

## Using Positive Transformations to Eliminate Educational Racism

**Genella Matthews Spencer**

**PhD Candidate**

School of Education & Human Development

University of Colorado

Denver, CO

---

### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to awaken school systems on an issue that is prevalent and affecting all students, black and white. Five sections are discussed followed by *Implementing Positive Transformations* which includes various beneficial implications. The goal is for all students (white, black, and other dark skinned students) to benefit from a pedagogical practice of student-teacher relationships in an environment that is void of racial implementations.

---

### Introduction

Pedagogical practices of teachers of black students have shown to be different towards white students for various reasons that continuously lead to racial discriminatory actions (Howard, 2017; Kalam, 2017; Perry, 2017a; Perry, 2017b). Black students face racism outside of the school system, confronting the injustices of societal trends. As Perry (2017a) stated, “The unconscious bias, racial anxieties, and stereotypes contribute to the criminalization of black people” (para.7). Politics and education are linked in a chain of racial disparities that must be broken for the benefit of all children. The oath of devotion (Pledge of Allegiance) to this nation – America – is or was repeated by students in the salute of the American flag reminding the children that there is liberty and justice for all. Do we really want our children to believe this, or are we trying to brainwash our children into conformers of an American culture of injustice? The public school system was designed to educate and provide a safety zone for all children (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

This article will not only address the racism that students are facing, but the concealed issue of racism within the school system that black teachers are exposed to on a daily basis. Most white people have little if any knowledge about the ways of black folks and their linguistic traditions; they are likely to show a negative attitude toward the expression and voices of black teachers (Jackson, 2011; Miller, 2015; Perry, 1997a; Perry, 1997b). This reflects negatively, oppressively on black and other dark skinned teachers.

Throughout this article, the term *black students* will be used for students that are classified by the United States Census Bureau (2017) as a member of the black race. The term *other dark skinned students* designates students that may have different shades of brown skin but are not necessarily classified by the United States Census Bureau as a member of the black race.

## Discussion

The upcoming sections will discuss how racism is taking place in classrooms and how it affects black students psychologically and academically. A literature review consisting of previous studies and my personal experiences will be used to address the unanswered questions that now exist in the issue of racism in public schools. White teachers have conscious and unconscious biases toward black students, especially black male students that will be openly discussed.

Classrooms are poorly designed causing a hindrance to the full potential of the black students' academic achievement. Is this an accident or purposefully done? This is another issue that needs to be addressed. After focusing on racism of black students, it is essential to examine the pedagogy practices with black students. Do educators feel that it is necessary to teach black students differently from white students? How are black students presently taught in the United States educational system? Do black students learn better when taught by a teacher that looks like them?

It is essential to scope the problematic issue of school districts' hiring practices of black teachers. Qualified black teachers are available for hire. A critical lens of why the minimizing of black teacher hiring practices is happening nationwide will also be reviewed. The purpose of each section is to awaken the issues of racism in the school system – that is primarily avoided – in the hopes to alleviate the pains of the oppressed victims; black students and black teachers.

### **Black and Other Dark Skinned Students Facing Racism in the Classroom**

Racism in the classroom are acts of discrimination, biases, racial microaggressions, prejudices, and stereotype exploitations. All of these actions define the term *racism*, including the degradation and humiliation of black students. The rarity of mentioning racism in the school system is seen as good practice by teachers, administrators, and staff members (Darden, 2009). In other words, saying *racism* is a “no-no” unless the school is giving its annual PD (professional development) on recognizing racism. People seem to find it difficult to describe racism (Blake, 2014). Racism is a form of hatred. Hatred may be manifested in the demonstration of deliberate actions, unconscious actions, and/or subliminal messages (Miller, 2005). Hatred may be developed through life occurrences. As a result, the person thinks they come from a privileged race placed on the top of the hierarchical scale. The Anti-Defamation League (2017) shares a similar definition of racism, “The hatred of one person by another – or the belief that another person is less than human – because of skin color, language, customs, place of birth or any factor that supposedly reveals the basic nature of that person” (para. 2). Racism displays many actions, but it is also an act of hatred (Zirin, 2017; Mudede, 2017; McIntosh, 2013). Does this hatred and other forms of racism take place in the classroom? They definitely can be found in the classroom.

