

**CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN SECONDARY CLASSROOMS:
DIMINISHING THE DIVIDE: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
SERIES**

by

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This project is dedicated:

To my husband, Brant, who has been my rock, sounding board, voice of reason, and greatest fan.

*Your love and support has meant everything to me, and this project could not have been
accomplished without you by my side.*

*To my daughters, Hayley and Hannah, who have been my great inspiration and accomplishment
in life – thank you for making me the woman I am today – I could not be prouder of you both.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	7
CHAPTER 1	8
Introduction	8
Background	9
Problem Statement	10
Project Roadmap	11
Professional Significance	13
Definition of Terms	15
Summary	16
Literature Review	16
Introduction	16
History of Critical Theory and Pedagogy	18
The Frankfurt School - Critical Theory	19
Paulo Freire - Critical Pedagogy	21
bell hooks - Engaged Pedagogy	24
Principles of Critical Pedagogy	27
History of Critical Race Theory	29
Tenets of Critical Race Theory	31
Idealist / Materialist	32
CRT Theoretical Foundation	32
Critique of CRT	35
Conclusion	36
CHAPTER 2	38
Introduction	38
Social Justice Education	39
Student-Centered Learning	44
Social Emotional Learning	46
Antiracist Education	48
Conclusion	50

CHAPTER 3	52
Targeted Training Audience.....	52
Diminishing the Divide ~ Training Session I: Link to Presentation	53
Diminishing the Divide ~ Training Session I: Training Script.....	53
Diminishing the Divide ~ Training Session II: Link to Presentation	58
Diminishing the Divide ~ Training Session II: Training Script	58
Diminishing the Divide ~ Training Session III: Link to Presentation.....	65
Diminishing the Divide ~ Training Session III: Training Script	65
Diminishing the Divide ~ Training Session IV: Link to Presentation	68
Diminishing the Divide ~ Training Session IV: Training Script	68
CHAPTER 4	73
REFERENCES	80

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to cultivate a series of professional development training sessions for secondary teachers to incorporate concepts of Critical Race Theory in their classrooms, through the use of social justice education, social emotional learning, and student-centered learning. The researcher examined material in favor and in opposition to the project topic to collect information on how to best serve educators and students. The researcher engaged with academic writing as well as with high school teachers and administration about this project topic. This manuscript and attached training material is the result of the researcher's findings and serves to answer the question of whether aspects of Critical Race Theory should be implemented in secondary classrooms as well as if so, how should teachers do so—all in hopes of better supporting more equitable and just education for high school educators and students.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As explosive commentary and conduct relating to the opposing opinions and beliefs pertaining to mask mandates and critical race theory erupt within local school board meetings as well as throughout social and news media, the safety and well-being of educators across the country are being threatened. At the same time, American politicians are composing and constructing legislation banning critical race theory (CRT) and the use of words such as racism, classism, and sexism within public school classrooms across the United States. Unfortunately, contemporary educators are left to face the challenge of not only navigating their personal well-being, but also addressing the impact that these actions and laws will have within their classrooms, and more importantly, on their students. Contrary to popular opinion, prohibiting the discussions of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class within a high school setting will not eliminate or decrease the political, racial, and social tension within the United States—ignoring or dismissing the problem will not make the problem go away. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to develop and design professional development curriculum and resources that equip secondary educators with the knowledge, understanding, and skill set to acknowledge and address the issues of racism, sexism, and classism found within their classrooms as well as throughout their students' educational and daily life experiences. This will be accomplished by providing a foundation that demonstrates the overlapping connections between the concepts of critical theory (Frankfurt School), critical pedagogy (Freire, hooks), and critical race theory (Bell, Delgado, Crenshaw). Utilizing a critical theoretical framework, this project will incorporate aspects of social justice and antiracist education within the context of social emotional and student-centered learning to teach and train secondary educators on how to

recognize and discuss difficult and often controversial issues, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.

Background

Within the last year and a half, educators across the United States have encountered unprecedented challenges. Teaching during a global pandemic sets its own distinct, challenging obstacles. During March of 2020, COVID-19 brought in-person learning to a standstill. Teachers, administrators, and schools across the country were scrambling to implement online learning without any concrete training or previously used resources and technology. That alone brought about major anxiety and stress for students and teachers alike. Then, add to that, the racially contentious summer of 2020, when Americans were forced to take sides—either aligning with “Black Lives Matter” or “Blue Lives Matter.” Still operating in a pandemic world, many resorted to various forms of activism—such as protesting in the streets and online through social media—to have their voices heard. These voices and forms of activism continued to grow as the 2020 Presidential election progressed in the fall of 2020. These voices not only became louder but also harsher and more divided—about everything in America: politics (Democratic / Republican, liberal / conservative), health issues (vaccines, masks, and abortion), as well as social issues (related to race, sexual orientation, class, and religion).

With a constant, combative discourse playing out in America, students and teachers returned to in-person learning. Although they were now within the confines of their classroom walls, the disagreeing and explosive voices did not diminish, especially related to what should or should not be taught in public school classrooms. As more and more vocal Americans questioned the concepts of critical race theory, fear and animosity grew, resulting in politicians and governmental leaders taking matters into their own hands.

According to the June 2021 article “Where Critical Race Theory is Under Attack” from *Education Week*, at least 25 states have pending legislation barring any aspect of critical race theory to be discussed or taught within a public school setting, and eight states have already successfully banned CRT within their school districts. Relying on the historical accusation that public schools and educators are trying to indoctrinate their students, political leaders, parents, and those in power adamantly oppose CRT without comprehending the potential benefits and positive impact it could have not only within education, but more importantly within American society. Although some may be reluctant to stand up or speak out in reference to critical race theory, American teachers, especially at a secondary level, find it imperative for the emotional and even physical well-being of their students to address and discuss the concepts of race, gender, sexual orientation, or class within their daily classroom experiences and exchanges with their teenage students—many of whom actively participated in their own activism over the past year and a half. High school teachers must identify, acknowledge, and address the needs of their students, particularly in regards to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. Incorporating critical pedagogical insight and strategies, especially within the framework of critical race theory, will enable and empower them to productively and effectively do so.

Problem Statement

As the contentious and combative political environment churns within the United States, secondary public school educators need assistance in facilitating and mediating conversations about race, gender, and class with their teenage students who are situated daily in their classrooms. The incorporation of critical pedagogy, coupled with the fundamental ideas and concepts found within critical race theory, will enable secondary teachers to not only understand their students better, but also be able to recognize current social issues and inequities within their

students' everyday lives. Doing so will empower educators to integrate and implement social justice education as well as learning that is focused on being student-centered as well as addressing students' social and emotional needs and skills. This type of learning will equip both teachers and students with the necessary understanding and skill set to effectively maneuver through difficult and uncomfortable discussions pertaining to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. The purpose of this project is to develop accurate, concise, and productive professional development curriculum and resources for high school teachers that will enhance their ability to engage with their students in a manner that can bring about much needed societal change concerning race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.

Project Roadmap

The structure of this project will be presented in four distinct chapters that will include the following:

- Chapter 1: will introduce the project as a whole, providing essential contextual information pertaining to the current state of education in the United States, a statement of the current issues and problem, evidence of the relevance and importance of this project, as well as definitions of key terms and concepts that will be used throughout this project. This section will conclude with a literature review, outlining the basic concepts and significant contributors of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory as well as an explanation of how they interact and engage with each other.
- Chapter 2: will discuss the theoretical approach and framework that will set the foundation for the decisions and choices made within the specific professional development piece of the project. This section will look at how critical pedagogy and critical race theory align with each other, especially related to current educational

strategies and practices such as social justice and antiracist education. Finally, this segment will provide insight into how critical pedagogy and critical race theory look independently within education, specifically as it relates to social emotional and student-centered learning.

- Chapter 3: will provide the specific, concrete professional development training sessions that Indiana school districts can utilize to develop secondary educators as they address current social issues within their classrooms. This section of the project will include four (4) distinct presentations that will begin with an introductory session—outlining historical background and key concepts and contributors of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory. This session will also define fundamental terms and concepts that will be used within the remaining three sessions. The second training session will correlate the current trends within education (social emotional and student-centered learning) with aspects of critical pedagogy and critical race theory (social justice and antiracist education). This presentation will establish the foundation and explanation for why it is crucial that we implement aspects of critical pedagogy and critical race theory within secondary classrooms. The third training session will then provide specific content, strategies, and resources that educators can implement in their individual classrooms, including lesson plans, conversation starters, interactive activities, and online resources. The final training session will acknowledge and address the opposition to implementing concepts of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class within secondary classrooms. Specifically, this presentation will outline the various opposing views and beliefs as well as provide productive insight and information necessary to diminish the

current divisiveness within the U.S. related to critical race theory and conversations about race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.

- Chapter 4: will share insight into the obstacles and stumbling blocks faced throughout the process and production of this project. It will also share what can be learned from this project from the perspectives of teachers, students, and administrators. Finally, this section will shed light on next steps that can be taken as well as further research and training opportunities.

