Original Research

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Photovoice as an Act of Agency to Decenter Whiteness in P–12 Classrooms

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Abstract

Given the lack of diversity in the P–12 teaching force, we contend that white normativity is prevalent and remains mostly unchallenged in these settings. Acknowledging such inequities requires an intentional focus on equity in teacher education programs. The project described here facilitated in-service teachers' growth in becoming culturally competent and critically conscious by using Photovoice in P–12 classrooms. Photovoice is a participatory action research method that uses photography to examine the lived experiences of participants. Photovoice was used to examine school-based practices that erased and silenced students while offering an inflection point from which the in-service teachers could develop and exhibit critical consciousness. They moved beyond examining the system of inequity and toward actions to counter the culture of whiteness.

Recommended Citation

Introduction

Though fraught with tensions since the country's inception, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity remains a significant part of America's story. Frey (2020) noted that racial and ethnic minorities accounted for all of the nation's population growth over the previous decade. The author calls attention to the increasing diversity in a rising, younger population and simultaneous declines in the overall white population. In addition, Frey (2020) further predicted an acceleration of the projected growth of nonwhite racial minorities compared to Whites.

Schools are not immune to or insulated from societal deliberations and are directly impacted by demographic trends. While we are experiencing increasing diversity in the U.S. population generally and school-aged

particularly, the nation's population of teachers and administrators does not mirror this growth in diversity and, in fact, is becoming less ethnically and culturally diverse. Despite rising numbers of Black, Hispanic, and Asian teachers, the growth is still outpaced by the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population (Schaeffer, 2021). The shift in both student and teacher populations has the potential to create a disconnect between educators and the students and families they serve. Ladson-Billings (2005) has long contended that there is a "demographic and cultural mismatch that makes it difficult for teachers to be successful with K–12 students and makes it difficult for teacher educators to be successful with prospective students" (p. 229). It then seems plausible that coupling the demographic and cultural mismatch between teachers and students with the debates surrounding matters of diversity and the praxis shock experienced by newly minted teachers (Edwards & Nuttall, 2015) has a profound impact on the culture and curriculum of schools.

The mismatch between teachers and students directly impacts the knowledge deemed worthy enough to be taught and the voices that are given a platform in schools. Most often, chosen P–12 curricula reflect the history, culture, and values of non-marginalized white populations (Nganga, 2015; Saunders & Wong, 2020). What occurs is a whitewashing of the curriculum in which racial, linguistic, sociopolitical, and sociocultural contexts are misrepresented or altogether lacking. In the U.S., we are currently experiencing bans against the use of Critical Race Theory in K–12 schools, even though this content is mainly relegated to law schools and higher education. "The intention of these state measures is to limit and prevent teachers from discussing sexism, racism and other forms of systemic oppression" (ADL Education, 2021, para. 1). This colonization of the curriculum presumes the superiority of Western pedagogies and White epistemologies while relying on dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices that align with white middle-class norms (Lindsay, 2020; Paris, 2012). Such biased accounts and erasures are harmful not only to students but to society as a whole. Taylor and Duke (2013) posited that this may be an informal way for schools to eradicate the linguistic, literacy, and cultural practices that many students of color bring from their homes and communities and replace them with what is viewed as superior practices. Given the lack of diversity in the P–12 teaching force, we contend that white normativity is prevalent and remains mostly unchallenged in these settings. Acknowledging that such inequities exist requires a re-education of in-service and an intentional focus on equity in courses for pre-service teachers.

Literature Review

"Unscripting" and Decolonizing the Curriculum

There have been calls to "unscript" and "decolonize" the curriculum. Bernard and Flint (2020) encouraged educators to take a teaching approach that relies less on "scripted, prefabricated and standardized curricula" (p. 59) while emphasizing students' identities. When followed as prescribed, such curricula do little in terms of inclusivity while also limiting teachers' ability to offer broader perspectives.

The authors contended that unscripting is but one way to actively work against racial and cultural erasures in the curriculum. Likewise, decolonization involves rethinking the actual curriculum as well as how it is taught. Stated curricular changes in a decolonized curriculum include revised reading in which the canon has been broadened, as well as the addition of more diverse scholarship, perspectives, and inclusive definitions (Cheang & Suterwalla, 2020; LeVasseur, 2021). Both unscripting and decolonizing the curriculum are predicated upon fundamental changes to teaching and to the culture of schooling. Each requires that educators challenge the dominant narratives and make room for the presence, identities, and narratives of marginalized groups. In essence, educators must be able and willing to take on oppressive elements and structures within schools and take actionss against them.

