theoretical Framework

Using qualitative research methods with a participatory social justice design, the research partners, who are directly affected by the phenomenon of study, engaged in an opportunity to highlight the disparities of support and strengthen the practices used to support teachers of color. The methods and design of this study are supported by and intersect with the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT showcases the symptoms of structural racism and acknowledges the racial disparities that have continued since the civil rights movement. CRT asserts that race is a social construct and that racism is not the product of individual bias (Sawchuk, 2018). CRT is an academic concept that emerged from a legal framework in the 1970s and 1980s by Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado (Sawchuk, 2018). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) first applied CRT to education policy research by highlighting and challenging racial inequities in schools.

The CRT framework suggests that racism is structural and embedded within policies that systems are upholding, even if they are doing so unintentionally. However, as society begins to realize the inherently racist laws and policies that affect mostly marginalized groups, organizations such as school districts are addressing policies and are beginning to dismantle the structures that keep minoritized individuals from the same opportunities as their counterparts of European descent.

Although components of the education system are now addressing structural racism, there must be interventions, or empowerment mechanisms, that keep teachers of color in the classrooms while the system is corrected. Teachers of color leaving the profession is a symptom of the system. Allowing teachers of color to have access to mentorship, networking, being validated, creating a positive culture and climate within a culturally understanding environment,

and providing a safe space is the objective of an affinity group. Additionally, allowing teachers of color to share their stories through personal narratives gives power to the next steps forward in retaining teachers of color.

Qualitative research seeks to make sense of personal narratives and how the narratives intersect with one another. As such, qualitative research design intends to generalize a social phenomenon (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; Glesne, 2006). Qualitative research is a tool that seeks to understand the perspectives of individuals directly affected by the social phenomenon. According to Glesne (2006), qualitative research "contextualizes issues" and sometimes helps to "change social conditions" (p. 4). Qualitative research is an inquiry process used to understand a social problem by creating a holistic picture through words and detailed reports from informants (Creswell, 1994). By collecting, analyzing, and interpreting non-numerical data, the researcher will be able to understand concepts, opinions, and experiences of a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

This research aims to examine the specific support needed to keep teachers of color in the classroom and district. Teachers of color move schools or leave the profession at a higher rate than teachers of European descent (Carver-Thomas, 2017). The mover rate (transferring from one school to another) nationally consists of 19% of teachers of color who move or leave the profession annually compared to 15% of European American teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2018). If mover rates affect students as equally as teachers of color leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas, 2018), finding solutions to making conditions better for teachers of color – many who work in schools that are under-resourced and have an overall high turnover rate – includes the support needed to retain teachers of color. The main question guiding the proposed research is: what does support look like for teachers of color:

As part of answering the above research question, the researcher completed a root cause analysis to verify the problem of practice in the research setting. Additionally, the researcher conducted an environmental scan to understand what similar schools do to support teachers of color. The environmental scan and root cause analysis results indicated that implementing an affinity group for teachers of color would be a viable strategy to enact as a short cycle intervention. As such, I propose to implement an affinity group with teachers of color at the research site. In order to understand the impact of the affinity group, the researcher plans to solicit feedback from partners about their perceptions of support and perceptions of the intervention process. The questions guiding the understanding of teacher perceptions are:

- How do teachers of color perceive the impact of the support received?

- Are affinity groups a viable practice for schools and districts to use as support for teachers of color?

Research Design

This research project utilized the affinity group as a broad overarching structure to provide support for teachers of color through empowerment. Additionally, understanding the efficacy of the short cycle intervention, this research employed a qualitative design to expose the site-specific outcomes and process. Finally, the researcher used a participatory-social justice design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018) as a tool of empowerment and exposure. A participatory-social justice design is a method where stakeholders take an active role in the design of the study. Participatory action research involves partners being active in the research process (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). This involvement specifically addresses or solves a problem within a situation, organization, or community. The purpose of a participatory social-justice design is to empower partners to bring about change (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

Partners worked with the researcher to create recommendations for retaining a diverse teaching force within Parkside Public Schools. Partners were part of the change that occurred within the practice of supporting teachers of color and what this practice looked like at the research site. The qualitative research method included interviews with school leaders, two focus groups interviews, four weeks of an intervention, and written reflections from each week of the intervention. A sample population of full-time classroom teachers of color at Stanley Jerome Elementary School facilitated the researcher gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences regarding the retention of teachers of color. This data increased the researcher's understanding of the perspectives and experiences of teachers of color, as well as created a safe space for teachers of color to express their concerns, network with one another, and provide suggestions for additional support within the school for teachers of color. Thus, partners will be considered research partners as the teachers of color volunteering to be part of this study will give in-depth opinions, knowledge of their experience, and suggestions as to what types of support are needed to feel supported and connected to the school community.

Research Site

The choice of the research site was a resultant of a combination of location and access to the researcher. Stanley Jerome Elementary School (S.J.S.) is a Pre-K – Grade 5 school located in Parkside Public Schools, a large urban district in a Northeastern state. The school has 525 students and 90 staff members. Fifty-five-point three percent of teachers identify as European American, 27.7% identify as Hispanic/Latinx, 14.9% identify as African American, and 2.1% Asian/Pacific Islander. While 77.9% of the students are Hispanic/Latinx, 14.9% identify as African American, 4.2% identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3% identify as European American. Forty-one percent of S.J.S. students also identify as Multi-lingual Learners. The staff

members of S.J.S have participated in race and equity book discussions and training the previous school year as mandated by the district, and classroom teachers are receiving continuous training in culturally relevant pedagogy.

Research Partners

The partners for this participatory action research were teachers of color at Stanley Jerome Elementary School (S.J.S.). Qualified partners in this study identify as either African American/Black or Hispanic/Latinx and actively work as classroom teachers at S.J.S. for the 2021-2022 school year. There are 13 classroom teachers of color employed at S.J.S. Six teachers of color participated in the study.

This research utilized a self-selecting sampling (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Self-selection sampling is part of non-probability sampling, which involves selecting individuals who are available and can be studied (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Self-selection sampling is practical when allowing individuals to choose to participate in the research. The researcher will send an email to all staff members of the research site explaining the study in detail and inviting teachers of color to participate in the empowerment phase of the study (see Appendix E). Self-selecting sampling was helpful in this study as it allowed partners to voluntarily participate in the study, usually making partners more willing to provide substantive insight into the phenomenon of study.

Study Procedures

The study design occurred in two phases. During Phase 1, the researcher validated the specific problems of practice regarding the retention of teachers of color in the school district and determined possible strategies for support. During Phase 2 two, the researcher implemented

one of the high leverage strategies through a short cycle empowerment mechanism to assess the feasibility of the intervention to promote positive systemic support for teachers of color that is likely the aid in the efforts of retention. As the improvement science approach to research aspires towards providing a practical intervention specific to the needs of the research location, it is essential to engage in an iterative two-phase process grounded in a participatory social justice design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The researcher implemented an affinity group as the empowerment mechanism. The intervention lasted six weeks. The first week was a focus group interview with the affinity group partners, four weeks of affinity group sessions, one group session per week .

Focus Groups Interviews

Focus group interviews attempt to elicit multiple meanings from partners to build a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and generate theory or patterns of a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). An interview protocol was created (Appendix B) with open-ended questions. Questions were designed to facilitate detailed responses, encourage reflection and interaction, and focused on behaviors and motivations (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Billups, 2012).), and the last week was a focus group interview. The researcher organized and coordinated the affinity group. The researcher reminded partners of confidentiality before the beginning of every meeting, as well as the process for securing the recording and transcriptions of the meetings. Every meeting consisted of a topical discussion, an activity, an actionable step for partners to explore in their practice, time for fellowship and socializing, and an after-session reflection (see Appendix D, E, F, & G).

Data Collection Instruments/Measures

Empowerment Mechanism

Based on a synthesis of the data gathered through the root cause analysis, environmental scan, and an in-depth review of literature, a teacher of color affinity group was the empowerment mechanism that was the foundation of this participatory action research endeavor. After contract hours, teachers of color voluntarily attended a destination mutually decided upon by the group to meet. During each meeting, there was a greeting with a welcome, introductions, and review of the agenda, followed by a group activity, an actionable step, time for socializing and networking. Each affinity session centered around a theme that emerged from the previous session, as shown in Figure 2.

At the end of every affinity group session, partners engaged in written reflection the group's discussion, their thoughts and feelings, and their reality as a teacher of color. This process lasted approximately ten minutes. Partners answered the questions in as much detail as possible and submitted the reflection within 24 hours of the affinity group session. The data analysis transpired through content analysis, including first and second-level coding, which allowed themes to emerge from the data.

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reflection and interaction, and focused on behaviors and motivations (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Billups, 2012).

Figure 2

Affinity Group Session Agenda

WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5
EMPOWERMENT 1	**EMPOWERMENT 2**	**EMPOWERMENT 3**	**EMPOWERMENT 4**	**SUMMATION**
Group Introduction	Topical Discussion: America To Me	Topical Discussion: Improving Practice	Topical Discussion: Tell Your Story	
Activity: Letter to Teachers of Color	Activity	Activity	Activity	Process Understanding Focus Group
Actionable Step	Actionable Step	Actionable Step	Actionable Step	
Socializing	Socializing	Socializing	Socializing	
Motivational Message	Motivational Message	Motivational Message	Motivational Message	

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Data Analysis

Phase 1 of the data analysis process included five interviews from the environmental scan, data review of district documents, and one focus group interview composed of 6 teachers

of color from S.J.S. Focus group discussions were semi-structured as an end-user protocol (Appendix B) and consisted of seven questions. The researcher encouraged focus group partners to share their perceptions, opinions, and experiences of support received as a teacher of color, challenge partners face, the culture and climate of their school, and successes as a teacher of color.