Professional Significance

Although a segment of high school teachers within the United States are open to discussing and engaging with social issues as well as holding discussions pertaining to racism, sexism, and classism, a large portion of high school teachers hesitate to discuss these relevant issues and concepts within their classrooms. This reluctance could stem from a number of reasons including, *fear* (of the unknown, of losing employment, or of conflict in general), *lack of understanding* (misinformed, apathetic, or unaware), or *even personal beliefs* (religious / political, adhering to the status quo, or that the U.S. is in a post-racial state). While some believe that education has been a practice of indoctrination (Hendricks & Howerton, 2010; Hess, 2004), previous research implies that education should be “aimed at liberating the minds of our students rather than indoctrinating them” (hooks, 2003, p. 1). The idea of “liberating of minds” was originally fashioned by Freire (1996) as found within his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where education is focused on “people engaged in the fight for their own liberation” (p. 53). Within this mindset, Freire believed that the pedagogy of the oppressed functioned in two stages: 1) where those who are subordinate exposed domination and oppression and through praxis, they pledge themselves to its transformation, and 2) the reality of oppression becomes transformed,

which allows pedagogy to belong to all individuals in “the process of permanent liberation” (p. 54). In agreement with Freire, this project supports the idea that within both stages of this pedagogy, action must be taken to confront the culture of domination – firstly by, confronting the consciousness of both the oppressed and oppressor, taking into account behaviors, world views, and ethics. A wealth of academic research addresses, supports, and critiques (Bell, 1976; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Van Wormer, 2004; West, 1995; Writer, 2008; Young, 2011) the confrontation of domination and oppression within the United States, especially within the education system (Freire, 1996; Giroux & McLaren, 1986; hooks, 1994, 2003). Therefore, this project seeks to incorporate existing research as a foundational support in an effort to inform and educate secondary teachers of current theories and how they can relate, develop, and enhance their traditional teaching strategies and practices in a manner that will cultivate equitable and just educational experiences for their students.

Additionally, although current research highlights and outlines critical pedagogy in contemporary classroom (Cati, López, & Morrell, 2015; Kincheloe, 2008; Sarroub, & Quadros, 2015) as well as critical race theory in education (Ledesma, & Calderón, 2015; Yosso, 2002), there is a lack of concrete, tangible instructional strategies and resources available to secondary public school educators that will assist them in their daily interactions and engagement with concepts of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class within their classrooms. This project seeks to provide much needed knowledge, information, strategies, and support for these teachers, especially as they face increasing opposition from political leaders, parents, and even fellow educators. This project will equip teachers with accurate information, context, and perspective that will allow them to address often misunderstood concepts that perpetuate divisive and destructive discourse related to critical race theory, such as conservative mass media’s belief that

CRT wants to disregard or diminish white Americans. Critical pedagogy and critical race theory are not looking for a shift from one pole to another (Freire, 1996) or a “reversal of hierarchies approach” (Schneider, 2004). Therefore, this project seeks to distinguish (for current educators) the importance of pedagogical strategies and practices that empower the liberation of all students by incorporating concepts of critical pedagogy and critical race theory within their contemporary classroom.

Definitions of Terms

- Antiracism: the vigorous practice of recognizing and eradicating racism by altering systems, structures, guidelines, procedures, and approaches in a manner where authority and control is reallocated and maintained equitably.
- Dominant Culture: social practices and representations that support the fundamental standards, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the physical and figurative capital of society.
- Prejudice: the negative assessment of individuals or groups based on unexplained, erroneous, or insufficient evidence.
- Privilege: the unearned and mostly unacknowledged societal advantage that a restricted group of people has over another group
- Social Emotional Learning: the process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills within students that are vital for school, work, and life success.
- Social Forms: principles that provide and legitimize specific social practices.
- Social Justice Education: teaching and learning practices that promote equity, democracy, and freedom to exercise one’s full humanity.
- Social Practices: what people say and do.

- Social Structures: constraints that limit individual life and appear to be beyond an individual's control.
- Student-Centered Learning: education that revolves around allowing students the opportunity to determine what and how they learn
- Subordinate: a group of individuals who reside outside the social norms and in compliance to the dominant class.
- Subculture: a subset of the dominant and subordinate cultures – often maintaining distinct symbols and social practices that help foster an individual identity outside the dominant culture / norm.

Summary

The purpose of this project is to design and develop professional developmental curriculum and resources for high school teachers so they can integrate concepts of critical pedagogy and critical race theory within their classroom content, curriculum, and conversations. The background and research efforts clearly established a need for additional resources such as a multi-level, tiered antiracist instructional course for contemporary educators that incorporate ideas, concepts, and practices from critical pedagogy and critical race theory, such as social justice education. The following section reviews the literature in favor of and in opposition to the project topics of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory.

Literature Review

Introduction

Currently within the United States, public school teachers face a multitude of challenges and obstacles that require them to discern what is best for their students while those who align within a critical pedagogical framework also understand that the educational system is political,

flawed, and unjust (Freire, 1996). Adding to the complexity, critical teachers are becoming more mindful of the wide range of educational outlets within a students' educational experience and process, inclusive of television, movies, music, the Internet, cultural experiences, diverse teaching styles, as well as ways that power constructs identities while oppressing marginalized groups, resulting in a conflicting purpose of education (Kincheloe, 2008). Sitting at the heart of critical pedagogy, educators must understand the role that culture, race, class, and gender forces play within education and educational settings. Situated within a community and learning vision of justice and equality, critical pedagogy works in unity with love, respect, and fairness—as Freire suggested, connecting the mind and heart—in an effort to comprehend at various levels and appreciate diverse perspectives as well as pursue opportunities to lessen human suffering.

In order to better understand the complexity of what public school teachers are dealing with on a daily basis, we need to examine the current American public educational system and structures that are in place. We can begin by questioning the dynamics and dichotomy that minimize and even prohibit the opportunity for all voices and perspectives to be heard, understood, and valued within the classroom. By doing so, teachers and students have a better opportunity to cultivate and experience equality, justice, and freedom throughout their educational process. The purpose of this literature review is not only to outline the work within critical theory (Frankfurt School), critical pedagogy (Freire and hooks), and critical race theory (Bell, Delgado, Crenshaw), but more importantly, to validate the relationship and connections between them by demonstrating the progression that each concept makes from the previous one. Within this literature review, we will examine the history and fundamentals of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory. We will also discuss the relationship and connection that can be found between critical pedagogy and critical race theory, distinguishing the viability

of each individually as well as together. Finally, we will investigate the previous and current research related to critical race theory and critical pedagogy, especially within a secondary public school setting, leading us to demonstrate how public education functions as an institution. To begin, it is imperative to provide the background knowledge and understanding of the Frankfurt School's concept of critical theory and then move onto how Paulo Freire and bell hooks expanded their concepts of critical theory within education through critical and engaged pedagogy.

History of Critical Theory and Pedagogy

Following WWII and the unimaginable events of the Holocaust, critical theorists grounded their work in acknowledging and addressing human suffering and seeking social justice. Relating these concepts to education, critical pedagogy built its foundation on concepts and ideology based on critical theory borrowed from the Frankfurt School's theorization of critical theory (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). Concentrating on the shifting landscape of capitalism, critical theorists scrutinized the evolving forms of dominance that brought about systematic oppression. Although Frankfurt School is denoted as specifically German, they were writing in and around American culture (Giroux, 2003). Intrigued by the inconsistencies between "progressive American rhetoric of egalitarianism and the reality of racial and class discrimination," critical philosophers created and composed a majority of their important work while living in the United States (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 47). Critical theory, while challenging to pinpoint into a single concept or theory, is a collection of multiple critical philosophies and principles, demonstrating that theories, ideas, and concepts are constantly changing and evolving. Ultimately, critical theory questions the statement that societies (including the U.S.) are "unproblematically democratic and free" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 48). Concerned with the

fluctuating repressive associations of influence and control in a variety of areas that result in human oppression, critical theorists call for a better understanding of varied means of oppression including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and ability-related concerns. In order to better understand critical theory, it is vital to begin the discussion with an overview that highlights the work of the Frankfurt School and their contribution of critical theory.

The Frankfurt School – Critical Theory

Led by the likes of Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno, the Frankfurt School was established in the 1920s in Germany and continued to expand throughout the early 1930s. With threats from the Nazi regime, the institution was forced to move to Geneva in 1933, and then to New York City in 1934, where they found a home at Columbia University. Prior to reestablishing themselves in Germany again in 1953, the members of the Frankfurt School made their way to Los Angeles, in 1941, where a significant amount of work was completed and accomplished (Giroux, 2003).

Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse along with other critical theorists focused their efforts “on the issues of how subjectivity was constituted and how the spheres of culture and everyday life represented a new terrain of domination” (Giroux, 2003, p. 33). This concentration led them to maintain two distinct aspects of thought: 1) that the only resolution to the existing predicament lies in cultivating a more comprehensive self-conscious conception of reason, one that values components of critical inquiry as well as of “human will and transformative action,” and 2) delegating to theory the undertaking of liberating reason from the “logic of technocratic rationality and positivism” (Giroux, 2003, p. 35). The Frankfurt School argued that within the concepts of *Enlightenment rationality*, people could not be freed from their own fear. Furthermore, critical theorists reasoned that within the realms of *positivism*—the final

ideological expression of the Enlightenment—reason functions simply to characterize facts not critique them. Therefore, reason unavoidably paused prior to any form of critical examination or inquiry, prohibiting any transformation within individuals or the world they live (Giroux, 2003).