Classroom learning starts with, “The curriculum materials and textbooks written in a manner assuming that the students were white” (Milner, 2006, p. 92). Choosing appropriate textbooks is an important step in the academic curriculum. Black folks contributed vastly to the development of America that is not discussed throughout the school year in classrooms. It is a disservice and a lack of educational concern to all black students and other dark skinned students when this information is withheld from them. Quinlan (2016) shared,

Black students are also expected to stay engaged and interested in courses that don't recognize the reality of their lives—and don't cover the contributions of black political leaders and artists as often as those of white historical figures. Even when black historical figures and contemporary political and cultural leaders are discussed, their lives are whitewashed. (para. 15)

All students, black and white, are exempted from this knowledge by the curriculum choices of bias textbooks and educational materials provided by the school system. Misled information is another form of misled education to all students, especially white students as a message to exemplify their whiteness.<sup>1</sup> For instance, one textbook<sup>2</sup> downplayed the horror of slavery by calling slaves “workers” who “emigrated” to the United States and another textbook<sup>3</sup> of Mexican-American history portrayed Mexican-Americans as trying to “destroy this society” (Quinlan, 2016). A representation of an inaccurate, distorted, and offensive history of Mexico and Mexican-American immigrants are being allowed in the school system (Wang, 2016). The deliberate action of psychological degradation of black students and other dark skinned students is evident in the curriculum development of history classes that will inclusively extend beyond other academics because they are developed and approved by the same people in the public school system.

Learning in the classroom cannot take place in an environment of racial favoritism. Studies have found that black students are more than three times as likely to be suspended or expelled compared to white students (Parker, 2015; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). The experimental study concluded that the teacher-to-student encounter escalated negative stereotype perceptions of black students in the interpretation of specific behaviors. The effect from these types of racist actions in the classroom may result in black students being placed in special education classes. A child only needs to be labeled by one teacher as having “Emotional Disturbance” which means that the child has difficulty building interpersonal relationships with his/her teacher, an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual factors, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness, and a tendency to develop fear with school problems (Loveless, 2020; Young, 2011). A teacher's judgment should have no merit when the teacher lacks cultural and social knowledge of black students. Black students have a higher dropout rate and lower test scores. Black students score less than white students on exams by reason of the psychological racist actions that students face on daily bases. Anderson (2016) stated,

The team of researchers found that the physiological response to race-based stressors – be it perceived racial prejudice, or the drive to outperform negative stereotypes – leads the body to pump out more stress hormones in adolescents from traditionally marginalized groups. What emerges is a picture of Black and Latino students whose concentration, motivation, and ultimately, learning is impaired by unintended and overt racism. (para. 3)

This overt racism widens the academic achievement gap between black and white students.

**Implementing positive transformations.** Racism in the classroom does not have to continue. Awareness and wanting to change are the keys to making a difference. The public school system needs teachers that do not feel threatened by the presence of black students; teachers that have a cultural and societal awareness of black and dark skinned students. Black male students have a higher dropout rate than white male students. They are most likely to be

suspended, expelled, or incarcerated. This can be a product of their home life as well as the school system. Teachers can make a difference in the lives of black male students.

This is no longer a hidden aspect of the treatment imposed on black students and dark skinned students in the classroom. All involved witness its visibility in the classroom, especially the white students. Is this the message that the American educational system wants to give to its white students that are also potential leaders of this nation? Of course not, because the result will continue to demonstrate a United States of racism and the problem will only escalate. Let's not be naïve and hypocritical on why racism in America is so prevalent. White children are taught this through subliminal messages at all grade levels. They observe acts of discrimination, biases, racial microaggressions, prejudices, and stereotype exploitations on people who do not look like them. They form an illusion that they come from a privileged race, placed on the top of the hierarchical scale.

### **The Enlightenment of Classroom Blackness**

A blackness of students and teachers is not only in appearance but also in a culture of common characteristic roots that distinguishes a distinctive pedagogical practice. Evidence has shown that black students achieve higher academic scores when taught by someone that looks like them. Many studies support this claim with important findings.

One of the first studies in this field was conducted in 2004, by the National Bureau of Economic Research<sup>4</sup> which found that when black teachers taught black students from kindergarten to 3rd grade, the gap in children's reading and math scores closed respectively, 71% and 65% (Kalam, 2017, p. 25). Milner (2006) released a report, "Black Teachers' Success with Black Students." The findings showed,

- Black teachers cared more for the black students than the white teachers.
- Black teachers may be less likely to refer their black students to the office for suspension and expulsion.
- Black teachers respect the parents of their students, they do not insult or talk down to parents and the parents respect the teachers.
- Black teachers and black parents work together for the benefit of the students. (pp. 91-94)

Jackson (2017) wrote an article, "The Real Reason Black Kids Benefit from Black Teachers," sharing the relationship about his skin color matching his black students. He said,

It gives me the ability to see them in a way that's untarnished by stereotypes, biases, and cultural disconnects that fuel inequality and injustice. Studies show that the assumptions make people see black boys as less innocent than their white peers. I have a shared racial identity, I am familiar with the world they inhabit, and I can see their charms and challenges without filters of "minority" or "urban" at risk. (para. 4)

Very similar to Jackson's (2017) discovery, DeRuy (2016) shared a comment about black students having a black teacher, "When schools have a diverse teaching force, they may also be able to limit the effects of implicit bias. A recent study found that white teachers have lower expectations than black teachers for the same black students" (para. 2).<sup>5</sup>