Critical consciousness centers on one's ability to identify oppression and to intercede to dismantle said oppression (Freire, 1970, 2013). Both unscripting and decolonizing the curriculum are modern-day

manifestations of critical consciousness. The success of each rests upon not just what is removed from the curriculum. Care must be taken to ensure that what's removed is replaced with the stories of those who have historically been silenced. According to Higgs et al. (2021), one key factor contributing to the advancement of racial and cultural equality in educational settings is the ability to present counter-stories that challenge dominant narratives. Because photographs are often linked to various identities and stories, they are a likely means for counter-storytelling. In addition, photos are also strongly related to social norms and the political climate (Aboulkacem et al., 2021).

Why Use Photovoice?

Aligned with the philosophies surrounding critical consciousness, we believe that educators have a responsibility to move beyond mere identification of oppression and introspections and put energy into dissecting curricular contradictions and negations while actively moving the needle toward social transformation. Informed by Freire's notion of critical consciousness, Photovoice is a participatory action research method that uses photography to examine the lived experiences of participants. Though often used to tell the stories of marginalized communities, it is adaptable for different groups and communities and for different participatory goals (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice provides a platform to assert power and resistance against dominant representations by offering participants a means to portray experiences of oppression, control, and agency (Liebenberg, 2022).

This type of participatory research is a tool for addressing social transformation and inequity. It aims to emancipate marginalized groups and confront inequitable behavior (Aboulkacem et al., 2021; Call-Cummings & Hauber-Özer, 2021; Vaishnav, 2021) and serves as "one attempt to enable participants to help disrupt and ultimately revise depictions that contribute to gender, class, ethnic, and other kinds of oppression" (Wang, 2003, p. 181). In addition, Photovoice "enable[s] people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, promote[s] critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and reach policymakers and others who can be mobilized for change" (Wang, 2003, p. 179). Rarely are student voices sought out or illuminated in discussions surrounding inequities in schools. In the context of the work presented here, Photovoice created an exchange of power that allowed P–12 students to share their perspectives about their learning environments.

Teacher Education

We agree with Carter Andrews et al.'s (2021) contention that ensuring that teachers have the necessary skills and abilities to meet the educational, sociocultural, and academic needs of their students is a crucial component in the preparation of educators. The authors further emphasize the importance of "countering the normative culture of whiteness within teacher education and the perpetuation of its oppressive and debilitating impact on program design, implementation, pedagogy, and community" (Carter Andrews et al., 2021, p. 134). However, these changes will not occur until there is a shift in narratives and perspectives about race that disrupts the traditions of white supremacy (Wysor Nguema, 2020). In order to counter the cultural norm of whiteness within the teacher education system, Carter Andrews et al. (2021) recommended a more expansive mindset, a deepened commitment to cultural responsiveness and social justice. To do so, it is imperative for educators to privilege the diverse ways of being and knowing that are rooted in the histories and cultural traditions of people of color. Higgs et al. (2021) maintained that this work is carried out through the development of critical consciousness among teachers and students. It involves addressing the normative whiteness in the field of teacher education and in the educational system overall. This also includes building on students' backgrounds, challenging dominant discourses, soliciting the active involvement of all students, and providing opportunities for students to share their views.

As social justice and equity-oriented educators, we believe that teacher preparation programs should equip their students with practices and mindsets that promote civility, empathy, and cultural humility. We further

contend that it is an ethical obligation for teacher educators to develop pre-service and in-service teachers' critical consciousness. It is essential that educators at all levels listen to their students as they speak about their lives. It is also a moral and cultural obligation that P–12 educators choose materials that reflect the lives of their students while simultaneously offering a window through which they can view human experiences unlike their own. Educational institutions must also ensure that their faculty, staff, curricula, and other material reflects the diversity that is present in the world.

The necessity for educators to possess critical consciousness is evident in the apparent disconnect observed when one contrasts discussions surrounding diversity within schools against the realities of school-based practices. Often, racial differences are acknowledged and seemingly celebrated, while simultaneously, related social challenges are ignored or completely rejected (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). Likewise, calls for actions to dismantle contributory factors go unanswered. This becomes apparent if one were to take notice of the "all White world of children's literature" (Boyd et al., 2015; Larrick, 1965; Pérez Huber et al., 2020) and the promotion of "children's and young adult literature, which too often privileges literature by and about White people" (Gangi, 2008, p. 30). Often, there is persistent privileging of those who have been historically privileged, which ultimately further marginalizes those who have been historically marginalized.