Phase 2 of the data analysis process included written reflections from each affinity group session and a focus group interview composed of 6 teachers of color from S.J.S. Focus group discussions were semi-structured as a process understanding protocol (Appendix H) and consisted of seven questions. As in Phase 1, the researcher encouraged focus group partners to share their perceptions, opinions, and experiences of the affinity group as support for teachers of color, as well as suggestions for additional support.

The qualitative data analysis included an inductive approach to collecting, organizing, preparing, analyzing, and interpreting data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). The researcher can either hand-code the data or use qualitative data analysis software programs (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Coding is the process of grouping evidence and labeling ideas in order to understand broader perspectives (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Coding assisted the researcher in developing a more specific focus or more relevant questions (Glesne, 2006).

Trustworthiness & Credibility

According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018), researchers must make sure the social justice lens is well-defined, link integrated results to possibilities for social change by connecting the results to action steps, aggressively endeavor not to marginalize partners in the study, and finally, specify the core design.

The ethical and cultural considerations pertaining to this study include handling sensitive information. For example, concealing the identity of teachers and their focus group answers, as well as information given during the affinity group sessions. The researcher also participated in member checking. Member checking is a technique of exploring credibility in a study (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking can be done by sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and drafts of the final report with the research partners (Glesne, 2006). Research partners received transcripts of the focus groups interviews, as well as a copy of the final report.

Ethical Assurances and Cultural Competence Considerations

The ethical and cultural considerations pertaining to this study included handling sensitive information. For example, concealing the identity of teachers and their interview answers, as well as information shared within the focus groups. The researcher was also aware of bias not being introduced into the process. As an educator of color, the researcher could have brought a level of bias into the research; however, the researcher was able to build rapport with the partners due to the researcher's understanding and similarity to the partners. Reciprocity for partners willing to participate is also an ethical factor that the researcher must consider.

Positionality

Various factors drive my passion for the retention of teachers of color. First, I am an African American woman educated in the inner-city, and I am also an African American educator in the inner-city. Second, I began my teaching career in high school through a Grow Your Own program in a large urban district in a Northeastern State. Aaron Joseph High School partnered with Michael Christopher University and the public school district to provide teacher prep classes and experiences within the high school curriculum and a full four-year scholarship

for seven students every year. Once the students earned their degree in education, they were to pay back that investment by working a minimum of three years as a teacher in the same city.

I remember being the only African American student graduating from the College of Education, as all of my classmates from high school earning the same scholarship left the program. However, the feeling of alienation did not leave me at graduation. That feeling continued throughout my teaching career, during my master's program, my 092 (certificate in supervision and evaluation) program, and still follows me at times as an administrator.

The Teacher Prep Program at Aaron Joseph High School no longer exists. I have witnessed and experienced the hardships of recruitment and retention for myself and others throughout the years. I currently work for a district that has prioritized the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. In addition, I volunteer on a committee that works directly with the state to ensure their recruitment and retention efforts follow through.

It is my hope that this ISDiP will shed light on the retention of teachers of color and the lack of diversity within the teaching profession. I will be the data collector as well as the conductor of data analysis for this ISDiP. I recognize that my personal experiences and opinions should be used to gain rapport with partners. As a seasoned educator of color, my experiences and opinions bring strength to this research. My identity and lived experiences are what allow me to gain rapport with the partners, which elicits trust. Trust is a component that must be strong within participatory social-justice research for real and immediate change to occur.

Limitations

The weakness or limitations of this study involved the role of the researcher. The researcher is an educator of color at Stanley Jerome Elementary School. As the researcher is also an educator of color, this allowed rapport with partners. Another limitation included small

sample sizes due to the number of teachers invited to participate. Some bias factors with this study consisted of handling sensitive information (interview and focus group results). Another factor of bias is reciprocity for partners who participated.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to afford teachers of color to share their perspectives and experiences, as well as gain support and networking opportunities in order to remain a teacher in the Parkside School District. The researcher used a participatory social justice design, as partners were considered research partners in addressing this social justice issue of creating and maintaining a diverse teaching workforce. The qualitative data used consisted of focus group interviews, affinity group discussions, and affinity group members' written reflections.

Chapter 4 provides the findings of the focus group interviews, affinity group discussions, and affinity group written reflections from the teachers of color at Stanley Jerome Elementary School. Conclusions about the data emerge from the results from the qualitative analyses for the research questions.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter details the results of the participatory social justice qualitative research study conducted to answer the research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers of color perceive the impact of the support received?

RQ2: Are affinity groups a viable practice for schools and districts to use as support for teachers of color?

After outlining the qualitative methodology, this chapter describes the processes used to analyze transcripts from both focus group interviews and affinity group reflections to uncover codes and themes. There were three levels of analysis: (a) open coding, (b) selective coding, and (c) theoretical coding. At each level of analysis, constant comparison was used to distill the data further until themes emerged from the data. Included in this chapter are tables and graphs used to present detailed codes and theme data, as well as quotations from the focus group interviews used to emphasize key themes.

Sample

Six partners participated in the empowerment mechanism and were interviewed during the focus groups. Table 3 **3** below indicates the partners demographics that represent the requirements as described in Chapter 3. The partners represented in the sample were all elementary classroom teachers teaching in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Two teachers from the sample came to the profession through Teach for America and the other four came into the profession through the traditional route.

The total years in the teaching profession varied among the six partners sampled. Partners with less than three years of classroom teaching experience made up 50% of the sample size, those with between four and nine years of classroom teaching experience made up 33% of the

sample size, and those with ten or more years of classroom teaching experience made up 17% of the sample size. All partners have only worked in Parkside Public Schools as classroom teachers. Three of the six partners identified as African American/Black and the other three of the six partners identified as Hispanic/Latinx. The ages of the partners varied between 21 and 65 years of age.

Table 3

Demographic Data for Study Partners

Participant (Pseudonym)	Role	Education Level	Age Range	Race/ Ethnicity	Years of Teaching
Gail	Teacher	Bachelor's	20 – 30	Hispanic/Latinx	Less than 3
Janelle	Teacher	Master's	20 – 30	African American/Black	Less than 3
Brenda	Teacher	Bachelor's	20 – 30	African American/Black	Less than 3
Jeanette	Teacher	Master's	30 – 40	Hispanic/Latinx	4-9
Jasmin	Teacher	Master's	30 – 40	Hispanic/Latinx	4-9
Sade	Teacher	Master's	50+	African American/Black	10 or more

Data Collection

The focus group interviews with teachers of color at Dr. Michael D. Fox Elementary School, as well as affinity group session reflections and notes from each session, served as the primary source of research data. The original interview protocol is provided in Appendix B (End-user Protocol) and Appendix H (Process Understanding Protocol). The affinity group sessions were guided by Great Schools Partnership sample agendas (see Appendix I). Great Schools Partnership is a nonprofit school support organization working with schools and districts to provide coaching and professional development with the purpose of creating equitable education. The agendas were modified and tailored to the partners based on whole group conversations within affinity group sessions and based on feedback given through the affinity

group reflections (see Appendix C). Both interviews and reflections were coded manually and reviewed for emerging themes. Following this method, the researcher ensured qualitative methodology was embedded throughout the data collection process.

Data and Analysis

All interviews were coded manually during open coding. The researcher coded both focus group interviews and affinity group reflections for categories or themes. Questions or clarifying questions were added to the interview method during the focus group interviews (Yin, 2015). The recordings of both focus group interviews were uploaded to TranscribeMe for transcription. The open coding results included 23 codes from manual coding as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Data and Analysis Process
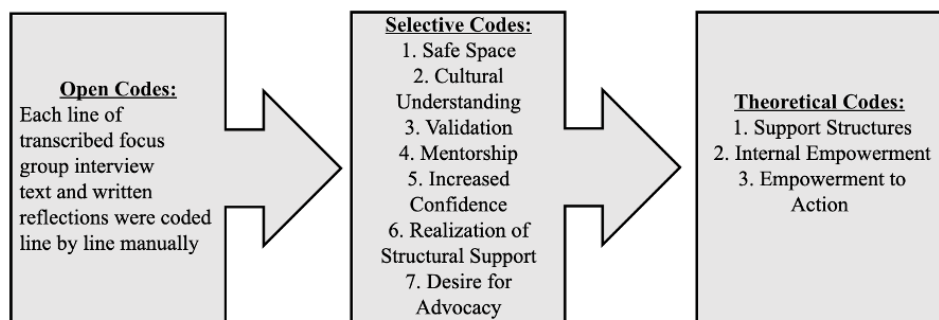
Note. The Data and Analysis Process displays the open codes from the focus group interviews and empowerment mechanism reflections. Selective codes emerged from the open codes and theoretical coding resulted from the relationship with and across open and selective codes.

In the next phase of analysis, selective coding, the researcher searched to find categories emerging from the similarities in the open codes. The researcher reviewed the vignettes of the

partners and the open codes and mapped them manually. Figure 1 includes the summary of the data analysis process for open, selective, and theoretical coding. In analyzing the depth of the codes, or the quantity of vignettes assigned to a code, selective codes emerged from the data. For the purposes of this study, the researcher defined depth as having five or more vignettes assigned to a code.

Theoretical coding resulted from the relationships both with and across the open codes and selective codes (Holton, 2007). The researcher reviewed the vignettes for relationships with other codes. If there was a relationship, the researcher connected the codes with a particular color. The selective codes with the most relationships formed the start of theoretical coding. Some of the selective and theoretical codes directly correspond to the change functions mentioned in the driver diagram in Chapter 1. The researcher conducted root cause analysis indicating two primary drivers: professional development and culture and climate. Secondary drivers directly address the issues teachers of color report when discussing the lack of support from schools and districts. The change functions are the theorized results of the change ideas presented by the researcher based on research and the environmental scan conducted.