In order for self-reflection and ultimately self-transformation to occur, the Frankfurt School developed three primary ideas that composed their overall concept of theory. The first notion begins with the understanding that the relationships that exist within society include the “particular and the whole, the specific and the universal,” which challenged the pragmatist assertion that theory is mainly an occupation of categorizing and positioning details and information (Giroux, 2003, p. 37). The second concept of theory, according to the Frankfurt School, is that it must nurture the capability of meta-theory, meaning that theory necessitates that ability to reflect on both the historical progress of specific interests as well as recognize the restrictions they may impose within various historical and social circumstances. The third idea of theory developed by the Frankfurt School includes *immanent criticism*: the assertion of difference, the refusal to collapse appearance, the willingness to analyze the reality of the social object against its possibilities, and *dialectical thought*, exposing standards and principles that are frequently refuted by the societal objective under investigation, and illuminating deficiencies and inadequacies of completed structures of thinking, revealing limitations where wholeness is argued (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003).

By applying these critical ideas and concepts to education, the Frankfurt School provides an historical study and a powerful theoretical context that “indict the wider culture of positivism,” while simultaneously providing awareness of how positivism is combined within the character and practices of education (Giroux, 2003, p. 49). Historical consciousness, as presented by the Frankfurt School, integrates critical thinking that promotes examination that

highlights the collaboration of the collective and the individual as well as of historical and isolated experiences. Through this method of inquiry, “dialectical thought replaces positivist forms of social inquiry,” allowing for “the historical, relational, and normative dimensions of social inquiry and knowledge” (Giroux, 2003, p. 49). Furthermore, the Frankfurt School proposed that schools politicized the notion of knowledge by serving as cultivators of social and cultural norms and principles. Critical theorists presented a new viewpoint as to the way in which prevailing philosophies were established and facilitated through particular social creations (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). By doing so, the Frankfurt School and critical theory built the groundwork for a greater explanation and comprehension of the connection between culture and power, especially within education.

Paulo Freire – Critical Pedagogy

Believing that education could be the solution to the power issues and struggles within society, Paulo Freire, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, applied the vast concepts and principles of critical theory from the Frankfurt School to pedagogical thought and practice in the field of education, cultivating critical pedagogy (Guilherme, 2017). Nurturing an exceptionally effective literacy movement in Brazil prior to the 1964 Brazilian coup d’état, Freire viewed education as “a deeply civic, political, and moral practice—that is, pedagogy as a practice for freedom (Giroux, 2010, p. 715). Following his brief imprisonment, Freire went into exile in Chile as well as in Geneva, Switzerland, writing his well-known and highly regarded *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996)—which is “considered one of the classic texts of critical pedagogy and has sold over a million copies, influencing generations of teachers and intellectuals both in the United States and abroad” (Giroux, 2010, p. 715). Throughout his work, Freire discussed how education is a preparation for a “self-managed” life, which incorporated what he considered to be

the three goals of education: 1) promoting self-reflection—an understanding and comprehension of the various dimensions of the world in which they live, 2) assisting people in being cognizant of the powers that govern their lives and consciousness, and 3) setting the circumstances for generating a new life—where influence and control has been shifted to those who create the societal realm by altering society as well as themselves.

Opposing the banking system of education, where educators who served as “pillars of knowledge” would transfer or “deposit” their knowledge into passive, obedient students who did not question or challenge teachers’ authority, Freire “proposed a problem posing education which can lead to critical consciousness” (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Freire’s critical pedagogy, which has been expanded throughout the following decades, empowers students to uncover their own critical awareness, expose their own reality, and employ that critical consciousness to affect change in their reality—creating an educational experience wherein both teacher and students are responsible and active in the learning process (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; hooks, 1994). Nixon-Ponder (1995) developed this concept further stating that students go through a five step process throughout Freire’s problem posing education: unfolding content, outlining the problem, personalizing the problem, debating the problem, and suggesting another courses of action to the problem (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Therefore, pedagogy, according to Freire, is not about “training, teaching methods, nor political indoctrination,” but “a political and moral practice that provides knowledge, skills, and social relations” that empower students to discover, investigate, and question “what it means to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy” (Giroux, 2010, p. 716).

Freire (1996) believed teaching had a narrative characteristic—stating that “the teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable” (p. 71).

He went on to point out that teachers feel it is their duty to fill students with content from the teacher's narration—making the student a receptacle for maintaining the teacher-driven content, context, and curriculum (Freire, 1996). In this mindset, students are not given the opportunity or power to actively participate in their own learning—they are not able to inquire, creatively reflect, or take action, resulting in not becoming fully human. Freire pushed the concept of education by encouraging teachers to engage their students in critical thinking—to question the status quo and transform the world in which they live. Within this inquiry, Freire believed that students (the oppressed) must become part of the “organized struggle” by taking action and participating in “serious reflection,” which he noted would only then be praxis (p. 65). By doing so, students “come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process—in transformation” (p. 83).

Additionally, Freire's concept of critical pedagogy called for education to include dialogue as a way to not only name the world, but more importantly, to understand it. Freire (1996) proposed dialogue that was not a “simple exchange of ideas to be consumed” (p. 89). Noting that dialogue must be conducted by both the oppressor and the oppressed, Freire advocated that it must be done so in “profound love for the world and for the people” (p. 89)—domination cannot be present as love is the basis of dialogue and love cannot occur within domination. Connecting critical theory and dialogue, Freire stated that true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking. Ultimately, Freire associated the value of dialogue within education by stating that, “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 93).

Although many support Freire's critical pedagogical ideas and notions, some feel as if it too abstract and even “utopian,” as it is not able to endure the day-to-day operations of the

education and instruction its devotees propose (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 297). Focusing on critical pedagogy's concepts of empowerment, student voice, and dialogue, Ellsworth notes that they "are repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination" (p. 298). Continuing, Ellsworth also mentions that critical pedagogy theories are more suitable for theoretical discussions about more challenging concepts such as liberty, fairness, equality, and other collective ideals rather than for developing and implementing in classroom curriculum and pedagogy. Within her critique of Freire and critical pedagogy, Ellsworth noted that a clearer explanation of its presence, objectives, implications, dangers, and possibilities were needed. Questioning its relevancy, Gur-Ze'ev (2003) noted that critical pedagogy as presented by Freire and other early critical pedagogists had lost its connection to the Frankfurt School, resulting in its inability to self-assess, reform, or renew itself (Guilherme, 2017). As some did not believe that critical pedagogy met the demands and fit of the current trends of globalization and within education (Guilherme, 2017), others were diligently building upon the concepts, mindset, and ideology laid out by Freire—leading to the work of contemporary critical pedagogy established by bell hooks (1994).

bell hooks – Engaged Pedagogy

Inspired by Freire and the work of critical theory, bell hooks (1994) expands the concepts and ideas of critical pedagogy by encouraging and motivating educators to have the courage to transgress the boundaries that would confine students to a monotonous, mundane approach to learning—what Freire (1996) previously described as the "banking" system within education. hooks focuses on approaches that ignite a will and desire for teachers and students to respond to their unique beings, meaning that she promotes the ideas that 1) both teachers and students become active participants—not passive consumers—of their education as well as 2) teachers

and student should both be mindful of their well-being by devotedly pledging to the progression of self-actualization that leads to their own educational and personal empowerment. Throughout her writing, hooks (1994, 2003) suggest that education must connect the will to know with the will to become—that classrooms should deepen and develop students’ understanding and more importantly, directly connect this understanding within their daily lives. Also inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh’s concept of mutual labor, hooks continued to cultivate critical pedagogy through engaged pedagogy with an emphasis on conducting *praxis*, by implementing reflection and action within the world in order to change the world, as well as achieving *wholeness*, which unites knowledge with the mind, body, and spirit in a manner that people learn how to live in the world.

Expanding on Thich Nhat Hanh’s idea of mutual labor, hooks proposed the notion of mutual vulnerability within the classroom by encouraging both teachers and students to share their life experiences through personal narratives and storytelling (Berry, 2010). Noting that teachers have an opportunity to extend vulnerability initially by authentically and sincerely revealing their lived experiences with their student, hooks (1994) believed that not only would trust be developed between teachers and students, but also that the power structure within the classroom would shift in a manner that students would feel safe to share their own life experiences and understanding. With this knowledge, teachers could then incorporate real-life content and context within their curriculum, providing meaningful education that moves students and teachers closer to self-actualization.

Additionally, engaged pedagogy emphasizes the well-being of both teachers and students by inspiring them to enthusiastically commit to the progression of self-actualization:

- empowering students to connect what they know with how they live

- providing meaningful knowledge that promotes the practice of freedom
- permitting students to take responsibility for their own choices
- cultivating an opportunity for vulnerability and risk-taking in the classroom
- allowing students to grow and express themselves
- translating into living life fully and deeply

hooks (1994) believes that educators should “teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students. . . if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (p. 13). hooks encourages teacher to do so by incorporating passion, dialogue, and interaction within the classroom, resulting in a more holistic education (Berry, 2010). By providing students with authentic knowledge that correlates with their daily experiences, students are given an opportunity to apply their education as a practice of freedom, allowing them to not only take responsibility and ownership of their education but also the choices and decisions they make—achieving self-actualization.