The Project

Schools send messages to students, parents, and others as to what and who "counts" in their educational setting. One of the major ways this message is relayed is through the materials/texts that are accessible to students and through posters and educational signage within the environment. By default, materials, texts, and curricula send a message as to what is important and whose voices, stories, and lives matter. This discussion focuses on a multicultural literature course for in-service P–12 teachers and efforts to guide them in identifying inequalities at their respective places of employment, as they also developed an action plan to address the inequalities. Throughout the course, the focus was on voices that have traditionally been silenced in children's and young adult literature, as well as those that have been given a platform that worked in tandem with systemic practices to provide unearned privileges to others. Because the practice of silencing occurs not only in literature, in-service teachers enrolled in the multicultural literature course examined the myriad ways that silencing might be taking place in schools.

Within the context of the course, the in-service educators were pressed to critically examine their professional setting and the degree to which the adults and students within each setting had knowledge of and access to texts and materials that displayed diversity. Aligned with national trends, the in-service teachers in the course were all white females. While the scope of the project was limited to ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, we encourage, acknowledge, and advocate for broader representations of diversity within texts and within schools. We believe that children should have opportunities to see themselves, their families, and their stories in texts and in their learning environment.

Using the Photovoice methodology, the in-service teachers were required to collaborate with their students to examine the perceptions of bias and privilege within their school setting and literacy environments. In cases where a teacher's direct access was to primarily younger students (Pre-Kindergarten), the teacher was encouraged to collaborate with an older student or a parent from a diverse background. Considering the cultural mismatch identified by Ladson-Billings (2005), the teacher-student, teacher-parent collaboration was vital in engendering voices that are normally silenced and in obtaining the perspectives of those being served by the school. "In our attempt to ensure that those who have been previously disadvantaged by schooling receive quality education, we also want those in the mainstream to develop the kinds of skills that will allow them to critique the very basis of their privilege and advantage" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 83). The varied perspectives provided a more holistic view of the perceptions of each school's level of commitment to diversity

in that it included critiques from both a place of privilege/authority and from those being served. Moving beyond identification of the problem, an integral aspect of this multipart project entailed the creation of actionable steps that teachers and administrators would take to positively impact teaching and learning.

Environmental Photo Essay

In attempting to guide the in-service teachers in undertaking an honest appraisal of their work environment, they were directed to capture original images (taken on-site at their professional environment) that addressed students', colleagues', and administrators' knowledge of and access to diversity (cultural, linguistic, and ethnic) in texts. Given previous class discussions, the in-service teachers were instructed to pay close attention to cultural authenticity within texts and to explicitly look for the availability of multicultural literature. They were advised that their photos should also be used to call attention to areas of concern and evaluate the overall school environment relative to the scope of the course.

Taking Photos

In-service teachers were instructed to select one or more students, a parent, or colleague (if they didn't have access to students older than Pre-K) and each would capture images of the school setting. The photographers were asked to align their image taking with topics consistent with content in the multicultural literature course. They were given a list of prompts for consideration to help focus their photography sessions. In-service teachers could choose to limit the prompts shared with their co-photographers and they were generally encouraged to do so depending on the age of the co-photographer. Student photographers were to only focus on the first prompt or some variation of it. Each photographer was to capture as many photos as they deemed necessary to accurately depict the school setting. Though photographers did not have to respond to each prompt, the following reflective prompts were provided to guide the photography sessions:

- What messages are being broadcast about whose voices, stories, and lives count in your school or professional setting?

- What opportunities are there for teachers and administrators in your building/district to examine personal biases related to linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity?

- What concerns about diversity and multicultural text exist (both expressed and implied) or have been raised (by you and/or others) in your professional setting?

- How are discussions about diversity and multicultural literature approached?

- Where, in your setting, is there resistance to ideas related to diversity and the use of (culturally authentic) multicultural literature?

- Where, in your setting (immediate and community), can you find support and advocacy for diversity and the inclusion of multicultural literature?

- How might including diverse perspectives and culturally authentic multicultural literature impact your professional setting? How might it impact your students?