The next study reported the findings of the article, “Having at Least One Black Teacher” by Camera (2017). She said, “Having at least one black teacher in school significantly increases the chances that low-income black students graduate high school.<sup>6</sup> For poor black boys, it decreases the risk of dropping out by nearly 40 percent” (para. 1). A similar finding was reported by Kamenetz (2017) stating,

Having just one black teacher in third, fourth, or fifth grade reduced low-income black boys' probability of dropping out of high school by 39 percent. The conclusion of the study was validated by randomly selecting students from another state, Tennessee. Not only did the black students assigned to black teachers graduate high school at higher rates, they also were more likely to take a college entrance exam. (para. 4)<sup>7</sup>

Kamenetz also discovered that black teachers recommend black students for gifted programs more than white teachers. There is an implicit bias by white teachers. Black students prefer teachers of color. The collective evidence of blackness in the classroom validates how essential it is for the pedagogical practices of black students to be recognized in the public school system.

**Implementing positive transformations.** The findings of recent studies and reports had one thing in common; black students do better in school if they are taught by a black teacher. Public school systems can make that happen by taking the necessary steps to employ more black teachers. Black students deserve to have a quality education equal to their white peers. Without the exposure of a black teacher at least once in their educational journey, this may not be possible.

### **Hiring Practices of Black Teachers**

Many large urban school districts are rethinking their personnel management strategies, often giving increased control to schools in the hiring of teachers (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2011). Many schools form a hiring committee consisting of an assistant administrator, a department head, a dean, and a teacher. Sometimes a principal is included but rarely. This method devises a school climate of a collaborative contribution involving staff members by eliminating the old method of having a single interviewer, the principal, to hire the teachers. The interview process is the same: application, resume, references, and a list of interviewer questions. Instead of one person asking the questions, each hiring committee member will participate by asking a question in a round-table format while vigorously taking notes until the list of questions have been covered. At the end of the meeting, the interviewee is told that they will be notified within 1-3 days of their decision. This sounds great but when a committee consisting of all white folks, sometimes with the exception of one black (compare to a single interviewer), make a decision to hire or not to hire the black teacher applicant; the outcome becomes a *collected racial-discriminatory agreement*. Thus, public school systems have made it harder for a well-qualified black teacher to prove that discrimination has taken place. How strategic is that?

This topic is usually not talked about because it is another form of hidden racism – institutional racism. It is the “maintenance of institutions that systematically advantage whites” (Simson, 2014, p. 550) that is hard to prove in court. It may have been easier when one person was in charge of hiring because to dispute the decision of a committee is more challenging.

Public school systems are well aware of this action but they are not doing anything about it. Ignoring the fact that their local schools are practicing discrimination in the hiring of black teachers (or dark skinned teachers) is a disservice to both black and white students that are enrolled in their schools. Again, whiteness – privileged – white superiority – we are a “good school” (white students, white teachers) – is the message that is instilled to white students resulting in their development of racist American citizens.

Pager and Shepherd (2008) reported, “When applicants had acceptable but ambiguous qualifications, however, participants were nearly 70% more likely to recommend the white applicant than the black applicant” (p. 7). They go further and say, “Experimental audit studies<sup>8</sup> focusing on hiring decisions have consistently found strong evidence of racial discrimination, with estimates of white preference ranging from 50% to 240%” (p. 6). Racial discrimination is obvious when this type of action has been a repetitive procedure for years in a predominantly white area rejecting black teachers.

Some black teachers are fortunate to receive a job, but it may be so unpleasant that they end up leaving. I was one of those teachers. I got hired as the only black teacher in the school. I was grateful. However, I wasn't prepared for the cultural shock that was ahead. The behavior of the students at the school and in my class was not good. In other words, uncontrollable. My mentor teacher was white, and she took on the task of showing me how to do things “their way,” which wasn't very effective. What I am saying is that I was being coached on how to act “white.” My mentor literally said, “Your actions and tone of voice needs to change. I am going to show you how to talk.” Needless to say, I never got it right. I never was able to sound like her. Unfortunately, it was evident “whiteness” did not improve the behavior management of the school, and it definitely had no relevance in my classroom. On the same day that I resigned, the school's *After School Same-Day Detention* room was so full that children were sitting on the floor, and this was the largest classroom in the school. When I came to the realization that I wasn't accepted culturally as a black person, I knew it was time to move on.

Institutional expectations of black employees have shown to be demoralizing by derogative comments. In Kanika Jackson's sociolinguistic study, she shared a comment that was made by an employer about his employee. She said, “He did not speak really white American English. He spoke black American English. And there's a big discrepancy there” (2011, p. 18). In other words, the black employee was allowed to sound black but not too black (Alim & Smitherman, 2012, p. 22). A white writer, Emily DeRuy, wrote in her 2016 article, “The Burden of Being a Black Teacher,”

Ultimately, teachers of all races and ethnicities quit because they don't feel appreciated. For black teachers, there's often the sense of an added layer of disrespect that is specifically tied to race. The issues that stifle the development and empowerment of black teachers are so deep seated that it will take honest and critical examinations of school cultures and systemic processes in order for school and district leaders to develop the trust, support, and collegial working environments needed to recruit and retain teachers of color. (para. 10)

The few black teachers that do get hired are facing racism as much as their black students on a daily basis.