Finally, throughout her work, hooks (1994, 2003) sets the foundation for liberatory education, much like Freire (1996) did, within praxis— “action and reflection upon the world in order to change it” (hooks, 1994, p. 14). Believing that the ultimate goal in education is self-actualization, hooks championed that both teachers and students must develop praxis, “an inventive way of life that encourages free, creative reflection and thoughtful action in order to change the world, even as the learners [and educators] are transformed in the process” (Specia & Osman, 2015, p. 198). As a part of praxis, hooks encouraged educators and students to critically and thoughtfully reflect on the power structures within society, especially related to race, gender, class, and sexuality, then calling them to act upon this reflection by working to end all forms of

domination and bring about justice not only within education but within their world—all of which directly correlate to the concepts and principles of critical (engaged) pedagogy.

Principles of Critical Pedagogy

As previously stated, Freire positioned education as a “deeply civic, political, and moral practice” – a “practice of freedom” as he coined it (Giroux, 2010, p. 715). Continuing, Freire positions that pedagogy must involve people in the fight for their own emancipation—for all of humankind. Evaluating Freire’s work further, Aronowitz (2009) proposed that critical pedagogy involved three specific goals of education: self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-management. Aligning with most critical theorists, education is meant to prepare students for a self-managed life, not a life of disheartened labor or work (Freire, 1996). Education is an opportunity to develop the wholeness of humans, providing knowledge on how to live in the world (hooks, 1994). Education is intended to serve in the best interest of their students (Macedo, 1994). Education is a vessel to expose life’s permanent conditions of oppression and exploitation (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). Finally, education is a balance of teacher and student input (Shor, 1992).

Specifically, critical pedagogy is based on a social and educational foundation of justice and equality for all students, emphasizing that education and pedagogy must reconsider and reimagine the role that society, culture, and politics play in shaping identity, the connection between community and schooling, the manner in which power and power structures function within education, how teachers and students associate to and with knowledge, as well as the ways schooling affects the lives of marginalized students (Kincheloe, 2008). Critical pedagogy is built on the belief that education is inherently political—referring to power and how it is dispersed and occupied within the educational system and everyday classrooms. Building on this

belief, critical pedagogy is also devoted to eradicating human suffering, especially those impacted by discrimination and poverty. Supporting this mindset and concern, Kincheloe states that, “advocates of critical pedagogy believe that such suffering is a humanly constructed phenomenon and does not have to exist” (p. 12). Critical pedagogy also advocates for education that does not hurt students—meaning that critical teachers take their students’ social, cultural, and economic backgrounds and perspectives as well as their needs and interests into consideration as they plan and prepare content, context, and curriculum. Critical teachers encourage and inspire students to share their diverse experiences and perspectives within the classroom—they also challenge students to examine, question, and evaluate established knowledge, empowering them to connect their life experiences with that knowledge in an effort to determine its authenticity as well as apply it to their function within that knowledge.

Finally, critical pedagogy is concerned with upholding a subtle steadiness between social change (the practice of praxis) and nurturing “the intellect” through critical thinking and reflection (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 21). Critical theorists, particularly Horton and Freire (1990), believed that pedagogy had as much to do with bringing about change in society as it did with cultivating arduous methods and practices of investigation; therefore, critical teachers must be multi-dimensional researchers who seek to understand more than the content and curriculum they present in their classroom. They must be researchers of education and the structures within it as well as researchers of their students and community by engaging in thoughtful and constructive dialogue with them, listening to them as they share their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and values. By understanding what students think, feel, and believe, critical teachers are able to distinguish how they see themselves within the scope of their educational process and more importantly within the world, allowing critical educators to center marginalized students by making their

perspectives and stories important (Berry, 2010). Trying to bring marginalized entities to the center was also a focus and concern for critical race theorists, which leads to the next aspect of this literature review.

History of Critical Race Theory

Although the specific origin of critical race theory is difficult to pinpoint, most would agree that its inception began in the 1970s, when a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars across the United States realized that the Civil Rights Movement had paused and in some cases regressed backwards (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). With a focus on studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power, Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, and other critical scholars sought to address the subtle forms of racism found within the United States as well as “question the very foundations of liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3). Although the first annual conference was held in Madison, Wisconsin, during the summer of 1989, and hosted by Kimberle` Crenshaw, who gave it structure and an official name, the decades of work leading up to that moment in time gave critical race theory validity and poise. Using a new method of scholarship, early critical race theorists utilized legal storytelling to “put forth the idea that racism was normal, not aberrant, in American society,” which “altered our understanding of race and civil rights” (Delgado, 2008, p. 1511).

According to Delgado (2008), three key stories involving three unique regions within the United States contribute to the creation of critical race theory: Harvard University, the University of California, Berkeley, and Los Angeles. Although Derrick Bell had published pivotal scholarship that eventually became known as foundational pieces for critical race theory:

“Serving Two Masters” (1976) and “Brown v. Board of Education” (1980), he resigned from Harvard University in order to accept a position as Dean of the University of Oregon Law School in 1981. With his departure, Harvard selected a well-known white civil-rights professor, Jack Greenberg, to teach Bell’s class on race law. Questioning the decision, black students noted that Harvard could have found a black professor to replace Bell, leading Harvard to defend their choice. Continuing to support their resolution, Harvard did not back down from the black students, who in return boycotted the class. Ultimately, these students, with Charles Ogletree as their supervising professor, created an unconventional class that met on the weekends, which introduced a series of black professors who flew to Harvard to speak, providing an educational experience that presented a continued, critical analysis of race—cultivating the beginning of the critical race theory movement, according to Harvard University.

Shortly following the Harvard University situation, law students at the University of California, Berkeley, produced the Boalt Hall Coalition for a Diverse Faculty, due to Boalt’s lack of hiring faculty members that were of color, gay, or women. These students rallied together to draw attention to the lack of diversity within their faculty. They even invited professors of color—some of whom had already spoken at Harvard—to present speeches about the need for diversity within the university’s faculty. When Berkeley did not respond to their requests, these students led a national strike for diversity that extended to several other schools—promoting student activism and empowering students to effect change within their world.

During the time that these student-led movements were concluding, the Conference of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) was preparing to hold their national conference in Los Angeles, California. When the event’s theme (race) was announced, a group of black law professors asked if they could speak at the conference. The CLS eagerly granted this panel of young

scholars the opportunity to speak, and many of these scholars would eventually contribute significantly to the critical race theory movement. Their work at the conference was eventually published in the *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, “becoming key documents in the critical-race-theory corpus, laying the foundation for the initial conference in Madison, Wisconsin a few years later” (Delgado, 2008, p. 1514).

Ultimately, all three noted experiences contribute to the development and progression of the critical race theory movement: one through scholarship (Los Angeles), one through prestige and respect (Harvard), and one through advocacy and activism (Berkeley).

Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Within Delgado and Stefancic’s “Critical Race Theory: An Annotated Bibliography” (1993), they suggest 10 major themes within CRT, which include: 1) critique of liberalism, 2) storytelling / counterstorytelling (“naming one’s own reality”), 3) revisionist interpretations of American civil rights law and progress, 4) a greater understanding of the underpinnings of race and racism, 5) structural determinism, 6) race, sex, class, and their intersections, 7) essentialism and anti-essentialism, 8) cultural nationalism / separatism, 9) legal institutions, critical pedagogy, and minorities in the bar, and 10) criticism and self-criticism; responses. Furthering their continued work, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) noted four basic tenets of CRT to involve the following concepts: racism is ordinary, interest convergence / material determinism, social construction thesis, and the notion of a unique voice of color. Before getting into the specifics of these themes and tenets, it is important to discuss the two varying yet instrumental modes of thinking within CRT: idealist and materialist. Understanding where each perspective is coming from and what they deem important will help cultivate a better awareness of the complexity and comprehensiveness of CRT.

Idealist / Materialist

CRT idealists postulate that racism and discrimination are issues of thinking, perceptual classification, outlooks, and debate—that race is a societal construction, not a genetic reality. On the other hand, CRT realists (also known as materialists) speculate that though approaches and language are important, racism is much more than an assortment of disparaging assessments of persons from marginalized groups—for them, racism is an avenue by which humanity distributes opportunity and prominence. Although both types of critical race theorist concentrate their efforts on race reform within the United States, their thinking outlines the approach for their decision-making of how and where to devote their attention, focus, and labor. According to the materialistic mindset, in order for racism to subside, one must change the physical conditions within the lives of minorities. Materialists examine and evaluate the structures and operations of labor unions, immigration measures, the prison-industrial complex, and loss of manufacturing and service jobs to outsourcing. Whereas, idealists scrutinize and assess aspects of university speech codes, legal and civic resolution for racist speech, media stereotypes, diversity training, healing circles, and the Academy Award (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

CRT Theoretical Foundation

Although it cannot be confined to an individual principle or method as it embraces an integrated approach that derives from various scholarship including Black feminist theory, critical theory, CLS, feminism, liberalism, Marxism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and neopragmatism, CRT scholarship is premised on two foundational ideas: 1) understanding how racism and the oppression of marginalized individuals have been shaped and sustained in the United States, and 2) recognizing and, more importantly, altering the problematic union between law and racial power in America (Willis, 2008). Utilizing the work of Lawrence, Matsuda,

Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993), contemporary CRT scholars (Schneider, 2004; Willis, 2008) concisely outline the theoretical foundation of CRT by recognizing six crucial features that comprise the fundamental ideologies within CRT research and academic literature.