There were three distinctions in the theoretical codes: support structure codes, internal empowerment codes, and empowerment for action codes. Support structure codes include what is needed from the building community, administration, content coaches, mentors, and colleagues. Internal empowerment is born out of the support structures. Confidence within teaching practices, confidence within their voice, and confidence in knowing where to get help and support emerge. Empowerment to action is an extension of internal empowerment. Knowing what is needed for students of color, advocating for students of color, and advocating to educate their colleagues on culturally relevant practices embodies empowerment to action.

Support Structures

The theoretical theme that emerged from the empowerment mechanism was support structures. The empowerment mechanism became a place where the partners were able to receive these support structures from one another. It was indicated through discussions that the partners were not consistently receiving these support structures from administration, coaches, or colleagues, therefore contributing to the feelings of isolation, doubt in their abilities as teachers, and lack of connection to the school community. The selective themes within this theoretical theme are safe space, cultural understanding, validation, and mentorship.

Safe Space

A safe space is defined as an environment in which the partners feel confident in the individuals in the group with no criticism, discrimination, or emotional harm. The partners' responses were focused on having a safe space to freely be themselves and to grow together. As such, the partners indicated that the affinity group functioned as an outlet to express their internal feelings as teachers of color internally, and the doubt they carry with them in their ability to perform as teachers due to external factors such as the cultural and climate of their school building, the relationships they have with their colleagues, and the support, or lack thereof, received from building and district administrators. The partners also indicated the affinity group allowed them to express these feelings without judgment. The affinity group is a safe space to share ideas, be vulnerable about areas of growth, discuss microaggressions, and collaborate in having difficult conversations with other colleagues. The safe space was expressed to be the largest and most valuable aspect of the affinity group. Explaining the idea of safe space for sharing, Jeanette (Partner 4) expressed, "I like having the time to reflect as well as discuss things

that are going well and things that we are struggling within the classroom and it being an open and safe discussions."

Other partners articulated their vulnerability through stating what is most frustrating in their practice as well as some of the issues they struggle with as educators. For example, Sade (Partner 6) was relieved finding a place to be vulnerable and to learn in sharing, "It was nice to hear what is going on in other classes that are working for them. It was also nice to hear I am not alone in the things I am struggling with." Likewise, Janelle (Partner 2) shared that:

> I have been struggling with time management, learning new curriculum, and differentiating materials. I need to plan more focused time in my day to get all these things done. There is just not enough time in our schedules, and it causes a lot of never-ending take-home work.

Creating a safe space was the foundation of the empowerment mechanism from which other themes are theorized to have emerged thus allowing the partners to be vulnerable and feel supported holistically.

Cultural Understanding

Cultural understanding was expressed as the understanding of the livelihood, values, and differences between cultures, as well as the respect and dignity for other cultures other than the dominant European culture. Understanding livelihood represents the knowledge of the set of activities that are essential to a person's everyday life. Understanding cultural values represented the various customs, traditions, and personal preferences of teachers, students, and their families. Finally, understanding the differences represented the ability to differentiate between cultures and have consistent respect for variations of life. The partners made clear that cultural understanding from their colleagues and for their students was of high importance.

The partners describe cultural understanding as the ability for their European American colleagues to be able to have an open mind in understanding the cultural practices of minoritized students and minoritized colleagues that do not live or function in the same ways as the dominant European culture operates. Lack of cultural understanding was also described as being cognizant of offensive comments disguised as curiosity or attempts of connecting–also known as microaggressions (Osanloo, Boske, & Newcomb, 2016). The frequency and impact of the microaggressions caused discussions about microaggressions to take precedence during many affinity group meetings. The partners discussed how difficult it was for them to bring to light some of these microaggressions to their European colleagues. Additionally, the partners engaged in self-gaslighting through internalization of the emotional abuse that occurs in the minimization aspect of gaslighting and in turn questioned whether they were taking some of the comments too seriously. Brenda (Partner 3) explained, "I'm Mexican, and someone on my team told me to watch this show because it had Mexicans in it and thought I would like the show solely off of that. I was taken back." Jeanette (Partner 4) echoed another microaggression that she did not know how to address:

> I remember a teacher complaining about the students having two last names. I told her I had two last names and she stopped and thought about it. But the whole time I was thinking Why is that even a problem? (Jeanette, Partner 4)

In the second focus group interview a theme that emerged was wanting to have more time to discuss how to address microaggressions and how to have difficult conversations with colleagues. Many of the partners expressed that they were discouraged in having these types of conversations due to responses from the previous year's race and equity book discussions mandated by the district.

The partners could not understand, but were not surprised, by why their European colleagues did not comprehend why there was and still is a need for a racial affinity group and why some of their European colleagues did not believe there is a need for race and equity training. For example, Gail (Partner 1) stated, "I just don't understand. They're not oppressed! Why don't they understand that?" This lack of empathy cultural understanding, or the resistance to recognize and understand, played a considerable role in the partners' reservations to begin these cultural and racial conversations, with their European colleagues much less, standing up for themselves and their students in the face of such resistance. Partners also articulated that having an affinity group provided not only a safe space, but a group of individuals who have a cultural understanding of who they are and validate their thoughts, feelings, and backgrounds.

Validation

Validation is the affirmation that a partner's feelings, thoughts, ideas, and knowledge are worthy. The partners indicated through discussion that they feel their expertise–and at times their existence–is not validated, creating a negative view of the school's culture and climate (Gatwiri, 2021). Two of the partners expounded on the day-to-day micro-invalidations their European American colleagues perpetrated and recognized how it maintained a sense of inhumanity of being a professional of color in a white space (Anderson, 2015). Janelle stated, "Sometimes I feel like what I have to say is disregarded." which was corroborated by Gail when she expressed, "There are times when I walk in the hallway and say hi to people and they just walk past me."

Partners expend mental energy trying to understand the generative causes of disregard that occurs based on their intersectional identities (Hicken et al., 2014; Torino, 2017). Jasmin attempts to dissect whether her de-legitimization is based on race or newness:

I kind of feel like what I say is not really taken seriously or it's always seconded

guessed and I will find myself saying things like Oh, yea it was in the email or Yeah,

you can ask so and so. I have to back up what I am saying instead of just staying

firm. I also don't know if that is because of my race or because I am new here.

(Jasmin, Partner 5)

This excerpt is also indicative of the strategies that partners utilized such as having outside

references to bolster their credibility. Regardless of the source, Jasmin recognizes that this is a

survival strategy that she is required to employ, defined by Fricker (2007) as epistemic injustice,

that was used to diminish her standing as a knower.

    For teachers of color, this adds another layer of stress. Deciphering whether

microaggressions are happening due to race or experience and how to address these

microaggressions adds a level of anxiety and resentment the partners discussed. As a result of the

added layer of stress, the partners agreed it is easier for them to stay to themselves and isolate

themselves when at work. In contrast to isolation, the affinity group created space, validation and

understanding which operated as a tool to prevent and resist racial trauma (Mosely et al., 2021).

Janelle explained:

It was nice to hear what is going on in other classes that is working for them and

with some of the issues in the building. It was also nice to hear I am not alone in the

things I struggle with. (Janelle, Partner 2)

The affinity group not only created a sense of belonging through validation of the partners'

feelings and abilities, but also provided a place for leadership through mentorship. Partners with

greater life and teaching experience were able to help one another with teaching practices and

culture and climate issues.

Collective Mentorship

Mentorship became a fluid role within the affinity group. The partners indicated that the affinity group allowed a level of mentorship with one another, or guidance to help one another grow as practitioners. The partners were able to develop higher levels of collective self-efficacy through sharing teaching practices, classroom management strategies, and an opportunity to expand on ideas to implement within their classrooms. Jasmin stated, "I used suggestions from these sessions in my classroom. Particularly celebrating student achievements more. My students really loved that, and it helped us to grow closer." Likewise, Brenda further substantiated this idea, "I heard some great ideas of things I can start incorporating and I am looking forward to hearing more about what else I can do within my classroom to best support our students."

The partners discussed wanting more time to spend with one another to continue the mentorship-like sessions to better their teaching practice. For example, Janelle reflected, "Each session was a good starting point. I feel like if we had more time to expand on ideas and topics, it would have been more impactful."

The affinity group sessions were also able to go further than teaching practices. The partners discussed the various ways the affinity group mentored them. One way was through having difficult conversations with colleagues, as mentioned earlier. It became apparent that the partners did not have a clear understanding of how microaggressions were happening to their peers and their students until hearing stories from one another. Once partners realized they were not alone in how they felt about these microaggressions, and were validated in what they heard, saw and felt, they grew the confidence to want to confront these issues with the larger community.

Key topics from the discussions included how to capitalize on what partners learned in the affinity groups about academic and social injustice issues to their classrooms for the benefit of their students. The partners wanted to ensure this experience of understanding self and community was also afforded to their students. They wanted their students to be able to have these conversations early and for the students' existence and abilities to be validated and guided early for students to feel a sense of self-worth and pride. These sessions also allowed the partners to set goals for themselves personally and professionally towards advocacy and efficacy. These goals consisted of developing improved teaching practices, being more assertive and confident in their grade-level team meetings and speaking up when feeling uncomfortable about their colleagues making inappropriate comments about staff or students. Additionally, partners expressed actualizing a change in their daily teaching practice and in their interactions with students and colleagues.

Internal Empowerment

The function of the support structures created a sense of belonging that gave the partners an opportunity to connect with one another, feel understood, bond, and discuss hardships of their profession without judgement. This type of support developed internal security within the partners with included increased confidence and realization of support structures. Knowing where to find resources and walking away from the perceived "imposter syndrome" (Clance, 1985), allowed partners to focus on the growth within their teaching practices and began opening a door for a higher purpose of advocacy. The selective themes within this theoretical theme consist of increased confidence and realization of support structures.