Schools that have a higher enrollment of black students are more aggressive in the recruitment of black teachers as role models based on evidence of racial biases among white

teachers (Dee, 2004; D'amico, Pawlewicz, Earley, & McGeehan, 2017). The 2016 Kentucky Teacher of the Year, Valerie Strauss (2016) wrote an article, "Why White Students Need Black Teachers by a White Teacher," shared a similar view knowing that it is important for all students to have a black teacher by stating,

It is difficult to believe generalized racist comments when a human being [her black English teacher, Mr. Trumbo] who defies them stands before you every day. The answer to this problem isn't simply recruiting minority teachers just to increase the numbers of minority teachers, but to provide pathways for *everyone* capable of becoming a phenomenal teacher to be given the opportunity and autonomy to do so. (para. 18)

Black students need black teachers as a role model but it's not just about increasing the number of black teachers; it's about doing the right thing and hiring black teachers for all students giving them the opportunity to show that they are phenomenal teachers.

**Implementing positive transformations.** The hiring of black teachers starts with local schools, but the responsibility lies with the public school system. It is the responsibility of the school system to enforce the actions of discrimination that is taking place at the local school level. There is a large school district located in the Rocky Mountain area that appointed a black person as Director of the Human Resource Department. To protect the identity of that person, I will refer to the Director as Mr. Z. Mr. Z shared the concerns that the district was having about the lack of black teachers in their schools with me. This particular school district has a predominantly white student population. It was speculated by Mr. Z that something was not right when well-qualified black teachers applied for academic positions such as mathematics, chemistry, physics, and language arts teachers at their predominantly white schools and not hired. Yet, the less-qualified white teachers were the ones that got hired. The black teachers were informed by Mr. Z to report back to the Human Resource Department after the interview if there were any concerns that took place during the interview. Mr. Z told me that no one has ever reported back after completing their interview. Mr. Z was perplexed and shared with me that the district's schools were still not hiring qualified black teachers, and none of the applicants made a complaint. A deeper investigation of that district's interviewing procedure may have addressed their concerns. Today, the practice of a *collected racial-discrimination agreement* in that school district still exists.

This type of practice needs to be stopped. It's a way of saying that we're trying to address the how and why our local schools discriminate against black teachers. If applicants don't say anything, then we can't do anything about it. Hearsays, assumptions, and accusations will not legally stop employment discrimination. I devise that there is a better way to do this. I propose the following:

School systems can mandate follow-up documents that all schools must submit at the end of each interview process. The first document must state the interviewee's name, race, and credentials. The remaining documents will consist of the name and race of each person on the hiring committee with the interviewer questions and the interviewee's answers. The original hand-written notes (answers, replies, comments given by the interviewee) that the committee members vigorously took during the round-table interviewing process must be submitted and unadulterated. Finalized on a separate

document, an explanation from each hiring committee member their choice of candidate and the reason for that choice. A detailed explanation with specifics will also need to be given on why the other candidate(s) were not chosen. The follow-up documents will be reviewed by the school district's Diversity & Equity Department, which will make the final decision in the hiring process.

This type of process will eliminate the many discriminatory actions that are taking place in hiring qualified black teachers. The customary procedure of “yeas and nays” should no longer be used. Documentation is a better method. Having the individual hiring committee member put their decision in writing justifies their behavior and actions for both the interviewer and the interviewee as a legal reinforcement against discrimination concerns. At the present time, this is not the procedure. Human Resource Departments seem to be dumbfounded on how to handle this predicament. The implementation of this suggestion is straightforward and possible. The public school system is allowing for a collective group of individuals to continue their practice of keeping qualified black teachers from being employed in their predominantly white schools.

### **The Designing of a Segregated Classroom**

A classroom consisting of a diversity of races (United Census Bureau, 2017) may not literally be separated by shades of color, but it does exist. It was brought to my attention during my early days as a teacher in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn, New York. Most of my students were black, so I didn't have an obvious arrangement of races. It was a segregation of gender. I became attentive when I received an informal visit by the administrator; the principal walked into my classroom and quizzically asked me to explain why I placed the black male students in the back corner of the room. I didn't intentionally single them out. From what I remembered, they asked to be placed there. After that, I was consciously aware of how my students were arranged. My classrooms no longer had black male students congregated together in the back of the room nor a checkerboard-grouping pattern of races. It may be possible that teachers put black male students in the back of the classroom because the guys may want it that way, and the teacher is afraid to confront them (Calvert, 2017). As I now walk into many classrooms, I notice that exact arrangement with black male students. Often times, the black students are placed together, and the white students are placed together. This type of classroom arrangement is not uncommon in the public school system, but it is doing a disservice to the black students' performance (O'Neil, 1998; Meeks et al., 2013). This is an obvious concept of a segregated classroom.