Beginning with the belief that racism is “endemic to America life” (Schneider, 2004, p. 90), CRT examines traditional American values and questions how they (as the status quo) uphold and perpetuate “a common, unconscious unity” of inequality, discrimination, and racism in the United States (Willis, 2008, p. 18). Secondly and building on the concept of perpetuating inequality, CRT investigates the central “legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy”—arguing that assertions of being race neutral assists the continuation of inequality within the U.S. as “privileged groups are assumed to represent society as a whole,” meaning that the understood “cultural” standard or norm in America is white (Matsuda et al., 1993; Schneider, 2004, p. 91). Developing Derrick Bell’s theories of *constitutional contradiction* and *interest convergence*, CRT associates whiteness as a “property, both in terms of identity and privileges,” while agreeing that cultural fairness can be attained as long as it does not alter the position of whites (Willis, 2008, p. 19).

Thirdly, CRT contends that it is impossible for the United States to have an unbiased judicial system as it is generated from a foundation of inequality; therefore, CRT doubts historical accuracy and demands contextual examination of the law, especially as it relates to criminal law that results in racially-driven regulation including slave codes, Black codes, and Jim Crow laws (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; Schneider, 2004). Continuing, CRT insists on recognizing the experiences and knowledge of people of color, especially when analyzing law and society. CRT proposes that theory surrounding race should be steered by marginalize individuals, and furthermore, CRT argues that the statement that America is race

neutral is a falsification as critical race theorist believe that people and systems are linked through vigorous shared interactions, and as long as an advantaged group maintains power, an honest investigation and evaluation of racism within the United States cannot be accomplished (Schneider, 2004).

Another important tenet of CRT, much like critical theory, is that CRT is not derived from a singular ideology. Just as critical theory analyzes and questions the status quo, so does CRT (Minogue, 1994). It does so by looking at race through various lens—such as feminism, Marxism, critical legal theory, pragmatism, and nationalism—in an effort to eliminate racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; Schneider, 2004). Building on that concept, CRT focuses on eradicating racial domination as a means of ending all forms of oppression (Matsuda et al., 1993). CRT brings racism to light in American society, whether manifest in informal microaggressions or formal macroaggressions (Milovanovic & Russell, 2001; Schneider, 2004). Finally, CRT values storytelling that was constructed on daily “experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 45). CRT argues that marginalized people’s stories have been edited out of American history, resulting in cultural hegemony. Counterstorytelling, per CRT, allows minorities to share their stories in an effort to challenge dominant stories that have socially constructed the concept of race—stereotypes, negative views, and false narratives (Schneider, 2004). Although the concepts of CRT are becoming more widely appreciated and understood, there is still a segment of the population that adamantly opposes CRT. The following section provides insight and perspective that needs to be addressed within this project.

Critique of CRT

In the book, *Critical Race Theory*, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) outline how over time critics have “felt freer to speak out” against CRT (p. 102). Areas of concern include the notion of storytelling, the assessment of merit, reality, and neutrality, as well as the concept of marginalized entities having a unique perspective and voice. Delgado and Stefancic addressed concerns from Randall Kennedy, who disagreed with the idea that minority intellectuals speak in a unique voice about racial issues, and from Daniel Farber and Suzanna Sherry, who allege that CRT hides behind personal stories and narratives to develop their arguments as well as critical race theorists’ lack respect for the traditional notions of truth and merit—going as far as arguing that CRT’s critique of merit could be considered “anti-Semitic and anti-Asian” (p.103). They strongly opposed the idea that the cards were stacked against marginalized individuals within the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

In response to these critiques and responses, critical race theorists and their defenders argued that Kennedy was “guilty of misstatement and an unsympathetic reading of CRT texts” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 103). Some believe that he missed opportunities to take racial analysis to a new level due to his attitude and adherence to conservative standards. When addressing Farber and Sherry’s analysis, Delgado and Stefancic noted that if Asians and Jews thrived in the face of an imbalanced system, it was due to their ability to overcome the universal standards within an unfair structure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Focusing on more recent criticism, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) recognized the “furious attack on civil rights and critical race theory” from conservatives such as right wing bloggers, radio hosts, and devotees of color blindness. Many of them believe that Obama’s presidency proves that America has “overcome its racist past and that no further efforts were necessary”—

leading many to still debate whether or not the United States should now be considered a post-racial society (p. 104).

Additionally, in his *Notre Dame Law Review* article “Some Critical Thoughts on Critical Race Theory,” Litowitz (1996) calls into question various aspects of CRT that require further investigation. Agreeing with CRT but disagreeing with Kennedy, Litowitz points out that racism is pervasive within the United States and that legal research does need to value various perspectives, including black and brown voices. Continuing his critique of CRT as a movement, Litowitz argues that CRT’s assessment of liberalism needs to be more focused. When analyzing various research and academic writing related to CRT, Litowitz claims that liberalism is not challenged as a theoretical approach: he believes that CRT is blaming the “wrong party” for the “oppression and inequalities” of marginalized groups (p. 514).

Litowitz (1996) also mentions that CRT faces a “danger of narcissism” as well as other troubling aspect of CRT that relate to storytelling and interest convergence. Finally, Litowitz questions CRT’s terminology of “insiders” versus “outsiders,” especially when “so many self-titled ‘outsiders’ are sitting on the faculties at top law schools and publishing in the best law journals” (p. 527). Litowitz points out that if the goal of CRT is a “balanced view,” then a majority of the writing and research should not be coming solely from outsiders’ perspectives, views, and experiences. He calls for CRT to implement their own ideology by including and incorporating “all sides of an issue” (Litowitz, 1996, p. 527).

Conclusion

With the current state of affairs in the United States in respect to social and racial discourse, it is clearly evident that further research and reform in education is needed, especially with a determined focus on critical pedagogy and the incorporation of Critical Race Theory.

Although critical pedagogists and critical race theorists have gone to great lengths in the past to create and design education to meet the needs of diverse students and increase equality within the classroom, these measures are not translating to productive, effective cultural engagement in society as a whole. Therefore, we have an opportunity within the realm of education to make a change, to make a concentrated effort to gain a better understanding of how critical pedagogy and critical race theory within a secondary educational setting can impact current as well as future classrooms within the United States, providing a more equitable and engaging educational experience and outcome for all students.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology: *How we currently see critical pedagogy and critical race theory converge and diverge within education*

Introduction

As this project moves forward, the second major question to be addressed and answered is: *How can teachers relate critical pedagogy and critical race theory in a manner that can not only enhance their teaching, but also their ability to provide equitable educational experiences for their student?* Throughout this section, we will discuss how critical pedagogy and critical race theory converge and diverge, producing what we now call social justice and antiracist education. Operating in Freire's (1996) critical pedagogical as well as hooks' (1994, 2003) engaged pedagogical theoretical framework, this project will focus on the proponents of education that prepare students for a self-managed life by understanding and mastering skills such as self-reflection, self and social awareness, critical thinking, empathy, collaboration, and responsible decision-making. In current K-12 educational conversations focused on what should be included in national, state, and local teaching standards and proficiencies, the previously mentioned "self-managed" competencies are directly related to educational reform that includes Social Emotional Learning (SEL), specifically noted in Indiana's IC 20-19-51 – per the IDOE. In an effort to incorporate these critical pedagogical concepts, local school districts are integrating a daily focus, composing and using district-wide language and terminology, and implementing grade-level classroom activities and strategies that teach, support, and cultivate students' abilities to develop them wholly as humans so they know how to fully live and function within the world they live (Freire, 1996; hooks, 1994).

Expanding concepts of critical pedagogy further, a number of states, including Indiana, have incorporated student-centered learning strategies that provide avenues for students to share their knowledge, voices, and stories, which can lead to a more equitable educational experience for students and teachers. By understanding and utilizing elements of critical race theory, critical pedagogists can provide safe classroom environments that empower students to critically examine racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression within the classroom as well as within their everyday lives. Although critical race theory was initially focused within the U. S. legal system and structure, aspects of it can be directly correlated to public education in America, particularly in regards to the perpetuation of racism, claims of neutrality and colorblindness, questions about historical accuracy and the demand for contextual examination, valuing storytelling and marginalized perspectives, and questioning the status quo with the goal of eliminating all forms of oppression within the United States.

The following will provided a detailed explanation of how critical pedagogy and critical race theory collectively and independently communicate within education, setting the foundation for the decisions made during the composing and creating of the specific professional development curriculum included in this professional project. This project will incorporate concepts and strategies located within social justice education (SJE), antiracist education (AE), social emotional learning (SEL), and student-centered learning (SCL).