Increased Confidence

Once partners began leaning into the support from the affinity group, a sense of confidence within their role as teachers increased. The partners expressed that their confidence came from knowing that they are not alone in how they feel and that they have this network of support to help them through issues they may not necessarily be comfortable with bringing to administration, coaches, or other colleagues. Brenda, Janelle, and Sade described their increased confidence in various areas throughout the implementation of the empowerment mechanism: "The affinity group educated us on the importance of teachers of color and why we are needed. It also made us aware of our similarities and gave us the opportunity to be with and get to know new colleagues" (Brenda, Partner 3).

In the beginning of the affinity group sessions, the partners read a letter to teachers of color, provided by Great Schools Partnerships (Muhammad, 2019). Although the partners knew why teaching was important, many of them did not realize the impact they had on students being a teacher of color. The impact of just being who they are and the power behind their story and the impact they have on future generations of this community was new knowledge the partners were able to take with them.

The partners also gained increased confidence through a practice of sharing what they felt when experiencing microaggression. They questioned the legitimacy of their feelings, and many thought they were being sensitive or overthinking. This caused them to remain silent and withdraw from their colleagues instead of speaking up. The affinity group allowed the partners to understand that their emotions are real and valid and that they do have a right to speak up if their colleagues are making them or their students feel uncomfortable. Janelle reflected, "These

sessions gave me more confidence in knowing that I need to speak up. It gave me the skills to have difficult conversations with my colleagues."

Once the partners were able to see themselves as 'worthy' of being educators and knowing that their presence was vital, their focus of improving their practice and helping their students became stronger. Sade described, "It [the affinity group] helped me to set goals for myself and my students. It has helped me to better my teaching practice." This internal empowerment, through increased confidence, allowed the partners to break away from 'imposter syndrome' (the persistent inability to believe that one's success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one's own efforts or skills) and realize that their presence within the school is not only validated within this affinity group, but needed for the students and for the profession.

Realization of Support Structures

Some of the partners expressed that although there are multiple assigned supports for them within the school and district, such as administration, academic/content coaches, and TEAM mentors for new teachers (a mandatory program provided by the state), that support was not helpful to their specific needs; cultural understanding, validation, and mentorship. In addition, many of the partners felt like a burden to some of their colleagues when they were assigned to support them or volunteered to help them. Brenda shared:

> I also feel bad because I'm like 'That's not really her job.' So, it's putting extra
>
> pressure onto her because now I'm bothering her instead of whoever is designed to
>
> help me doesn't have time to help me. (Brenda, Partner 3)

Even though some of the partners feel like a burden, others want help and express frustration with the lack of support given from administration and mentors. The lack of

support greatly affects students and the partners' responsibility of carrying out legal obligations. Jeanette stated:

> I have to do a lot of IEPs. And at first, I didn't know how to work the system. I was told, 'Just play around with it. If you mess up, it's okay. It's your first year.' ... I'm like, my God...I don't want to mess up. I'm in charge of these kids and whatever I put in this IEP is legally binding." (Jeanette, Partner 4)

Not only do legal obligations affect the students, but it also affects the job security of the teacher. Lack of guidance in certain areas can leave a teacher's job in jeopardy and attention to these areas is vital.

In comparison to feeling like a burden or receiving a lack of support from administration, coaches, or mentor teachers, the affinity group allowed not only a safe space but a space where the partners feel a deep sense of welcome where they can collaborate with one another without the pressure feeling like a burden to another professional. Gail explained, "I would love to continue having these group talks and collaborate with my colleagues...I feel like we don't have a space or time to talk, vent, and come up with solutions." In addition to improving the art and science of teaching through mentorship, the partners realized that being in a 'like-minded' space fostered exploration of more professional improvement outside of the official structures of assigned content coaches and mentors. Jeanette discovered:

> More time to collaborate with like-minded teachers to make improved instruction and classroom climate. It feels good to build new relationships with teachers and it would be nice if we were allotted more time during the school day to collaborate with a wider range of teachers. (Jeanette, Partner 4)

Although the affinity group highlighted some of the microaggressions and some of the negative aspects of the school's culture and climate, the partners expressed that they felt closer to the other partners of the affinity group and agreed that they now have a new network of support that was not there before.

Additionally, the researcher connected the partners to opportunities outside of the school, such as the Teacher Preparatory Program. This program is dedicated to recruiting and retaining teachers of color in the state. There are opportunities for teachers to become mentors for the residents and new teachers of this program, as well as instructors for residents studying for their teaching license. Although some of the partners thought it would be too much to add to their practice now, they all expressed gratitude to know what other organizations are doing to recruit and retain teachers of color and to be granted the opportunity to be part of something bigger than the school and district in which they work.

The combination of realizing where the partners can receive support without judgement and the increased confidence within their ability as practitioners created a sense of internal empowerment. This internal empowerment propelled the partners to want to create change and a renewed sense of belonging and purpose became the partners' primary concern and focus.

Empowerment to Action

The support structures that were provided through the empowerment mechanism created an internal empowerment which prompted the partners to want to advocate for themselves and their students. Some of the partners discussed their reservations in bringing their concerns to administration. Jasmin discussed wanting to express how she feels to administration. However, she feels intimidated at times or knows the answers already, which are deemed not helpful. She

wants to be able to express her frustration to administration so that they hear her and not try to immediately give a "politically correct" response.

> I have other teachers that I can go to and talk about some things, but then in terms of admin and I think I haven't shared my problems with them. It may be because of intimidation or ...I know what they are going to say...I don't want them to address anything. I just want them to listen to me and let me get it off my chest. (Jasmin, Partner 5)

Some of the affinity group sessions became a 'what if?' think tank of sorts, brainstorming ways to change the culture and climate of the building, to educate their colleagues on culturally relevant practices, give voice to their students, and connecting the community. As the sessions developed, the partners became clearer about their desire to advocate.

Desire for Advocacy

Once the partners realized they were not alone in how they felt about the culture and climate, the actuality of microaggressions, and their insecurities in their teaching practices, the conversations among the partners began to shift. The partners wanted to find ways to stand up for themselves and their students. Some of the partners expressed their realization of the impact culture and climate, lack of cultural understanding, and microaggressions have on their practice and their students. Jasmin states, "I get really frustrated because I come to work for the kids." Additionally, Sade explains, "I am not doing enough to stand up for our students" and Brenda also adds, "I have learned that students of color and teachers (of color) go through a lot in the school. It is important to speak up."

The partners discussions shifted from not knowing where to find proper help and support to asking the question, "How can we help and support?" The partners discussed wanting to find

ways to bring the concerns and trends discussed in our affinity group to administration to begin "fixing" the issues that were concerning. Additionally, many of the partners discussed ways they can bring the conversations we discussed in our session to their students and the school community, Jasmin stated:

> I need to stand up more for students. I want our school to be a safe space where our students feel comfortable to be themselves, feel loved and valued. I want to celebrate my students more for their progress and growth.

Gail also circled back to advocating for her students: "I would like ideas on how to create this space for students. Suggestions on how to implement more of these conversations into the classroom with my students." The desire for advocacy became the purpose for many of the partners; the 'why' in why they teach, prompting discussions about next steps to create a more equitable place to teach and learn.

Conclusion

This chapter contains the results of the analysis, connects the analysis back to the research questions, and demonstrates consistency of the analysis with qualitative methodology. Six partners were interviewed twice in focus group interviews and participated in the study's empowerment mechanism. Interview questions were structured to understand what factors contribute to their experiences as teachers of color and what support is warranted to want these teachers of color to stay in the classroom.

Consistent with qualitative methodology, and using a participatory social justice design, there were three levels of analysis, open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding. Twenty-three codes emerged from open coding. Manually coding, the open codes, seven selective codes emerged from the open coding, leading to three themes. The three themes

resulting from this study summarize the evolution of contributing factors of quality support for teachers of color provided by the empowerment mechanism; the affinity group: (a) Support Structures (b) Internal Empowerment, and (c) Empowerment to Action.

The empowerment mechanism provides a safe space that provided validation and cultural understanding for teachers of color. This space then evolved into a place of mentorship with the characters of professional development which increased the confidence of the partners. When the partners felt they had a network of peers that they trusted and understood them, they wanted to find ways to create that space throughout the school community for themselves and their students and prompting them to become advocates and providing a deeper purpose for teaching. Chapter 5 includes the summary for the critical analysis and discussion on the three themes.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this participatory social justice study was to identify and understand aspects of the school context that present barriers to the retention of teacher of color and subsequently design an intervention to mitigate one of the barriers. Given the systemically embedded nature of racial hostility, it was determined that a research-based strategy for retention of teachers of color would be introducing an empowerment mechanism that serves a protective factor as a precursor to an intervention. During phase 2 of the study the goal of the teacher was to understand the viability of affinity group empowerment mechanism and identify teachers' perceptions of support and perceptions of the empowerment process.

During phase one of the research, it was hypothesized that teachers of color struggle to find a sense of inclusion within the greater community of schools and that this is largely rooted in systemic and individual racism that caused then to be pushed out of the school and education at a greater rate than the rate of departure for teachers of European descent. Root cause analysis confirmed that systemic and individual racism persists as a problem of practice at the proposed research site and negatively impacts the retention of teachers of color. Additionally, reflecting on the information promulgated through synthesis of the literature review and environmental scan, several alternatives that could mitigate racially driven attrition materialized, however the affinity group emerged as the most promising alternative. The environmental scan consisted of consultation with educational leaders in other districts and schools to determine the scope of the problem of practice and their strategies for mitigating racially driven attrition. The literature review was a process of documenting, understanding, and synthesizing the evidence-based strategies that are effective in reducing attrition. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings related to the literature on retaining teachers of color and what implications may be

valuable for schools and districts. Additionally, this final chapter will synthesize the research in a way that provides practical and tangible action steps that continue to consider the perception of the impact of affinity groups. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, areas for future research, and a summary.