What may not be so obvious is the atmosphere of segregation that the teacher is instilling in the mindset of the students. Tyrone and Terry (2011) support a teaching method that they call “culturally responsive teaching.” They stated, “There is growing evidence which shows that culturally responsive teaching approaches are having an influence on student outcomes, improving student learning, and engaging students who are often disengaged from teaching and learning” (p. 356). This may sound great but whose culture are we talking about? The classroom is full of different cultures. If you are singling out black students, why is that? Are they the majority in the classroom? Recognizing the culture of the students decreases the atmosphere of a segregated classroom but can “culturally responsive teaching” really do this? Tyrone and Terry feel that not only is there good culturally responsive teaching but it can also be poorly done as further explained, “One of the more troubling explanations for disparate educations of poor



culturally responsive teaching attempts to disrupt is the deficit-based explanations of poor students, students of color in general, and African American students in particular” (p. 349).<sup>9</sup> Racial division and apprehension against one another of a different race may result from this type of pedagogical practice if not done ethically. This is dangerous and may exploit a message of pedagogical racism.

White-middle class students have shown high academic performances with “culturally responsive pedagogy” used in their majority-white classrooms for decades in the public school system. Should the curriculum be changed for black students, excluding the white students, in that same classroom? I bring up the question because I taught at a predominantly black school in a Rocky Mountain school district, and they did exactly that. They excluded the small percentage of white students’ culture (because they were the minority) in their pedagogical practices, school assemblies, and school events.

The white students were withdrawn and afraid to speak up. They stuck together and conversed among themselves, but they were ethnically segregated in the classroom. The teachers were supported, encouraged, and trained at PDs (professional developments) by the principal to implement this style of pedagogy. This type of practice should have never been allowed. White students, black students, and all the other racial groups of students should have the opportunity to excel in academics equally in a pedagogical practice of a nonsegregated classroom.

**Implementing positive transformation.** Evidence for segregated classrooms has been presented, but it doesn't have to continue. First, teachers must look at the physical design of their classroom. Check to see if it is conducive to all learners and not segregated in a grouping patchwork of colors. Disperse the racial groups bringing in a sense of unity among the societal learning of students. Second, be careful in how you use culturally responsive teaching (if that is your choice) in your classroom. This type of teaching may cause more harm than good. Recognize all cultures even if you only have one student that is of a different culture, and teach with meaningful student discourse implementing the culture in the academic subject. Finally, it is never acceptable to exclude any culture of a student in the classroom. Schools were meant to be a safe and loving place for students, and teachers have the responsibility to enforce that in their classroom. Likewise, administrators have a responsibility to ensure all students are treated equally.

### **What's Right With White Teachers**

Teachers, white and black, should have the best interest of their student at heart. No teacher has the intention of doing harm to students. My son (the only black student in his history class) was targeted by his white male teacher with a racial joke that upset the white students. They went home and told their parents about it. My son didn't mention it to me because he liked the teacher and didn't want to cause a problem. I found out because one of the white parents saw me at the grocery store and started apologizing explaining that the community (predominantly white) did not agree with the teacher’s comment. She went on to say how sorry they were for his actions. Of course, I didn't know what had happened until the parent went into details. I reassured the parent that I had no ill feelings against the community, but I did confront the teacher and the administrator the next day on what had happened. The teacher cried and said that he meant no harm; it was just a joke. To make sure students are not psychologically harmed by racial microaggressions, biases, and stereotype exploitation, steps need to be taken by the public

school system to prevent this from happening by utilizing proper teacher training. Are white teachers racist? Most people might say “no,” but a white Norman, Oklahoma teacher feels differently. From a lecture by the Oklahoma high school philosophy teacher, Wootson (2016) quoted the teacher as saying,

Am I racist? And I say yea. I don't want to be. It's not like I choose to be racist, but do I do things because of the way I was raised? To be white is to be racist, period. (para. 5)

The lecture was given at a predominantly white school that caused white students, school officials, and white parents to feel very uncomfortable from the white teacher's admission to racism. Other students were in support of his honesty and praised him for his serious and thoughtful discussions about institutional racism in order to change history and promote inclusivity (Wootson, 2016). Unfortunately, the teacher was facing charges of inappropriately handling racism.

Some white teachers may not be as audacious as the philosophy teacher, but one wrote an article, “I was a Racist Teacher and I Didn't Even Know It.” She shared how she campaigned for black politicians but as a teacher, she noticed that she had racist tendencies (Calvert, 2017). Awareness does not make you anti-racist. Even denying the racial acts of others is not enough, but learning to become anti-racist and taking responsibility for your own actions is the ultimate step. Calvert (2017) states,

Anti-racism is more of an action than a feeling. I'm learning to take action to promote equity and to call out injustice. I am learning to lean into doing my part to help this country that I love. I become true to our promise of justice for all. (para. 17)

Deterring the ambiance of inequality in the classroom is an action that teachers need to take as a positive role model of anti-racism for both white and black students.