Social Justice Education

As we begin to work through how critical pedagogy and critical race theory align to provide meaningful, equitable, and lasting education for secondary students, it is important to understand the concepts and components of social justice education (SJE). In her article “Five Essential Components for Social Justice,” Heather W. Hackman (2005) not only succinctly

defines what SJE is, but she also outlines what she believes to be the five crucial aspects of it so that educators have a better understanding of how to implement SJE within their classroom. To begin, Hackman notes that, “Equity and social justice need to move beyond being merely buzzwords and instead become part of the lived practice in the classroom” (p. 103). Continuing, she acknowledges that SJE promotes the idea that students need to actively participate within their own learning, while SJE also assists educators as they generate “empowering, democratic, and critical educational environments” (p. 103). In defining what SJE is, Hackman looks to the work of Lee Anne Bell, who noted that SJE is both a goal and a process. Functioning as a goal, SJE desires to achieve complete and equal involvement from all entities represented in our communities and education that will meet the needs of all students. Whereas, operating as a process in order to achieve that goal, SJE needs to deliver a fair and impartial educational environment that is student-centered, implements dialogue, as well as opportunities to investigate and examine the power structures and struggles within the classroom and students’ everyday lives (Hackman, 2005).

After defining SJE, Hackman (2005) outlines five essential components for SJE, including content mastery, tools for critical analysis, tools for social change, tools for personal reflection, and an awareness of multicultural group dynamics. Briefly working through each of these components, we will also see how they directly correlate to various concepts within critical pedagogy as well as aspects of critical race theory. Beginning with content mastery, Hackman believes that accurate information and historical background as well as a critical examination of the content present is the foundational basis for SJE. Students who engage with complex, diverse sources and perspectives that are not limited to the replicated prevailing, hegemonic principles traditionally shared in public school classroom gain a broader and deeper

understanding of their world. By critically examining classroom curriculum and content, students will be more equipped to not only participate in constructive conversations, but also personally reflect on their own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs – which aligns with critical pedagogy as they both value the importance of dialogue as well as promote self-reflection. Ultimately, students in socially just classroom need to understand not only the content presented but also comprehend the impact of the information and knowledge, leading them to critically thinking and analyzing it.

The second element of SJE, according to Hackman (2005), incorporates critical analysis of knowledge, especially as it relates to the power structures within society. Specifically mentioning Freire's (1996) praxis loop, Hackman suggests that social justice education needs to equip students with the skillset of critical thinking about not only the knowledge they acquire in school but also about how power is structured and maintained within their world. Although some may believe that merely thinking about an issue is critical thinking, SJE, critical theory, and critical pedagogy propose that critical thinking requires considering various viewpoints, ideologies, power structures, and possibilities with respect to information and knowledge (Freire, 1996, Hackman, 2005, hooks, 1994).

Combining critical thinking with the next two tools, action and social change as well as personal reflection, SJE provides students an opportunity to affect much needed societal change, particularly related to racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Hackman, 2005). Through their conceptualization of critical pedagogy, both Freire (1996) and hooks (1994) valued the importance of praxis, which requires individuals to personally reflect on what, how, and why they are taught (content, curriculum, and context) and then take action with that knowledge to bring about needed change within their lives, communities, and world. Within the

concept of action and social change, Hackman mentions an important point that can be related to the current contentious opinions about integrating aspect of critical race theory. Stressing the importance of not only cultivating critical thinking, but also providing social action tools and opportunities within the classroom, SJE counters the arguments that perpetuate disempowerment, complacency, and hopelessness. It also addresses the “cultural imperialism” that convinces marginalized entities that there is nothing they can do about the systemic inequities present in their everyday lives (Hackman, 2005, p. 106). Much like Freire and hooks have challenged critical pedagogists in the past, Hackman challenges social justice education teachers to counter the belief that teaching outside the current dominant ideology is “un-American” and unpatriotic or that “silence is patriotic” – instead, they should be teaching students that they have a duty as individuals to use their voices and bring about change so that we “become a society of, by, and for all of its citizens” (p. 106).

The fourth tool of SJE, personal reflection, relates not only to students, but also specifically to teachers. Citing bell hooks (1994, 2003), Hackman (2005) incorporates the ability to be critically self-reflective within the role of educators, especially within the context of our power and privilege. Although white teachers are not typically taught to recognize our position within the classroom or our lives as privileged (inside and outside of the classroom), SJE requires that we not only start to do so, but more importantly continually do so. Dominant reasoning suggests that most teachers view themselves as equality-minded because they claim to be nice, treat their students the same, or are colorblind in their classrooms (Hackman, 2005; McIntosh, 1988). Unfortunately, this mindset perpetuates the established, systematic inequities present in education and American society. By incorporating concepts of critical race theory within secondary classroom, teachers and students can address the issues and impacts of

neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy, beginning with white educators understanding and acknowledging their whiteness and how the dominant culture has determined white to be the standard or norm.

The final component that Hackman (2005) references within her article pertains to being aware of multicultural group dynamics of both students and teachers. As teachers function and operate within their classrooms and with their students, they need to be mindful of the socially constructed identities represented as well as how they interact and communicate with one another. By doing so, they will be able to more effectively implement social justice education for all students, meaning that teachers cannot teach in the same manner in every class. Although student-centered learning has recently become a strategy used within social justice classrooms (which will be discussed later in this section), teachers need to be attentive of the group dynamics as well as the individual entities and multicultural perspectives that are present within their classrooms so that thoughtful, constructive, and productive conversations and discussions can occur, which is a crucial element within SJE. Ultimately, social justice education teachers focus on establishing a safe environment for all students to discuss social issues and concerns. They also maintain classroom expectations that promote the sharing of varied personal lived experiences as well as integrate culturally pertinent and cognizant content and curriculum that effectively enhance and benefit the multicultural dynamics within the classroom.

As teachers plan and prepare social justice education within their classroom, they can turn to the guidance of critical pedagogy and critical race theory by correlating it to the strategies and practices of student-centered learning, which focuses on what students should or want to learn as well as being mindful of how they learn, individually and collectively. Although student-centered learning has been mentioned as a significant element of effective teaching by a

number of multicultural and social justice scholars (Ayers, 1998; Gay, 2000; Shor, 1992), it is important for this project to clarify what it is and how it can be integrated into critical pedagogical and social justice classrooms.

Student-Centered Learning

Although the basic definition for student-centered learning (SCL) revolves around allowing students to determine what, how, and why they learn, there is so much more to it, especially as it correlates to concepts found within critical pedagogy and critical race theory. Various education websites, including edutopia, edglossary, and even the Indiana department of education, outline SCL as student learning that:

- meets the physical, psychological, and safety needs of each individual student
- fully embraces who each student is
- provides a sense of belonging and positive identity
- gives freedom to exercise choice in pursuing students' interest
- teaches students how to solve real-life problems and issues
- incorporates skills that will be used in their everyday lives

Borrowing from Freire (1996) and hooks (1994), SCL encourages students to take an active and engaged role within their own education and learning so they can transform themselves and the world they live. Additionally, SCL encompasses characteristics and qualities that align with both critical pedagogy and critical race theory. At the heart of SCL, learning is personal and authentic. Whether through sharing personal life experiences or stories or by studying the complex, diverse perspectives that are represented in their daily lives, student who participate in SCL are also engaging with principles found in CRT and critical pedagogy. As Freire and hooks both argued that teachers and students should be personally responsible for

their own learning, they also encouraged educators to step away from the mundane, monotonous approaches to learning that were traditionally utilized in education. They petitioned against the “banking” system of learning which dictated that teachers deposit their knowledge into the minds of their students without considering their students’ interests, perspectives, or identities. Much like critical pedagogy, SCL deepens learning and understanding by incorporating real-life content and context and then connecting it to students’ everyday lives and experiences.

Taking it deeper, SCL promotes *inquiry, collaboration, critique, reflection*, and *productive struggle* – all of which correlate within the framework of CRT and critical pedagogy (Martin, 2018). SCL empowers students to connect what they know with how they live by providing meaningful knowledge that endorses the practice of freedom and is based on the foundation of justice and equality for all students. Providing students with an opportunity to grow and express themselves, SCL equips students with the knowledge, understanding and ability to live a full and deep life, much like Freire (1996) and hooks (1994) described in their vision of critical pedagogy. Additionally, SCL inspires education that offers knowledge, abilities, and relationships that enable students to discern, scrutinize, and interrogate not only in the classroom, but also in the world they live (Martin, 2018). Aligning with CRT and critical pedagogy, SCL urge students to evaluate, *through means of inquiry, collaboration, and critique*, the status quo and power structures that preserve systems of domination and oppression. Furthermore, they are urged to critically *reflect*, often through *productive struggle*, so they can bring about much needed action in order to change to their world – with the goal of eliminating all forms of domination.

When all is said and done, much like hooks’ (1994) engaged pedagogy, SCL respects and cares for students, which also relates to the next type of learning suggested within this project:

social emotional learning. We cannot have true, authentic, sustainable learning, if we do not care for the souls of our students, and in order to do that, we need to be mindful of how they function socially and emotionally.