This chapter contains discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the research questions:

(R1): How do teachers of color perceive the impact of the support received?

(R2): How do teachers of color perceive the impact of the affinity groups as a whole program and as individual components?

By exploring these questions and embarking on this study, the researcher was able to identify the challenges and opportunities of affinity groups and their role in retaining teachers of color.

Summary of the Results

The theory for the needed supports to keep teachers of color in the classroom comprises three themes: (a) support structures, (b) internal empowerment, and (c)empowerment to action. This study was, therefore, significant in that it highlighted the efficacy of the support given to teachers of color through the empowerment mechanism: the affinity group. The various supports that are salient for teachers of color were uncovered through the affinity group and emerged a level of empowerment, making way for advocacy as a renewed purpose within the profession of teaching.

Discussion of the Results: Process Understanding

Analysis of the data collected during this research study culminated in several observations. As the researcher reviewed the themes and sub-themes, a model of support for teachers of color emerged from the data as shown in Figure 4. The Teachers of Color

Empowerment Model begins with support structures must be in place for teachers of color to gain internal empowerment, and once teachers of color gain internal empowerment, they gain the empowerment to act, creating a safer and equitable place for themselves and their students. Creating a safe space is the foundation of this model. Cultural understanding, validation, and mentorship are the pillars which frame the house and create space to lay the beams of this model, increased confidence, and realization of support systems. The beams allow for and hold up the roof of this model, the desire for advocacy.

Figure 3

The Model of Support to Empowerment for Teachers of Color
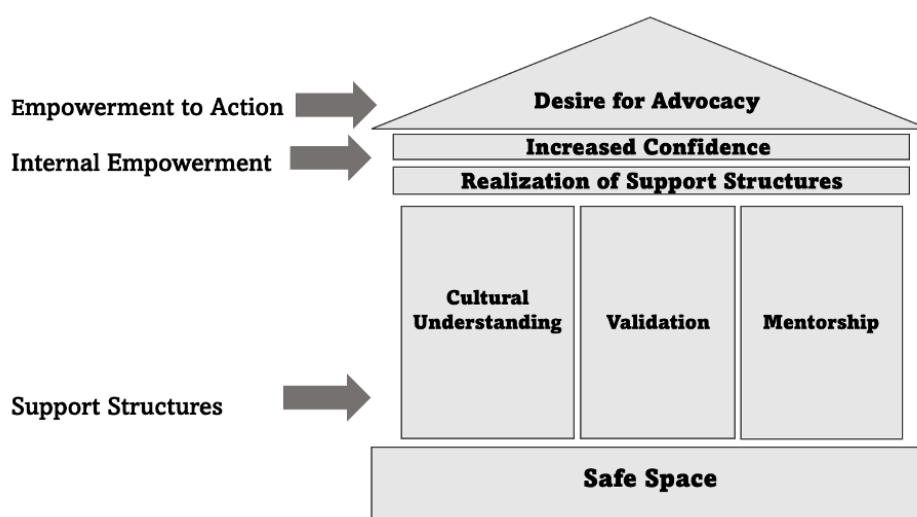
Note. The Model of Support to Empowerment for Teachers of Color presents the various types of support needed to empower teachers of color. The two levels of empowerment materialized from the support level. These levels emerged through themes uncovered from focus group interviews and affinity group reflections before, during, and after the empowerment mechanism.

Prior to the affinity group, teachers of color perceived the support given by the school and district as somewhat basic and not helpful. The teachers of color in this study revealed that

support is multidimensional and extends beyond pedagogy (Dillard, 1994; Philip, Rocha & Olivares-Pasillas, 2017). Having an administrative team, coaches, and colleagues that are empathetic to cultural differences, are sensitive to cultural dialogue, and are open to understanding the needs of their students and their colleagues of color are of the utmost importance to teachers of color. Creating a safe space for teachers of color to express their thoughts and concerns without repercussion or judgement is the foundation of what teachers of color need to begin to feel supported. Just like the foundation of the house is the most important structure of the house, creating a safe space for teachers of color is the most important aspect of supporting and retaining teachers of color. An affinity group can naturally create this space for teachers of color, as teachers of color experience micro and macro aggressions and their experiences of being suppressed professionally are factors they can relate to, share with one another, and feel understood.

The emanation of the pillars of the house occurred as the affinity group progressed. The support structures of cultural understanding, validation, and mentorship were made clear by the partners. The Anglo-American culture, mindset, and traditions are engrained in the education system and influence the teaching practices within an institution. Without teachers of color resisting, correcting, and educating, cultural understanding of colleagues and students will not engage in sharing and appreciating one another with ease. Many felt with their colleagues it was a forced conversation or a conversation where they had to correct their colleagues, usually filled with tension and anxiety. The affinity group gave the partners space to share with pride and excitement, connecting them to one another and learning from and appreciating one another.

Validation is another pillar of this house. Research suggests that teachers of color seek professional validation from colleagues and supervisors, but often do not receive that validation

(Branch, 2008; Kohli, 2014). Fricker (2007) refers to this as epistemic injustice, and more specifically testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word (Fricker, 2007). Many of the partners discussed feeling isolated or having to prove themselves to their colleagues. Testimonial injustice was displayed when the partners discussed their reactions and feelings to their colleagues' conversations and responses during district-mandated race and equity book discussion the previous year. Many of the partners expressed that they were discouraged in having these types of conversations.

The partners experienced increased discouragement as they learned about rumors being discussed by colleagues not in the affinity group. During the affinity group period, teachers not in the group described the affinity group as a space where teachers of color were meeting for the purpose of speaking poorly against their European colleagues. As this news spread throughout the school community the researcher attempted to mitigate the rumors through providing literature of the function and purposes of an affinity group. This resistance to the affinity group is to be expected in spaces where European American teachers may have theoretical agreement in support for teachers of color but resist the policy and practices that are likely to bring about that support (Gay & Howard, 2000). Fricker (2007) calls this hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice happens before testimonial injustice, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences (Fricker, 2007). The teachers of color in this study were discouraged in sharing their personal stories and bringing concerns to administrators and their colleagues. The affinity group was a place where teachers of color were able to get their power back by telling their stories and having their stories validated.

Due to the systemic issues within the American society, the culture and climate of many school buildings are rooted in the middle class European American culture and history as the story of the American people, better known as the hegemonic cultural norm in which "dominant cultural capital" reifies powerful, high status cultural attributes, codes, and signals rooted in whiteness (Carter, 2003). Similarly, "non-dominant cultural capital" describes those resources used by lower status individuals to gain "authentic" cultural status positions within their respective communities (Carter, 2003). The affinity group became the place for the non-dominant cultural capital of the teaching staff to be validated regardless of the dominant cultural capital of the teaching staff thus creating a counter story (Pour-Khorshid, 2018).

The last pillar of the house is mentorship. Research suggests mentorship as one of the most prevalent effective strategies for the retention of teachers of color and yet rarely do teachers of color have the option to engage in authentic mentorship. Additionally, when mentorship is available, often the process and content is perfunctory in nature (Carver-Thomas, 2018: Lacy, 2015). The partners in the affinity group were able to partake in collective mentorship, where everyone contributed strategies and resources, and everyone was taking of those strategies and resources. What is interesting about collective mentoring is that the role of the mentor and mentee was fluid and without the traditional hierarchy present in traditional mentor relationships. Collective mentorship is also a direct result of the co-constructed safe space when more senior teachers did not feel the need to uphold the pretense of perfection and liberally offered and received.

The researcher began a Google Jamboard to take notes from the sessions and partners had access to these notes. The notes consisted of websites, books, external resources, strategies,

questions, solutions, and ideas. Collectively, the partners added to and used the Jamboard to help in their teaching practice, classroom management skills, and networking endeavors.

Collective mentorship also gave the partners an opportunity to exercise fluid leadership as the partners looked to one another as experts and leaders. In a traditional educational setting, teachers of color are often overlooked in opportunities and contributes to teachers of color leaving the classroom and at times the profession altogether (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Given that the leadership role fluidly passed between research partners, it produced a greater amount of leadership practice than the typical leadership structure would. As such, encouraging leadership development while educators are in a teaching role can also give additional purpose to teachers of color, as they have a community of people who learn from and lean on one another (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016)

The support structures of validation, mentorship and cultural understanding led to a sense of internal empowerment which consists of increased confidence and realization of support structures. Increased confidence represented a higher level of professional efficacy resulting from validation through the affinity group. Likewise, realization of support structures is the elucidation of accessible support through other members of the affinity group. Both ideas are generative mechanisms that were always present, yet dormant without the structure of the affinity group. Although the generative power of increased confidence and realization of support was always present, the oppressive force of the status quo of the American educational system isolated teachers of color and suppressed their collective power.

Support from the affinity group allowed the partners to build confidence within their craft, within their "worthiness" of being educators, affirming they belong as classroom teachers within this school and district. The partners were also able to put words to what they were

experiencing. The partners were able to develop the ability to express their experiences and express how microaggressions and other toxic climate and culture related issues had a deleterious impact on them and their students. The partners also created a network among themselves for support. Many partners expressed not getting adequate support from building and district administrators, coaches, or colleagues. A leading contributor to the attrition of teachers of color is the result of a lack of support from administrators (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kohli, 2018). The affinity group became the space where the partners knew they would get help, support, resources, and a place to express themselves with a collective understanding and without judgement.