Lynch (2015) recognized that black boys are more likely to be placed in special education with 80% of all special education students being black or Hispanic males. He states, “The K-12 teaching profession is dominated by white women, many of whom are very qualified and very interested in helping all their students succeed but lack the first-hand experience needed to connect with their black male students” (p. 1).

Most teachers probably do not realize the extent of the damage that they are doing to black students. White teachers do not intentionally commit acts of racism expressed by Jamie Utt (2015) in his article, “10 Ways Well-Meaning White Teachers Bring Racism into Our Schools.” He asserted,

I know there are actively racist teachers out there, most white teachers mean well and have no intention of being racist. Yet as people who are inscribed with whiteness, it is possible for us to act in racist ways no matter our intentions. Uprooting racism from our daily actions takes a lifetime of work. (para. 4)

This cannot be done by the recognition that black students learn better from black teachers or calling for the recruitment of more black teachers (Perry, 2017b). Facing reality, black students' chances of always having a black teacher are slim. So, there must be another solution to this problem since white teachers are presently here to remain teaching black students. The

---

percentage of black teachers in America is significantly small (United States Department of Education, 2016). Perry (2017a) says,

We need the majority of teachers of this country to improve their practice. An effective teacher must be defined as a teacher who is not racist and who acts on the high expectations she has for every child . . . Focusing on black recruitment insidiously shields white educators from scrutiny and downplays how important it is to provide teachers with an anti-racist education before and after they enter the profession. (para.7)

White teachers are gradually recognizing the importance of how their whiteness is embedded in their everyday teaching practices (Hyland, 2005). If this is maintained and more steps are taken by public school systems on teaching anti-racism to white teachers; hopefully, the pedagogical practices of white teachers may change their role as teachers of black and dark skinned students.

**Implementing positive transformations.** There are ways that racism could be abolished in the classroom. It starts with the teacher. Most teachers in the United States are white, so the focus is on white teachers. The student population in urban schools is mainly black and dark skinned students. Therefore, the approach is to fix the white teacher-black student relationship and advance academic achievement. The responsibility of the public school system is to bring awareness of racism in the classroom and teach white teachers how they are exploiting whiteness in the classroom. This needs to stop. The classroom is not a place for personal feelings of stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. Children's lives are precious, and public schools should have a zero-tolerance policy for teachers that practice whiteness or any other type of racism in the classroom.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to awaken the public school system about racism. It is an issue that is prevalent and affecting all students, white and black. Each section resulted with *Implementing Positive Transformations* in hopes that the implications will be used to transform racism in public schools to an environment of non-racial discrimination. The focus was for all students (white, black, and other dark skinned students) to benefit from the aforementioned suggestions that were given in each subsection of *Implementing Positive Transformations*. This article may be used as a very strong message and positive teaching supplement in a professional development workshop on racism in schools or as an informative reference source for educators, local schools, and school districts that are interested in eliminating racism in their institution.

The relevance of a follow-up study will help to see how the implications that were given in the *Implementing Positive Transformations* were used and an examination of the resultant outcomes. A more time consuming, but a more accurate study may be a mixed study of quantitative and qualitative methods in the selection of one or two of the *Discussion* sectors.

---

### References

- Alim, H. S., & Smitherman, G. (2012). *Articulate while black: Barack Obama, language, and race in the US*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, M. D. (2016). How the stress of racism affects learning. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/10/how-the-stress-of-racism-affects-learning/503567/>
- Anti-Defamation League. (2017). *Race and racial justice: Racism*. Retrieved from <https://www.adl.org/racism>
- Blake, J. (2014). *The new threat: Racism without racists*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/26/us/ferguson-racism-or-racial-bias/>
- Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., Ronfeldt, M., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). The role of teacher quality in retention and hiring: Using applications-to-transfer to uncover preferences of teachers and schools. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 30(1), 88-110. doi: 10.3386/w15966
- Calvert, L. (2017). *I was a racist teacher and I didn't even know It*. Retrieved from <http://educationpost.org/i-was-a-racist-teacher-and-i-didnt-even-know-it/>
- Camera, L. (2017). One black teacher can improve outcomes for black students. *US News*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2017-04-05/drop-out-risk-plummets-for-black-students-who-have-one-black-teacher>
- D'amico, D., Pawlewicz, R. J., Earley, P. M., & McGeehan, A. P. (2017). Where are all the black teachers? Discrimination in the teacher labor market. *Harvard Educational Review*, 87(1), 26-49.
- Darden, J. (2009, Fall). Talking race: Making a space where teachers can talk about difference. *Teaching Tolerance*, (36). Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall2009/talking-race>
- Dee, T. S. (2004). Teachers, race and student achievement in a randomized experiment. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 86(1), 195-210. doi: 10.3386/w8432
- DeRuy, E. (2016). The burden of being a black teacher. *The Atlantic Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/the-challenge-of-teaching-while-black/506672/>
- Howard, T. C. (2017). Commentary: Why are we criminalizing black students? *Education Week*, 36(25), 32.
- Hyland, N. E. (2005). Being a good teacher of black students? White teachers and unintentional racism. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 35(4), 429-459. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-873X.2005.00336.x
- Jackson, D. (2017). The real reason black kids benefit from black teachers. *The Sunday Review of the New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.mytimes.com/2017/04/15/opinion/sunday/the-real-reason-black-kids-benefit-from-black-teachers.html>
- Jackson, K. N. (2011). *Speaking the part-is black English in the workplace a detriment to climbing the corporate ladder? A sociolinguistic study regarding black English in the workplace* (Thesis, Paper 124, Wayne State University). Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa\\_theses/124/](https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa_theses/124/)
- Kalam, R. R. (2017). Black teachers matter; school integration doesn't. *Education Week*, 36(30), 24-25.