Select and Reflect

Photographers were to examine their photos and select specific photos that they found particularly interesting, important, or those that they liked. In-service teachers were advised to select 15 of their photos, while student photographers (parents or other co-photographers) selected five of their photos. Each photographer then created titles and captions for the chosen photographs. The photographers reflected on the following questions as they came up with titles and captions:

1. What were you trying to illustrate when you took the picture? What is happening in this situation?

2. What do you want people to know about this situation?

3. What does this have to do with diversity in text or multicultural literature?

4. What circumstances have created this situation? Why did/does this happen?

5. What can be done about this situation? Who has the power to do something?

After reflecting on the previous questions, co-photographers met and discussed why they selected the photos and titled and captioned them as such. Next, they discussed each of the reflection questions relative to the selected photos. They then turned their attention to the entire body of photos, looking for recurring issues/themes. They identified photos that best captured the themes and captioned the recurring issues/themes.

Action and Engagement

After meeting with their co-photographer, it was now time for the in-service teachers to describe their new understandings about the diversity in their professional environment. They were advised to re-examine the body of photos and consider how the photos helped them to think about their professional setting with regards to diversity overall, diversity in texts, and culturally authentic literature. More importantly, the in-service teachers reflected on how this learning directly influenced their thinking and teaching practices as well as how the photos helped them to take measures to influence their professional setting.

The in-service teachers developed an action plan that included direct actions (i.e., introducing authentic multicultural literature), indirect actions (i.e., sharing information), and ideas for advocacy (i.e., speaking up or setting up programs). Reflecting on questions four and five above, they had to describe what they intended to do and why they believed it would help resolve the issue. One of their direct actions had to include the installation of a Little Free Library that was stocked with culturally authentic children's books. While it was important for them to identify how their classroom practices would change, it was equally important to identify specific actions that they would take to engage colleagues and administrators, thus creating a ripple that could bring about positive changes in the system. They were asked to consider what could be done to impact the issues/themes revealed in their photographs.

What We Learned

As expected, there was as much variability in what the in-service teachers found within their professional settings as there is diversity in the world. While some were encouraged by their findings, others were disheartened. It also became evident that some of the in-service teachers' pride came as a result of their comparisons of their school to others that were seemingly less diverse in terms of student body, staff, and thinking. This sentiment was evident as one in-service teacher reflected on her findings: "I was encouraged after taking a closer look at the occurrence of multicultural children's literature within my professional setting. In my opinion, we are further along in the inclusion process of multicultural literature into our curriculum and everyday school lives than other local school districts." Though she expressed pride about their progress with offering diverse texts, she noted that this was relegated to individual classrooms. She stated, "All of these texts have been purchased by individual teachers for student use within the classroom."

Commenting on the lack of multicultural texts outside of individual classrooms, the in-service teacher commented: We, as educators, *must* do a better job in celebrating *all* of our students' cultures. We must also do a better job of showing that we value literature, all texts, and people from all cultures.

Once I traveled to the library, I noticed there were no multicultural texts on display or featured in any way. Seems as though our teachers are understanding the importance of access to multicultural literature, but the powers that be, meaning those in control of our library budget, are not as aware of the importance of the access to this type of literature.

This seems to suggest that education and advocacy work is still needed to show why diverse texts are important. Several of the in-service teachers involved in the project worked at schools with little to no diversity in the staff, student body, or community. In such situations, it can be more difficult to see the need for diverse texts or the introduction of diversity in the curriculum. When confronted with this reality, one in-service teacher struggled with how to get students engaged in the project. She stated:

When I had to explain the process of evaluating texts within our building to the four students I worked with, it made me have to re-think my understanding of multicultural literature. Then, going out into the school and looking for texts that represent the culture of our school made me nervous. Since we are mostly a mono-cultural school and community, I knew we would not find much diversity. After all I have learned this semester about providing windows into other cultures to promote tolerance and even a push for equality, it is embarrassing to see how unreceptive our school is to change.

Many of the in-service teachers found it difficult to focus on inequities in their work environment. At least one in-service teacher was asked by an administrator to stop taking photos in the building. A parent (who happened to be a board member) also lodged a complaint with administrators about the teacher's solicitation of students to be co-photographers. This in-service teacher was also admonished for her "new found focus on diversity." Still others were concerned about the messages that students received pertaining to whose lives and voices mattered. They offered the following critiques:

The messages we send to students are not culturally diverse. Taking pictures, my students and I struggled to find any diversity. We found a few Spanish posters & a few African American authors featured on old, outdated posters.

With the picture of Rosetta Stone, it became clearer to me that we expect students to assimilate to our culture. We are not receptive to change. We expected non-English speaking students to learn English & to make it a priority. This does not honor their cultures and perpetuates an heir of white-supremacy.