The roof of the house represents how the desire for advocacy is an outgrowth of the internal empowerment teachers of color experience when properly supported. The partners displayed a desire to advocate not just for themselves, but for the students that shared cultural and racial match as themselves. This substantiates the claims made by Kohli and Pizzaro (2016) stating that teachers of color feel a high sense of accountability towards students of color. However, most schools continue to operate in Eurocentric ideas thus isolating and marginalizing teachers and students of color (Kohli & Pizzaro, 2016). When teachers of color felt supported and no longer isolated, they were able to renew their focus of why they teach, to promote social justice and allow students of color to feel validated and supported as they did in the affinity group.

Once the partners realized what they experienced was valid and others were experiencing the same issues, the partners quickly formulated ideas pertaining to creating an equitable environment for all students, but especially the students who look like them. The partners discussed that if they felt unsupported and did not have the space or the ability to express

themselves, then how could students feel supported to do the same. The partners wanted students to be able to have the same space they were granted to express their concerns, speak openly about race and systemic racism, speak proudly about their heritage, and feel understood. The partners wanted to create a system that keeps the privacy of the affinity group but made administrators aware of the concerns and work to help improve the culture and climate of the building. The partners also wanted to create affinity groups for students because they believed in the impact the affinity group had on them.

The largest impact of the affinity group was the ability to provide the support teachers of color look for and need in order to remain and grow within the profession. Teachers of color need support structures to be empowered (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Kohli, 2009; Kohli, 2014; Villegas & Irvine, 2010) The agency engendered by virtue of the affinity group empowerment mechanism, the partners focus transformed into advocacy and creating a more equitable workplace for colleagues and environment for students to thrive (Dillard, 1994; Dixson, Griffin & Teoh, 2019; Pour-Khorshid, 2016). This created a new sense of purpose within their profession. The hope is with this new purpose that these teachers of color will remain in the profession regardless of the systemic issues still plaguing the profession and that teachers of color will be the change agents the teaching profession needs to cultivate equity throughout the education system (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011).

Limitations

Qualitative research was the appropriate choice for this study given that understanding the reasons for attrition of teachers of color combined with attempting to mitigate the resultant impact is a concept that remains too illusive in nature. Capturing the research partners' attitudes

and emotions that have developed due to the systemic racism that has molded the education system allowed the researcher to gain insights specific to this phenomenon.

The positionality of the researcher within the context of the research site threatens the credibility of the research. As an appointed leader, the researcher holds potential within the organization that can potentially deviate into coercive power. To mitigate the propensity for partners to perceive that their participation is compulsory in nature, the researcher developed the affinity group through a participatory social-justice action research approach (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). As such, the process elevates partners to the role of partner with the prerogative and sanction to co-create the content of the affinity group (Morgan & Morgan, 2021). Rather than being coercive in nature, the process "empowers the disenfranchised to emigrate from position of powerlessness to a posture of prosperity" (Morgan & Morgan, 2021, p. 126).

A second limitation of the study resides in generalizability of the research findings given the exploratory nature of the affinity group in its current iteration. Specifically, the design of the empowerment mechanism solely focused on providing support for teachers of color at Stanley Jerome Elementary School. In keeping with the improvement science ideology, the findings from this current study remain most applicable to the research site. The researcher established trustworthiness and credibility through the technique of member-checking by sharing transcripts and the study's conclusions with the study's partners. Pursuant to qualitative inquiry, the researcher utilized through description of the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research to enhance transferability (Korstiens & Moser, 2018). These two aspects, credibility and transferability, have helped to establish trustworthiness within this research.

Additionally, the researcher focused on one school. Although traditionally this would have been considered a limitation, the purpose of an improvement science dissertation in practice

is to accelerate how a field learns to improve. Improvement science focuses on one school and one problem of practice at a time in order to deploy rapid tests of change to guide development, revision, and continued fine-tuning of new tools, processes, work roles and relationships (Perry, Zambo, & Crow, 2020). Therefore, focusing on one school was a strength in this study.

The potential for bias is an additional limitation to this study. The researcher is a seasoned educator of color and gained rapport with the study's partners which allowed the partners to be honest and transparent with the information given during focus group interviews, affinity group sessions, and affinity group reflections, giving the study rich and immense data to add to the research. Through a combination of teaching, research and lived experience, the presumed bias is in reality a strength of the research that increases the credibility and trustworthy nature of the research. For those persons that consider the researcher's racialized positionality a potential for bias, it is appropriate to question the questioner in that European American researchers are rarely accused of biased when researching European partners, however the proposition of bias is quite often uttered when considering research completed by researchers of color working for the liberation of communities of color (Zuberi et al., 2008) However, this study was a participatory social justice design. Therefore, leaders should be partnering with stakeholders in order to create real and immediate change within a phenomenon (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

A final consideration of limitation connected with the study are the longitudinal effects. The researcher conducted this study within a six-week period, which could constrain the results of investigating the research problem and to measure the change. It is the expectation of an improvement science interventions to occur within a short cycle to test the change idea (Perry, Zambo, & Crow, 2020). If the intervention produces positive results, the researcher can learn

from the process, improve the process, and complete additional cycles of research as the process for improvement. Engaging in a short cycle approach is appropriate for the study given the paucity of research on the use of affinity groups as a strategy to retain teachers of color.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several areas for future research have the potential to bolster the findings of this study. By engaging a larger population of teachers of color, researchers gather a larger population of teachers of color, researchers gather a larger range of perceptions that help to verify the promising results of the study. Within an expanded research design. Researchers can utilize a more diverse population of teachers of color, which is beneficial for gathering additional perceptions and reaching saturation. This study included African American/Black and Latinx teachers. An expanded sample allows researchers to study the effects of implementing same race affinity groups compared to a mixed-race affinity group.

Another suggestion for a future study would be a longitudinal study consisting of teachers of color who are part of an affinity group and are willing to answer survey questions over a multi-year period to determine if there is an increase in the teachers of color intention to stay in the profession if the retention rate of teachers of color in a school or district increases as a result of engaging in the affinity group.

The results of this study revealed that teachers of color are concerned about their students and the validation of their racial and cultural makeup. Advocacy became a central focus within this study. A replication of this study that includes students as partners in racial affinity groups has the potential to determine if advocacy is a natural progression of affinity groups utilizing the support to empowerment model that emerged from this research. With an expanded study, the

research could evolve to a mixed methods design that includes tracking the culture and climate data, students and teacher perceptions, as well as student achievement and teacher growth. Additionally, studying the effects of ally groups for teachers of European descent, people who do not identity with a particular affinity group but want to support the equal rights of people from that group and tracking cultural sensitivity and perceptions of students and colleagues of color.

Recommendations for Practice

After gathering the data for this research, there are several recommendations for school leaders and district leaders to support the goal of retaining teachers of color. The recommendations take into consideration the barriers and challenges, as well as the hopes and aspirations as expressed by the partners in the study.

Create Intentional Space for Teachers of Color

The affinity group was a space specifically for teachers of color. This space provided security, understanding, fellowship, mentorship, and development. Creating a space that is intentionally for the care, wellbeing, and development of teachers of color proved itself to be a necessity. Teachers of color expressed the sincere need for developing relationships and connectedness in the six weeks of the affinity group compared to the relationships and lack of connectedness felt within the school community.

This space must be authentic and be able to provide the pillars of a safe space discussed in the Model of Support to Empowerment for Teachers of Color, cultural understanding, validation, and mentorship. Research states that affinity groups are a place of healing and a place where teachers of color are supported in their personal, political, relational, and pedagogical growth (Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Creating this space also has implications for their retention and leadership within the field.

Schools and districts should examine the need and want for this space, as well as who should be organizing this space. Great Schools Partnership suggests choosing a person who has access to the principal of the school or the superintendent of the district as well as someone who is comfortable raising concerns of teachers of color (Great Schools Partnership, 2020). The physical space of the meeting location is just important as the space itself. The meeting location should be a place that provides a welcoming and private environment. It can be held onsite or offsite. Schools and districts can also consider the organization of racial affinity groups. For example, an affinity group for all teachers of color, an affinity group for African American/Black teachers, Hispanic/Latinx teachers, Asian teachers, etc. In keeping with the current model, schools and district leaders need to consult with potential affinity group members to understand what they believe works best.

In addition to creating the time and physical space for teachers of color, schools and districts should also create time and space for the entire staff to reflect on culturally relevant pedagogy, unconscious bias, and race and equity training. Continuously educating the entire community helps bridge the gaps within the systemic issues this profession and our community faces daily. Analyzing past and current practices and actively challenging our practices keeps equity at the forefront of this work, for teachers and students.

By engaging the entire staff, the leader begins to address the systemic issues that cause racialized attrition within schools. The current research focused on the empowerment of teachers of color, but that is not to indicate that the system is working well. Every practice that empowers teachers must also occur in a context that continually equalizes and validates the experience and expertise of teachers of color.

Create a Culture of Empowerment

Administrators who provide the space for racial affinity groups should also take seriously the feelings, thoughts, and opinions of teachers of color. This study has shown, and research corroborates, teachers of color isolate themselves due to the dominant cultural capital within the school or the district (Carver-Thomas, 2017; D'Amico et al., 2017; Ingersoll, 2001; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). To engage teachers of color, they must be empowered. They must know that their expertise is valid and is part of the community and the growth of that community.

Schools and districts should consider regularly meeting with affinity group facilitators and discussing the concerns of the affinity group. When teachers of color know that their thoughts, feelings, and opinions are taken into consideration for practice, they not only feel supported, but they are also empowered to continuously engage in the work happening within the school building and within the community. They feel that they are an integral part of the school's success and the growth of their students and their practice.