- Kamenetz, A. (2017). Having just one black teacher can keep black kids in school. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/04/10/522909090/having-just-one-black-teacher-can-keep-black-kids-in-school>
- Loveless, B. (2020). *Emotional and behavioral disorders in the classroom*. Retrieved from <https://www.educationcorner.com/behavioral-disorders-in-the-classroom.html>
- Lynch, M. (2015). *4 troubling truths about black boys and the U.S. educational system*. Retrieved from [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/education\\_futures/2015/08/4\\_troubling\\_truths\\_about\\_black\\_boys\\_and\\_the\\_us\\_educational\\_system.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/education_futures/2015/08/4_troubling_truths_about_black_boys_and_the_us_educational_system.html)
- McIntosh, C. (2013). *Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary* (4th rev. ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Meeks, M. D., Knotts, T. L., James, K. D., Williams, F., Vassar, J. A., & Wren, A. O. (2013). The impact of seating location and seating type on student performance. *Education Science*, 3(4), 375-386. doi: 10.3390/educsci3040375
- Miller, A. (2005). *What is hatred?* Retrieved from <https://www.alice-miller.com/en/what-is-hatred/>
- Miller, G. R. Y. (2015). *How can I explain to a white person who tells a black person, "you speak well" or "you sound like a white person" why this isn't a compliment?* Retrieved from <https://www.quora.com/How-can-I-explain-to-a-white-person-who-tells-a-black-person-you-speak-so-well-or-you-sound-like-a-white-person-why-this-isnt-a-compliment>
- Milner, R. H., IV (2006). The promise of black teachers' success with black students. *Educational Foundations*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ794734.pdf>
- Mudede, C. (2017). *Has racist hatred of Obama completely broken Trump's mind?* Retrieved from <http://www.thestranger.com/slog/2017/06/13/25208803/is-racist-hatred-of-obama-breaking-trumps-mind>
- Okonofua, J. A., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2015). Two strikes, race and the disciplining of young students. *Psychological Science*, 26(5), 617-624.
- O'Neil, J. (1998). Why are all the black kids sitting together? A conversation with Beverly Daniel Tatum. *Reaching for Equity*, 55(4), 12-17.
- Pager, D., & Shepherd, H. (2008, January 1). The sociology of discrimination: Racial discrimination in employment, housing, credit, and consumer markets. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 181-209.
- Parker, C. B. (2015). Teachers more likely to label black students as troublemakers. *Stanford News*. Retrieved from <https://news.stanford.edu/2015/04/15/discipline-black-students-041515/>>
- Perry, A. (2017a). What's really wrong with white teachers? They're racist. *The National Interest*. Retrieved from <http://www.theroot.com/the-national-interest-what-s-really-wrong-with-white-t-1794671362>
- Perry, A. (2017b). What's wrong with white teachers? *The Hechinger Report*. Retrieved from <http://hechingerreport.org/whats-wrong-white-teachers/>
- Perry, T. (1997). *Reflections on the Ebonics debate. Rethinking schools*. Retrieved from <http://rethinkingschools.aidcvr.com/publication/ebonics/ebperry.shtml>