Social Emotional Learning

Pulling from the Indiana Department of Education resources, such as the Parents Education Bill of Rights as well as documentation from Christy Berger, the director of Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Wellness at the IDOE, and Lisa Truitt, a Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Wellness Specialist, social emotional learning (SEL) nurtures the expansion of intellectual, emotional, and behavioral domains, including: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Although the Indiana Parents Education Bill of Rights argues that CRT should not be associated with SEL, this project will demonstrate how it can and should be so that all students represented in Indiana classrooms can be understood, heard, and valued as well as receive and participate within socially just and equitable education. Noting that Indiana standards should offer “a holistic approach that is balanced and represented of all viewpoints,” the Indiana Parents Bill of Rights contradicts itself by further stating that “curriculum should not be diluted with controversial and radical teachings of CRT in a K-12 classroom” (p. 8). Furthermore, it mentions that standards “must be crafted in ways that reflect equality, inclusivity, and diversity, while not maligning parents, students, and educators” (p.8). Contradictory statements like these support the importance of this professional project, as it will address the misunderstandings and confusion related to incorporation of CRT through SEL, which at its core aligns with multiple aspects of CRT (see Chapter III for specific strategies and resources).

While the Indiana Parent Education Bill of Rights is not a proponent of CRT in Indiana classrooms, the training documentation from Berger and Truitt opens the door by defining SEL as the “process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to: understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, establish and maintain positive relationships, feel and show empathy for others, and make responsible decisions” (slide 9). Without directly noting CRT within the definition, the specific elements of SEL and CRT fundamentally connect, beginning with the *process* to acquire knowledge as well as how we *apply* attitudes and skills, especially related to emotions, goals, relationships, empathy, and decision-making.

Although aspects of critical pedagogy relate to SEL (self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness), the controversy and divisiveness surrounding the incorporation of CRT in K-12 classrooms in Indiana must be acknowledged and addressed, particularly as it correlates to establishing and maintaining relationships and showing empathy for others, and more importantly, how it involves the *process* through which we learn and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills. The first step for integrating SEL begins with understanding the process by which students and teachers acquire knowledge. Engaging with as well as truly understanding CRT’s theoretical foundation provides teachers with an opportunity to better comprehend how the established process of student learning directly impacts their ability to apply that knowledge within their attitudes, behaviors, and skills. For instance, CRT questions and investigates how the status quo maintains inequality and injustice by looking at the flaws within American society, initially through the legal system, and more recently through education, socioeconomics, and a multitude of other societal aspects. CRT also contests the historical accuracy that has been traditionally presented and demands contextual examination—again, initially focused on laws

and the legal system, but this also applies within educational content, context, and curriculum. CRT respects storytelling and maintains that marginalized perspectives and stories have been edited out of American history—resulting in cultural hegemony. These CRT fundamentals identify and acknowledge how normalized power structures of domination and inequity within the classroom influence what and how students learn, especially marginalized students.

Additionally, school districts across the country and more specifically the state of Indiana are currently working to implement SEL within their schools and classrooms by focusing on competencies such as adaptability, collaboration, critical thinking, connection, communication, empathy, and integrity. In order for students and teachers to master these competencies, we must establish authentic relationships with one another. In order to do that, we must gain a better understanding of one other and the diverse lived experiences and perspectives represented within our classrooms, which aligns with CRT’s emphasis on storytelling as well as with the belief that neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness perpetuate inequality in the U.S. Furthermore, adhering to the mindset of neutrality and colorblindness contributes to the silencing of those who do not fit within the American “white” standard. Although CRT’s framework is widely understood to operate only through a racial lens, it actually works to eliminate all forms of oppression and inequalities, allowing it to serve as a comprehensive approach to the elimination of domination within the United States. As CRT works to identify and eliminate institutionalized racism, it also calls for us to look at the bigger picture, which is what antiracist education does.

Antiracist Education

In his book, *How to be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi (2019) defines an antiracist as: *One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea* (p.

13). Throughout his book, Kendi provides additional antiracist definitions in regard to biology, ethnicity, body, culture, behavior, space, gender, and sexuality. By utilizing the key principles of antiracist education, this will combine Kendi's definitions and concepts with critical race theory demonstrating how they directly relate and apply to educational structures within the United States. Per the Center for Anti Racist Education (CARE), the five principles of antiracist education include: affirming the dignity and humanity of all people, embracing historical truths, developing a critical consciousness, recognizing race and confronting racism, and creating just systems. The following will illustrate how these principles coincide with the major tenets of CRT.

Highlighting the manner in which antiracist educators and curriculum can affirm the dignity and humanity of all people, CARE notes that it should champion the diverse and complex experiences and perspectives of all humans, ensuring that no one feels unsafe, invisible, or unheard. These ideas are also found within the basic tenets of CRT, specifically in regards to the objection of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy, as well as within the focus on storytelling and recognizing the experiential knowledge of marginalized individuals and communities. By providing students an opportunity to learn about various perspectives as well as share their own life experiences, antiracist educators work towards eliminating the power structures and established social norms that often silence and dehumanize people of color and other marginalized entities.

Additionally, antiracist education and CRT both call for and embrace historical truths by questioning and rejecting incomplete narratives. At its core, CRT contests ahistoricism and demands contextual and historical analysis. Taking CRT's challenge further, antiracist education offsets dominant narratives by including various perspectives as well as parallel stories of

domination with those of intervention, opposition, and persistence. Both CRT and antiracist education look to uncover the origins of present-day racism, injustice, and inequalities.

Developing a critical consciousness, according to the Center for Anti Racist Education website, enables students to recognize how dominant social norms perpetuate marginalization. As CRT works to eliminate all forms of oppression, it argues that racism is endemic to American life, and therefore, we must question and examine how the status quo and established power structures within the U. S. maintain inequality and injustice. Antiracist curriculum confronts power and marginalization, revealing the unseen and observable traditions that racism produces in individuals and societies (Kendi, 2019).

In order to confront issues of power and oppression, antiracist education comprehends and recognizes intersectionality as well as realizes that all individuals are impacted by living in a racial society. Antiracist educators discuss bias, racism, power, privilege, and oppression in their classrooms as they work to eradicate stereotypes, inspiring students to see each other more fully. Finally, critical race theorists and antiracist educators focus on constructing just systems by encouraging students to inspect how policies and practices function to hinder or improve human potential, ultimately working to demolish unequal structures that will be replaced with equitable, unbiased, and fair systems that benefit all human beings.

Conclusion

As educators work to implement and provide impartial, balanced, and just education for all students, projects such as this one, offer tangible and concrete evidence, support, resources, and training that can affect the change needed within our educational system and country as a whole. By combining the fundamental concepts critical pedagogy and the basic tenets of critical race theory within the realm of education, this project will deliver practical content and

comprehensive approaches from social justice and antiracists education by applying strategies and practices grounded in student-centered and social emotional learning.

CHAPTER 3

Targeted Training Audience

Prior to getting into the specific training sessions and accompanying training scripts, it is important to note that these training sessions were specifically designed and composed as professional development opportunities for secondary educators. As a current Indiana high school English and communication teacher, I created this content for my peers. Although there are additional prospects for these training sessions to be expanded to include secondary educators throughout the country, this particular project is geared towards high school teachers within the state of Indiana. With my teaching experience and completion of this MA project taking place within the state of Indiana, I have been able to cultivate conversations with fellow teachers, administrators, and professors that assist in identifying and addressing the needs of this specific audience.

Additionally, the structure of this training series lends itself to be utilized in a variety of formats. Initially, this training would be delivered as instructor-led sessions so that I can receive prompt feedback as well as have an opportunity to work through any content or concept gaps within the instructional aspects of the presented material. Once the early issues have been addressed and resolved, these training sessions would then be recorded and published in a manner that they can be utilized as online, self-driven training sessions—particularly as a means to earn PGP points for teacher licensing requirements in Indiana. Furthermore, I would like to travel throughout the state (and eventually throughout the country) presenting these training sessions to the leadership teams within various school districts—training them to be able to conduct them with their faculty—similar to a “train the trainer” scenario. With additional time,

research, and experiences, this project can be extended to reach additional audiences throughout the United States in the future.

Link to Session I Training Slide Presentation:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1sNyPZt7TAAU4XgpLGSYsZyoEN0gunFTkM0prY1mlw_g/edit?usp=sharing

Diminishing the Divide: Session I Training Presentation Script

Slide 1: (Introduction) Greeting, fellow educators. Welcome to the first session in a series of four training sessions called Diminishing the Divide—a comprehensive look at critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and secondary classrooms. This professional development series was created as my Master’s professional project, but hopefully, will serve as a beginning to the much needed constructive conversations that educators need to have pertaining to race, racism, discrimination, injustice, and inequity that is found in classrooms across the United States.

Slide 2: I am fairly certain that each of us in this room has seen the pictures, posts, and news stories across the country depicting how school board meetings are heating up...

Slide 3: over the debate of whether or not critical race theory and discussion of equity should be implemented in high school classrooms

Slide 4: and as that debate continues to rage—I ask the question:

Slide 5: Where do WE (as Indiana Secondary Educators) go from here?

Slide 6: I understand that sometimes the most important conversations to hold are the most difficult to have, but. . .

Slide 7: Let’s talk

Slide 8: Before moving any further, let me introduce myself. My name is Darci Brown, and I like you, am a high school educator. I teach Dual Credit Speech and Communication as well as Ethnic Literature and Creative Writing at DeKalb High School. As previously mentioned, I began this work during my Master’s program at Purdue Fort Wayne. Having taught in a predominantly white, conservative, middle-class community, I have struggled with how to teach my students about concepts relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.