Schools and districts should also consider counting the participation of affinity groups as part of professional development. The support teachers of color receive through affinity groups is directly aligned to teacher evaluations. The Common Core of Teaching consists of four domains: (a) Classroom environment, student engagement, and commitment to learning, (b) Planning for active learning, (c) Instruction for active learning, and (d) professional responsibilities and teacher leadership. The affinity group touched upon all four domains of the Common Core of Teaching authentically for teachers of color.

Leadership roles and opportunities should also spring forth from affinity groups. Teachers of color will have a space to not only be understood and supported, but a place to grow. To retain teachers of color, they must know there is room for growth. The affinity group can

offer a place for teachers of color to develop leadership skills, mentor one another, and find passions within the profession that sparks their interest to stay in the profession.

Expect and Prepare for Resistance

Unfortunately, not all stakeholders will understand the value of having racial affinity groups. Once affinity groups begin, schools and districts should expect resistance from various stakeholders. People will question and challenge the legitimacy of racial affinity groups and may claim "reverse racism" of sorts. However, schools and districts should remain steadfast and continue to educate others on the purpose and efficacy of racial affinity groups. Using FAQ documents, research articles, informative videos, and having candid conversations with stakeholders will help to break down the resistance the school or district may experience. Additionally, schools and districts should also create policies that address the disruption of affinity group sessions, the harassment of affinity group members, and to respect the privacy of affinity group members.

District and schools can consider forming ally groups for teachers who are not of color but would like to support teachers of color and equity across their profession. Ally groups allow partners the opportunity to identify ways in which those of European descent can use their privilege to bring about social change. The ally group can also help stakeholders of European descent to help one another understand white privilege and how they can address the impact of racism and to interrupt experiences of internalized racism (Blitz & Kohl, 2012). Creating an ally group in addition to racial affinity groups can have the potential to create true accelerated changes within the culture and climate of buildings and districts, as well as aid in the retention of teachers of color.

Conclusion

In this Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice, the researcher desired a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the retention of teachers of color. The findings of the study shed light on the experiences and perceptions of teachers of color and the impact of the support of the empowerment mechanism, an affinity group. This study contributes to the literature and reinforces the need for intentional and targeted support for teachers of color to remain in the profession.

Retaining teachers of color is a goal many schools and districts are struggling to reach and maintain. However, retaining teachers of color is essential for social justice and the social-emotional growth of all students (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Carver-Thomas, 2017; Ingersoll, 2001; Kohli, 2012). Schools and districts across the nation are creating programming, adding recruitment and retention of teachers of color to strategic operating plans, and partnering with colleges and universities to contribute to this endeavor. Affinity groups provide a safe space for teachers of color to be understood, feel validated, be mentored and to become mentors, to explore leadership opportunities, to be empowered, and to become advocates for their students and for social justice.

This study is significant in that it highlights the targeted support given to teachers of color through affinity groups. This study also highlights the trajectory of teachers of color once they are supported properly and holistically. The targeted support cultivates empowerment, and the empowered teacher becomes an activist, which gives an increased purpose to the "why" teachers of color will remain in the profession. This study allowed the researcher to create a model of the targeted support teachers of color needed and the platform, progress, and power that comes from a racial affinity group. Finally, this study was significant as it gave voice to teachers

of color and therefore allowed teachers of color to take back or find their power and use it to

make changes that will potentially lead to a more equitable environment for teaching and

learning.

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Appendix A

Environmental Informant Interview Protocol

Interview #

Date ___/___/___

Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Marissa Whited and I'm a graduate student at Sacred Heart University conducting my dissertation study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Educational Leadership. This interview will take about 30 minutes to complete and will include questions regarding teachers of color in your school or district. I would like your permission to tape-record this interview, so that I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers view the support from school and district administration as a teacher of color. The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of the types of supports that are needed for teachers of color. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice: The Fight for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Addressing Social Justice Through the Retention of Teachers of Color.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

Environment Informant Interview Questions:
- What supports does your school/district have for teachers of color?

- What initiatives does your school/district have in place to increase and sustain the number of teachers of color?
    a. What do you think is needed to increase the amount of teachers of color in your school/district?

- What trends do you notice with teachers of color in your school/district?
    - Successes and areas for growth

- What would you recommend for other schools or districts that will help them to retain teachers of color?

Closing
Is there anything else you think is important about support for teachers of color that we have not talked about?

- Summarize
- Thank participant
- Provide extra information and contacts to partners

Appendix B

End-User Interview Protocol

Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Marissa White, and I m a graduate student at Sacred Heart University conducting my dissertation study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Educational Leadership. This interview will take about 60 minutes to complete and will include questions regarding your experience as a teacher of color in the Hartford Public School System. I would like your permission to tape-record this interview so that I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers view the support from school and district administration as a teacher of color. The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of the types of supports that are needed for teachers of color.

At this time, I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice: The Fight for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Addressing Social Justice Through the Retention of Teachers of Color. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy, and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

End-User Interview Questions:

Support (15 minutes)	1. *Tell me about the support that you receive as a teacher of color?* School level support 2. District level support 3. Other support *What could school administrators do to add more support?*
Challenges (5-10 minutes)	*What challenges do you face in supporting student achievement at your school?*
Culture & Climate (15-20 minutes)	*Tell me about your personal and professional interactions with your colleagues?* *Tell me about your personal and professional interactions with your school and district leaders?* *Tell me about how students and parents are treated by administrators and teachers in this school?* 4. What does it look like when someone is treated well? 5. Can you give me an example of a time when a person of color has not been treated well and what you might have done differently?

	Probes
	Teacher interactions
	Microaggression that may be present
	How are you treated by your colleagues?
	How are you viewed by your colleagues?
	        -Disciplinarian?
	        -Curriculum expert?
	        -Whole educators?
	How are students and parents treated in the school?
	        -
	What is the impact on you at work?
	Do you have relationships to address these issues?

Successes **(5-10 minutes)**	What success have you had in supporting student achievement at your school?
Closing **(5 minutes)**	Is there anything else you think is important about support for teachers of color that we have not talked about? - Summarize - Thank participant - Provide extra information and contacts to partners

Appendix C

Affinity Group Session Reflection Protocol

Date:_____
Affinity Group Session #:
Session Topic:

Directions: At the end of every affinity group session, please take about 10 minutes to reflect on the group's discussion, the guest speaker (if applicable), your thoughts and feelings, and your reality as a teacher of color. Answer the questions below in as much detail as possible and submit them within 24 hours of the affinity group session.

Initial Impressions: What were your initial thoughts and feeling about….? (The topic of affinity group session). Please explain in detail.
Self-Learning: What insights are emerging for you? What are you learning/understanding? (About you or the teaching profession?
Next Action Step – What learning, or takeaways will you implement or dig deeper into after this session? Why?
Support – What support would you like to have as you begin implementing the next action steps or continuing with your established teaching practices this year?

Appendix D

Consent for Participation

Consent for Participation in Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice Research

Title of Research Study: The Fight for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: Addressing Social Justice Through the Retention of Teachers of Color

Researcher:	Marissa White	
	Phone: 203-214-2222	Email: whitem@mail.sacredheart.edu
Faculty Sponsor:	T. Lee Morgan, Ph.D.	
	Phone: 203-365-0000	E-mail: morgant@sacredheart.edu

I volunteer to participate in an Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice (ISDiP) research project conducted by Marissa J. White from Sacred Heart University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information action on the retention of teachers of color and the specific supports needed to retain those teachers. I will be one of approximately 20 people being interviewed, participating in affinity group sessions and/or a focus group session for this research.

✓ My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

✓ I understand that most interviewees/partners will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session or affinity group sessions, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview and focus group interview, or not participate in the affinity group session.

✓ Participation involves being interviewed by the primary investigator, Marissa J. White, as well as attending four affinity group sessions and one focus group session. The interview, affinity group sessions, and focus group session will last approximately 60 minutes each. Notes will be written during the interview and/or the focus group. An audio recording of the interview, focus group, and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be recorded, the researcher can write notes as the interview is in session.

✓ I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, affinity group participation, or focus group session and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

✓ The researcher has taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, as a participant, you may still experience some risks related to feelings that may be evoked from questions being asked in the interview. The study may include other risks that are unknown at this time. If, however, you feel embarrassed or uncomfortable at any time to answer a question, you may decline to answer the question or end the interview. You may also choose to withdraw from the study. There will be no penalty, no negative consequences, and no removal of other benefits to which you are entitled if you decline to answer any question, end the interview, or withdraw from the study.

✓ Building and district administrators from my district will neither be present at the interview, affinity groups, or focus group nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

Having read the above and have had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research.

If you have any questions about this research study, you may contact me, Marissa White, at whitem7@mail.sacredheart.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, you can contact the Sacred Heart University Institutional Review Board at alpf1@sacredheart.edu or 203-396-8241.

Options for Participation

Please **initial** your choice for the options below:
_____ The researchers may audio record or photograph me during the interview process of this study.
_____ The researchers may NOT audio record or photograph me during the interview process of this study.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   **Date**

_____
Participant Printed Name

_____   _____
Researcher Signature   **Date**

For further information, please contact:
Marissa J. White
Doctoral Candidate
Sacred Heart University
Office: 860-695-0000
Cell: 203-214-2222

Appendix E

Letter of Invitation

Teachers of Color at Dr. Michael D. Fox Elementary School

Date: _____

Dear_____,

        You are invited to participate in an Improvement Science Dissertation in a Practice research study conducted by Marissa White, a Sacred Heart University Doctor of Educational Leadership program student. This invitation will allow you to participate in an opportunity to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the teaching profession.