- Quinlan, C. (2016). How racial bias affects the quality of black students' education. *ThinkProgress News Site*. Retrieved from <https://thinkprogress.org/how-racial-bias-affects-the-quality-of-black-students-education-642f4721fc84/>
- Simson, D. (2014, January). Exclusion, punishment, racism and our schools: A critical race theory perspective on school discipline. *UCLA Law Review*, 61, 506-553.
- Strauss, V. (2016). *Why white students need black teachers-by a white teacher*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/08/21/why-white-students-need-black-teachers-by-a-white-teacher/?utm\\_term=.049f817cf775](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/08/21/why-white-students-need-black-teachers-by-a-white-teacher/?utm_term=.049f817cf775)
- Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tyrone, H. C., & Terry, C. L. (2011). Culturally responsive pedagogy for African American students. *Teaching Education, Publications and Resources for Transforming Public Schools*, 22(4), 345-364.
- United States Census Bureau. (2017). *About*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>
- United States Department of Education. (2016). *The state of racial diversity in the educator Workforce; policy and program studies service office of planning, evaluation and policy development*. Washington, D C: Author.
- Utt, J. (2015). 10 Ways well-meaning white teachers bring racism into our schools. *Everyday Feminism*. Retrieved from <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/10-ways-well-meaning-white-teachers-bring-racism-into-our-schools/>
- Wang, Y. (2016). Proposed Texas textbook says some Mexican Americans 'wanted to destroy' U.S. society. *ThinkProgress News Site*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/05/24/proposed-texas-textbook-says-some-mexican-americans-wanted-to-destroy-u-s-society/?utm\\_term=.20074ebd6f9a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/05/24/proposed-texas-textbook-says-some-mexican-americans-wanted-to-destroy-u-s-society/?utm_term=.20074ebd6f9a)
- Wootson, C. R., Jr. (2016). 'To be white is to be racist, period,' a high school teacher told his class. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2016/10/19/to-be-white-is-to-be-racist-period-a-high-school-teacher-told-his-class/?utm\\_term=.6b848ad071ba](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2016/10/19/to-be-white-is-to-be-racist-period-a-high-school-teacher-told-his-class/?utm_term=.6b848ad071ba)
- Young, M. M. (2011). Disproportionality of African American students in special education (Education Masters, Paper 75). Fisher Digital Publications: St. John Fisher College.
- Zirin, D. (2017). Even LeBron James can't escape this toxic wave of racist hatred. *The Nation*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/even-lebron-james-cant-escape-toxic-wave-racist-hatred/>

---

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this article, whiteness is defined as a behavior of being privileged that may result in a person representing oneself as superior over a race of people that are not of the white race. A person displaying whiteness considers himself or herself as the norm that everyone else should be compared to. See “Whiteness and White privilege; problematizing race and racism in a “Color-Blind” world, and in education” by P. R. Carr, 2016, *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 7(1), 51-74.

<sup>2</sup> The textbook, *World Geography*, was published by McGraw-Hill. The term “workers” was used for slaves and they were included in a section called “Patterns of Immigration.” Quoted from the textbook, “The Atlantic Slave Trade between the 1500s and 1800s brought millions of workers from Africa to the southern United States to work on agricultural plantations.” Retrieved from <https://thinkprogress.org/texas-mother-outraged-her-sons-textbook-called-slaves-workers-and-immigrants-92b348a433d4/>

<sup>3</sup> The textbook, *Mexican American Heritage* by J. Riddle and V. Angle was chosen from a proposed list of textbooks by the Texas State Board of Education to support the Latino community in its school system. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/05/24/proposed-texas-textbook-says-some-mexican-americans-wanted-to-destroy-u-s-society/?utm\\_term=.20074ebd6f9a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/05/24/proposed-texas-textbook-says-some-mexican-americans-wanted-to-destroy-u-s-society/?utm_term=.20074ebd6f9a)

<sup>4</sup> See “Did teachers’ race and verbal ability matter in the 1960’s? Coleman revisited” (NBER Working Paper Series No. 4293). [Electronic version] by R. Ehrenberg and D. Brewer, 1993. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w4293>

<sup>5</sup> The study was conducted by John Hopkins University released in 2016. Retrieved from John Hopkins News Release at <http://releases.jhu.edu/2016/03/30/race-biases-teachers-expectations-for-students/>

<sup>6</sup> The study, “Who believes me? The effect of student-teacher demographic match on teacher expectations” was conducted by the IZA Institute of Labor Economics in June 2016. See *Economics of Education Review*, 52, 209-224. Supportive data tables are found in Appendix (pp. 1-6).

<sup>7</sup> The study was conducted by John Hopkins University released in 2016. Retrieved from John Hopkins News Release at <http://releases.jhu.edu/2016/03/30/race-biases-teachers-expectations-for-students/>

<sup>8</sup> Experimental audit studies are defined as field experiments that are used to measure discrimination in real-world context are referred to as audit studies. The testers (trained individuals) play a part of a job seeker. Audit studies have documented strong evidence of discrimination in the context of employment. See “The sociology of discrimination: Racial discrimination in employment, housing, credit, and consumer markets” by D. Pager and H. Shepherd, 2008, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 181-209.

<sup>9</sup> H. C. Tyrone and C. L. Terry (2011) imply that students of color and African American students are not the same (an insinuation of two or more cultures). A distinction of students of color may have been more supportive in their argument of culturally responsive. Students of color are sometimes referred to as all but white students. It is obvious that the authors thought differently. The authors were vague in this respect, but their argument was important to mention in this article. See “Culturally responsive pedagogy for African American students.” *Teaching Education, Publications and Resources for Transforming Public Schools*, 22(4), 345-364.