Having learned about The Danger of a Single Story (Adichie, 2009), some in-service teachers also focused on whose stories were being told in their school settings. One in-service teacher noted, "multiple images depict the single story that's taught about Native Americans. We group all tribes into one group instead of acknowledging and celebrating the distinct cultures of each tribe." While one in-service teacher acknowledged, "It was hard, painful, and embarrassing to admit and to critique those photos." Yet another believed her district was moving in the right direction, saying:

When reexamining the body of my photos, I realized [my district] was on the right track. We do have some work to do, mainly with our literature, our curriculum, and other materials that are provided to

students that lack authentic culture representation. The photos simply provide solid evidence that we need to do a better job when it comes to representing different cultures.

Photovoice in Action

Each student photographer submitted photos along with explanations of the photos. The following section contains images taken by co-photographers as described above. You will note that we have opted not to include any identifiers relative to the names of the co-photographers or the schools in which the photographs were taken. We have included the photographer's commentary about each photo and are presenting the photos without explanation of our own. This is done intentionally to allow the in-service teachers and their co-photographers words to serve as counterstories that decenter whiteness while highlighting the silencing and erasures that are occurring in schools.

Though focused on the Bill of Rights, the phrase "otherwise they might still be left behind" caught the photographer's attention as they commented about how many minorities are still left behind and fighting for equity.

Posters in a high school hall recognize National Poetry Month, and the photographer noted the absence of diverse representation.

Photographer notes that every person is White in this display of advertisements for careers in agriculture.

One of the in-service teachers "planted" a multicultural Library.

Vanilla is a Lack of Flavor

The hallways are painted Italian Straw. This is the color used in every building across the district. Is it cream … it is bland. There is a lot of empty space in every hallway in the school. These are missed opportunities for the school to provide glimpses into other cultures or include words of welcome and/or encouragement in multiple languages. Students would feel more welcome with those types of images and all students could be provided a message of similarities across cultures and ethnicities, along with a message of respecting differences.

In gathering information for the Photovoice project, this teacher-photographer noted:

> As I look at our school and speak with students about their views of our school, I began to see a very Caucasian-centric orientation. It comes down to the simplest of indicators … every wall is painted

Italian Straw. There's no color, no diversity, no inclusion of anything other than vanilla. In reviewing the photos, I found an overwhelming theme of LACK. There's a lack of texts, a lack of languages, a lack of mirrors and window experiences.

Welcoming LACK

One teacher-photographer described a photo of the school's entryway:

> This is the main entry area for our students. It leads to our learning environment. It is plain, lacking any text at all. I find myself asking how students can see themselves here or appreciate similarities and differences between students when there is no indication of our student body composition. It is vanilla, sterile, and plain. It leads me to ask what could be done to increase warmth and welcoming.

The in-service teacher observed that "our students do not see themselves equally represented in the faculty and staff and they do not have mirrors and windows represented in authentic texts."

PARCCing in LACK

Even at the state level, there exists a lack of value placed on non-English speaking students. While the PARCC standardized test is written in English, it can be made available in Spanish for our Spanish-speaking students. However, our Arabic-speaking students must rely on our ONE Arabic-speaking aide that is shared between two buildings. This aide is fabulous and does a wonderful job of translating for our students, but the time investment is large. The personal attention the students get is wonderful, but the message of lack is still clear.

Mapping the Missing

A teacher described a photo of a map in the building:

> This wall hanging is located in the short hallway leading to our media center. The theme in the media center is one of travelling through books but the images are types of transportation (cars, boats, etc.). This map is the only representation of different locations, cultures, and countries in the school. When this is

added to the lack of texts providing mirrors and windows, the school continues a theme of LACK.

Historical Decimation of Culture

Another teacher-photographer described a photo this way:

> This is a photograph of a poster I had my 8th grade students create as a pre-reading activity for our Holocaust unit. This unit is one that is mandated by the state of Illinois. I chose this because it shows study of multiculture in the classroom. The students had to choose photographs from the United States Holocaust Museum and arrange them into a common theme and caption each photograph.

In explaining the significance of the photo, the in-service teacher discusses how there tends to be a hyper focusing on a singular group's plight, without consideration of how others were harmed during the same events:

> This was just one of five posters that have these photographs. I chose this one because it not only shows the Jewish plight during that time but also that of the Romana (Gypsy). All too often the focus on these units are on the Jewish people's decimation, but we very rarely talk about the other groups targeted by the Nazis. I think that this is an important unit, but one that needs to be more inclusive of the other groups as well as the Jewish people. Also, I feel like there is this one singular mandate that we have to teach this, but we are not mandated to teach about our own concentration camps that we had during the same time period (for the Japanese Americans) and there are wonderful texts that highlight this blight on our history (*Farewell to Manzanar* for example) nor is there any mandate on Native American literature units or Latin American units for students. Wonderful writers like Sherman Alexie or Sandra Cisneros come to mind for those units that are not mandated by the state of Illinois. Overall, I chose to include this because it is something that is multicultural that is required that I do in my classroom, but there are other things that could also be mandated by the state of Illinois that would help to improve multicultural literacy in the ELA classroom.