        As a profession, we need culturally competent teachers and school leaders that are inclusive of individuals that are representative of the cultural diversity in their communities and in the world in general. However, this challenge is complicated by the fact that most school communities continue to be dominated by teachers of European descent. One reason for the lack of diversity in the teaching profession is the lack of support given to teachers of color. As we purposefully examine our practices in supporting teachers of color, it is recognized proactively offering mentorship/fellowship is a high-impact move that has been proven to mitigate the impact of structural racism within educational and professional systems. To this purpose, I am excited to embark on a unique support system for interested candidates of color at M.D. Fox. An affinity group for teachers of color will commence in November 2021.

        The purpose of this study is to examine the extent of support affinity groups afford to teachers of color. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a teacher of color at Dr. Michael D. Fox Elementary School. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

    a.   Participate in 6 affinity group sessions, approximately 60 minutes each. The affinity group sessions will be used to offer useful professional learning and networking activities. There will be opportunities to share with me suggestions and ideas around mentoring and support for teachers of color.

    b.   You will also be asked to participate in a focus group interview at the end of the six sessions during week 7, also approximately 60 minutes in length.

    c.   Complete an "After Session Reflection" after each affinity group session, which should take approximately 10 minutes and can be done on your own time. Your discourse within the affinity group sessions and the focus group interview will be anonymous and confidential.

        Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may decide to discontinue participation at any time. Feel free to contact me at whitem@mail.sacredheart.edu or call me at 203-214-2222 if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Marissa J. White

Ed.D Candidate

The Isabelle Farmington College of Education

Sacred Heart University

Appendix F

Affinity Group Explanation

An affinity group is people sharing a typical race, ethnicity, religion, language, or goals and objectives. These individuals gather intending to find connection, support, and inspiration. Affinity groups can happen within any profession or organization, including education. These resources are specifically targeted to the development of affinity groups for educators of color. Such groups can provide partners support to survive racial isolation in many schools and institutions. These groups can be used as retention tools specifically designed to provide support for educators of color and help them remain in the profession.

For decades, the United States has failed to provide an educator workforce that truly reflects the country's diversity. Today, over half of the nation's public-school students are children of color. Still, educators of color, representing about 20% of the educator workforce, are grossly underrepresented in teaching and administrative roles. Much like segregated schools, an educator workforce that is predominantly European American can contribute to perpetuating racial bias, stereotypes, and inequitable systems.

Everyone benefits from having a racially diverse educator workforce (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Kohli, 2018). Increased teacher diversity can lead to more culturally relevant teaching techniques and curriculum, higher expectations of students of color, and the reduction of the racial achievement gap (Dilworth & Colman, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). It may also encourage students of color to enter the teaching profession. Unfortunately, these aspirations will not be realized without combatting the challenges of recruiting and retaining a diverse educator workforce.

Appendix G

Affinity Group FAQ

What is an affinity group?
An affinity group is a designated "safe space" where everyone in that group shares a particular identity. This identity can be based on race, gender, sexual orientation, language, nationality, physical/mental ability, socio-economic class, family structure, religion, etc. Affinity groups can be a place for underrepresented people in a community to come together to feel less isolated and more connected. During affinity groups, partners might share and talk about their experiences or focus on working towards a particular mission or goal.

Who can be part of an affinity group?
Only people who identify with a particular group can be a part of that affinity group. This is so that affinity group members can safely express their experiences without worrying about others not understanding their experience because they are of another identity.

Aren't affinity groups just exclusive and divisive?
Affinity groups are intended to bring people together over a commonality. We all benefit from interactions with people who share common identities or experiences. When you are in the numerical minority of a community, these bonding interactions may only occur during an affinity group. Affinity groups are only "exclusive" to create a safe space for people who may not feel safe in the larger community because they are in the numerical minority. During affinity group meetings, people can share freely and without inhibition about their experiences. These groups make them feel more visible and more included in our community and, in doing so, enhance our commitment to inclusivity.

Don't affinity groups just promote segregation and not diversity?
Affinity groups are one aspect of creating a diverse and socially just world. They make the safe space needed for people to build strength and pride. But equally as necessary are the collaborative efforts between different groups of people towards creating equity for all. Allies are people who do not identify with a particular affinity group but want to support the equal rights of people from that group. Ally work and affinity work are both essential aspects of creating social equity.

Appendix H

Process Understanding Interview Protocol

<div align="right">

Interview #

Date ___/___ ___/___

</div>

Script

      Welcome and thank you for your participation today as well as your participation throughout this study. My name is Marissa White, and I'm a graduate student at Sacred Heart University conducting my dissertation study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Educational Leadership. This interview will take about 30-40 minutes to complete and will include questions regarding your experience within the affinity group at Dr. Michael D. Fox Elementary School. I would like your permission to tape-record this interview, so that I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers view the support from school and district administration as a teacher of color. The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of the types of supports that are needed for teachers of color.

      At this time, I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the Improvement Science Dissertation in Practice: The Fight for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Addressing Social Justice Through the Retention of Teachers of Color. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy, and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses.

      Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

Process Understanding Interview Questions:
1. What are your thoughts and feelings about the affinity group?

2. What did you take away from the affinity group sessions?

3. Do you feel more connected to the school community after the affinity group sessions? If yes, how so? If no, why?

4. Do you feel that the affinity group offered additional support for your growth as a teacher? If yes, in what ways. If no, why?

5. Do you feel that the affinity group bettered your practice as a teacher?

6. Would you be interested in having this affinity group continuing? Why?

7. What would you add or take away from the affinity group to improve its purpose?

Closing

Is there anything else you think is important about support for teachers of color that we have not talked about?
- Summarize
- Thank participant
- Provide extra information and contacts to partners

***If participant wishes to discontinue study, ask if they would be willing to share why:

Thank the participant for his/her participation.

Appendix I

School District Sponsorship

HARTFORD
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Sponsorship Form
(Completed by School or District Leader)

Research Proposal Title:	The Fight for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: Addressing Social Justice Through the Retention of Teachers of Color

I, **Kevin Geissler, Principal** of **Dr. Michael D. Fox Elementary School** understand:

- the above research study and what it requires of staff, students, and/or parents in my school/district;
- that the privacy and confidentiality of any staff or student will be protected;
- that I have the right to allow or reject this research study to take place at my school;
- that I have the right to terminate the study at any time;
- that I have the right to review all consent forms and research documents at any time during the study and up to three years after its completion.

Select One (Required)

☒ I grant permission to the researcher to conduct the above named research project in my school as described in the proposal.
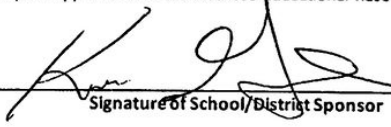
☐ I DO NOT grant permission to the researcher to conduct the above named research in my school as described in the proposal.

Data Release Agreement (Required – If permission to conduct is agreed upon)

☒ I understand that data should be released only by the departments that own them. My staff and I shall NOT release data to the researcher without prior approval from the District's Educational Research Review Board.

6/21/21
Date Submitted

Signature of School/District Sponsor

Hartford Public Schools | 11

Appendix J

CITI Training Certificate

Completion Date 13-Sep-2019
Expiration Date 12-Sep-2022
Record ID 32847684

This is to certify that:

Marissa White

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Sacred Heart University, Inc.

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w74c7df83-9606-4af1-b3ef-cc69df1b5f08-32847684

Appendix K
MD FOX Affinity Group
Session #1
November 18, 2021

Time	Activity
10 minutes	Welcome Introductions Review agenda Create norms
10 minutes	**Connection:** Name an educator who has inspired you. Listen to My Teacher Loves Me.
20 minutes	**Activity:** Resource: A Letter to Teachers of Color Protocol: A.W.E. Protocol
5 minutes	Suggestions for next agenda Plus: What worked? Deltas: What could improve?
15 minutes	Socialization **Reminder: Google Reflection Form** Adjourn

MD FOX Affinity Group
Session #2
November 23, 2021

Time	Activity
5 minutes	Welcome Review Norms Review agenda
10 minutes	**Connection:** Ice Breaker – This or That -Would you rather live in a country or city? -Would you rather be indoors or outdoors? -Would you rather have a sports car or pickup truck? Would you rather be able to fly or be able to change into an animal?
30 minutes	**Activity:** Resource: America To Me Discussion Questions: • What surprised, angered, or disappointed you?

	• How does today's film resonate with your experience as a student? -To the lives of your current students? • What are you doing to combat the inequities mentioned in the film? • What more should be done?
5 minutes	Suggestions for next agenda Plus: What worked? Deltas: What could improve?
	Socialization **Reminder: Google Reflection Form** Adjourn

MD FOX Affinity Group
Session #3
December 2, 2021

Time	Activity
5 minutes	Welcome Review Norms Review agenda
10 minutes	**Connection:** What (or whom) are you feeling grateful for right now?
30 minutes	**Activity:** Supporting teachers of color Guiding questions for discussion: • What is something that you are doing in your classroom right now that makes you excited? • Does anyone have a struggle that you would like help with from the group? • Do you have any resources that you have been using that you'd like to share? Suggested protocol: Ping Pong Protocol
5 minutes	**Suggestions for next agenda** Plus: What worked? Deltas: What could improve?
10 minutes	**Socialization**

	Reminder: Google Reflection Form Adjourn

MD FOX Affinity Group
Session #4
December 9, 2021

Time	Activity
5 minutes	Welcome Review Norms Review agenda
10 minutes	<u>**Connection:**</u> What was your experience with race as a child?
35 minutes	<u>**Activity:**</u> Supporting teachers of color • **Brainstorm** solutions for hardships from last meeting (10 minutes) • **5 Word Story** (10 Minutes) - Each member will craft a five-word story that represents their current state of mind. -The challenge is to pick the best five words that will tell your story as well as afford the reader/listener an understanding of what you are trying to convey • **Video** (10 minutes) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfykU65ziS8 • **Final Thoughts** (5 minutes)
10 minutes	**Socialization** - TRP Plug **Reminder: Google Reflection Form** Adjourn