Room to Improve

A teacher-photographer described a photo of the small library in her room:

> I pulled three books that are by multicultural writers—*Born Confused* was written by a woman of Indian descent, *The Kite Runner* is of the Arabian culture, and *Forged by Fire* represents African American culture. I have several other cultures represented in my library, but they make up a small percentage compared to the overwhelmingly white male writers that line my shelves. I am well-aware of the problem that plagues our literacy programs in not having enough cultures represented in the stories that we tell. The National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) has tried to make it part of their standards that multicultural texts be included—something Common Core does not specifically identify as being of importance. I work with what I can in the curriculum, but as far as provided students with independent reading material, I have made an effort in trying to include more multicultural writers in my library. I know that I can do better at this, but it is difficult considering I usually pay with my own money books for my classroom library.

Solutions

Recognizing the inequities is not the end of the story. Educators must take an active role in dismantling oppressive structures. The in-service teachers developed plans for how they would champion diversity. Given the nature of the course, many of the plans involved introducing multicultural authors and texts into the

curriculum. There were also plans to start a book club for teachers that focused on multiculturalism. One in-service teacher designed a unit focusing on Disney movies and cultural representations. Yet another planned to facilitate professional development centered on the inclusion of multicultural literature. Several of the in-service teachers planned to join the school improvement team or to meet with administrators to discuss the need for diversity with the schools and the curriculum. These steps have the potential to positively impact each of the schools and the surrounding communities.

Discussion and Implications

In-service teachers participating in a multicultural literature class used Photovoice to explore the intersection of class, race, privilege, and bias in P–12 school settings. They captured images that revealed the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that messages are sent to students and families about who and what are valued in school settings. By collaborating with their own students, the in-service teachers sent a clear signal that the students' thoughts and ideas were important and could make a difference. This exploration led to actions that positively impacted teaching and learning within their classroom while also making a broader impact within their school and community. Cornell et al. (2022) found that photos taken as part of a Photovoice project allowed students to interact directly with policymakers. In their study, participant's photos were exhibited as part of a forum that focused on racism on campus. The photos worked to unite participants and gave them a platform to share their personal experiences with racism which ultimately led to demands for policy changes. Though small, the work done by the in-service teachers in the multicultural literature course described herein, and that done by students in the Cornell et al. (2022) study were both profound acts against systemic oppression.

Examinations of one's practices and beliefs are just a start. Public advocacy is inherent within Freire's idea of critical consciousness as it involves not only identifying injustices, but also taking actions to demolish the systems that support such practices. It is essential that educators move beyond superficial discussions and examine both personal and institutional biases that may influence P–12 settings. In this instance, Photovoice served as a valuable tool in exposing the normative whiteness that exists in educational settings. Further, it offered an inflection point at which the in-service teachers could further develop critical consciousness by moving beyond a mere examination of the system of inequity. They were also able to devise a plan for taking definitive actions toward decentering and countering the culture of whiteness. Aligned with the thinking of Lewison et al. (2015), we believe that educators must be willing to employ and teach students to engage in practices that disrupt the commonplace in their interrogation of multiple viewpoints as they focus on sociopolitical issues. In this regard, the work done in the multicultural literature course positioned teachers as change agents.

Carter Andrews et al. (2021) recommended a more expansive mindset and a deep commitment to cultural responsiveness and social justice. Educators who engage in the deep work required to develop critical consciousness likely start the journey by examining their own values and attitudes, which then leads them down a path toward cultural responsiveness and social justice. Similarly, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (n.d.) acknowledges that educators must engage in "an examination of one's own attitude and values, and the acquisition of the values, knowledge, skills, and attributes that will allow an individual to work appropriately in cross-cultural situations." It is our contention that the development of critical consciousness nurtures one's capacities to increase levels of cultural competence. Both are necessary if one is to function effectively in cross-cultural situations. As such, the project described in this article facilitated in-service teachers' growth in becoming culturally competent and critically conscious by using Photovoice as an act of agency to decenter whiteness in P–12 classrooms.

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