Slide 9: Therefore, I have composed a four-part professional development series to assist fellow secondary educators in their pursuit to provide more equitable and just educational experiences and opportunities for their students. Within this series of training modules, I will provide an historical and foundational overview of the intensely debated concepts of critical pedagogy and critical race theory. In the second session, we will dive deeper into critical race theory and how it can be implemented in high school classrooms through a number of ways, including: social justice education, antiracist education, social emotional learning, and student-centered learning. In the third module, I will introduce secondary education resources that can be incorporated into daily interactions, lessons, activities, and conversations. These resources are broken down in general terms as well as content specific resources. The final session of this series will discuss the various opposing views and opinions related to incorporating CRT into secondary

education—modeling the difficult yet productive conversations and dialogue that need to be had in order for us to affect change within our classrooms as well as our world.

Slide 10: The purpose of this training is to provide professional development for current Indiana secondary educators by discussing the shift in Indiana State Education Standards that focuses on including more diversity, inclusivity, and civically-minded curriculum and conversations.

Slide 11: Additionally, this training will discuss and address controversial topics that relate to inequity, injustice, racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression by intersecting concepts and aspects of Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory. Finally, these courses will provide concrete, hands-on curriculum for secondary teachers across various content areas.

Slide 12: Understanding that a four-part training series is asking for your valuable time and attention, I wanted to take a moment to share with you why it is important. First, this training addresses and incorporates three significant educational priorities: educational standards (such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration), social emotional learning (especially related to self-awareness, social-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills), and finally, student-centered learning (by allowing students to have a say in what, how, and why they learn what they will learn in your classroom). Additionally, this training will directly impact and benefit students (by empowering them to question and analyze their world as well as equip them to use their voice to change their world). This training will enhance your classroom as both teachers and students will become responsible for the educational process and experiences—leading to more engaging communication and collaboration. And finally, these courses can assist in impacting our world by cultivating awareness, understanding, and empowerment, which ultimately can bring about a more equitable and just world.

Slide 13: Throughout this series, we will answer questions such as:

- What are Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory—as it is vital that we accurately understand these concepts before we can implement them in our classrooms
- How do Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory relate to each?
- How do they relate to current trends in education, such as Social Emotional Learning and Student-Centered Learning?
- And finally, what are some specific practices, strategies, and activities that can be implemented in my classroom related to concepts of social justice education?

Slide 14: So, let's begin by answering question number one: What are Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory?

Slide 15: We will begin with an introduction to Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory, which will include a brief historical overview and an introduction to the key contributors of both.

Slide 16: It is important to understand that fundamentally, Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory reside within the original framework of Critical Theory. In the next few minutes, we will learn how both Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory expanded the concepts within Critical Theory, ultimately, focusing on eliminating any and all forms of oppression so that all people can live life fully and deeply.

Slide 17: Let's start at the beginning—back in the 1920s, the Frankfurt School, founded in Germany, began investigating and questioning the power structures within society in an attempt to end human suffering. Keep in mind, the Frankfurt School was analyzing life in Germany (leading up to, during, and following the Holocaust), as well as in the United States (struggling with racially-driven inequalities and injustices) throughout the 1930s and 40s. Then, in the 1960s, Paulo Freire, who is known as a founding member of Critical Pedagogy, began connecting the concepts within Critical Theory to education. Following his exile from Brazil, Freire wrote and published *Pedagogy of the Oppression*, outlining the fundamental aspects and characteristics of Critical Pedagogy. Taking it further, bell hooks expanded Freire's ideas to cultivate what she called Engaged Pedagogy, which we will get into more on the next slide. Finally, as Freire and hooks were expanding concepts of Critical Pedagogy, a group of legal scholars, in the 1970s, began examining the impact of the Civil Rights Movement. This examination then led law students at a number of highly respected law schools to question why there was a lack of diversity within their faculties—culminating with Kimberle' Crenshaw hosting the first annual “CRT” conference - where she coined the official term: Critical Race Theory.

Slide 18: With all that being said, it is important to visualize this theoretical movement. With the broad study of the connection between culture and power conducted by the Frankfurt School, Critical Theory came to life. Freire then applied those ideas to education. hooks furthered those thoughts by suggesting that teachers and students should both take responsibility for their own education as well as teachers should focus on education that cares for the souls of their students by teaching to their wholeness—be aware of them as complete beings. Simultaneously, law scholars were investigating their own experiences and perspectives with power structures and struggles within the legal system. Eventually, CRT concepts were applied to other various areas of study, such as education, economics, employment, and cultural studies, to name a few.

Slide 19: Now that we have a better understanding of the historical movement within Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Critical Race Theory—let's dig a little deeper into what Critical Pedagogy is.

Slide 20: Paulo Freire once said, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”

Slide 21: Relating that specifically to education, Freire established education that is based on a foundation of justice and equity - that is devoted to eradicating human suffering. He also advocated that education not hurt students - He encouraged teachers and students alike to actively participate in learning.

Slide 22: Additionally, Critical Pedagogy proposes that teachers provide knowledge that will equip students to productively live in the world—Critical Pedagogy needs to serve the best interests of students as well as provide learning opportunities that apply to real-life situations. Finally, Critical Pedagogy encourages students to share their diverse experiences and perspectives. Although I could speak all day about the what, how, and why of Critical Pedagogy, I think it is important that we learn a little bit about the WHO of Critical Pedagogy.

Slide 23: Here are a few of the familiar faces within Critical Pedagogy. To start, Paulo Freire is known for pioneering the origins of Critical Pedagogy, by discussing educational concepts that

include: the banking system, dialectic, empowerment, liberation, and praxis. Henry Giroux also served as a founding theorist for Critical Pedagogy—he expanded Freire’s ideas to include a focus on the influence that media has on young people. As noted previously, bell hooks, also contributed to the expansion of Critical Pedagogy by examining the relationship between race, gender, and class - coining the term intersectionality. Antonia Darder is known for critical engagement with Freire’s work, discussing the social inequalities in schools and society. Finally, Theodora Berry added to bell hooks’ work by including not only a racial perspective, but also a feminist one. Although this is an impressive list, it is not nearly a comprehensive one, but for time sake, we will move onto learning more specifically about the contributions of the two theorists that have influenced and inspired my work: Freire and hooks.

Slide 24: As the founding member of Critical Pedagogy, Freire believed that education was political—he also believed that it could be the solution to the power issues and struggles faced within society. Ultimately, he believed that education should prepare students for a self-managed life. Opposing the banking system, where teachers deposited their own knowledge into the minds of their students, Freire proposed that education should empower students to uncover their own critical awareness.

Slide 25: He also suggested that: learning should be reciprocal –meaning that students should learn from teachers and teachers should learn from students. He also suggested that education should require critical thinking and dialogue. He believed that both were necessary for true learning to occur.

Slide 26: Influenced by Freire, bell hooks stated that: “To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.”

Slide 27: hooks extended Freire’s work through her development of Engaged Pedagogy, which suggests that curriculum, content, and context should connect what students know with how they live—she also suggests that educators should provide meaningful knowledge that promotes the practice of freedom. They should also encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and decisions. Finally, teachers should cultivate a classroom culture that inspires students to be vulnerable and take risks so they can grow and express themselves.

Slide 28: Ultimately, hooks promotes education that translates into students and teachers living their lives fully and deeply.

Slide 29: With a more detailed understanding of Critical Pedagogy, let’s move into an overview of Critical Race Theory—including the origins, the fundamental concepts, and key contributors.

Slide 30: So, what is Critical Race Theory? (Play the ABC Action News clip ~ 3:07) Before we can know whether or not it can cause a racial divide between students in the classroom, let’s figure out where it came from and what it really is.

Slide 31: As stated previously, in the 1970’s, legal scholars and activists noticed that the Civil Rights Movement had stalled and in some cases, it had regressed backwards. Scholars, such as Bell and Delgado, sought to address the subtle forms of racism found within the U.S.—they did this by looking through a legal lens and framework. In the 1980s, three unique situations took place resulting in the birth of what we know today as Critical Race Theory. Although Session II

of this series goes into more depth, here is a quick overview of what took place at Harvard University, UC Berkeley, and the Conference of Critical Legal Studies.

Slide 32: In 1981, Derrick Bell resigned from Harvard University to accept a position as Dean of the University of Oregon Law School. Instead of hiring another person of color to replace Bell, Harvard hired a white Civil Rights professor to teach Bell's class on race law. Students questioned the decision, eventually boycotting the class due to the lack of diversity within Harvard's faculty. The students resorted to creating an alternative class that met on the weekends and hosted a series of black professors from other universities to speak. The alternative class provided a continued critical analysis of race and American law—cultivating the beginning of CRT.

Slide 33: Shortly following the Harvard incident, law students at UC Berkeley began questioning the lack of diversity within Berkeley's faculty—forming the Boalt Hall Coalition for a Diverse Faculty. With a lack of response from Berkeley's administration, students rallied together to lead a national strike for diversity that extended to several other universities. This strike prompted student activism on college campuses across the country and drew national attention to the racial inequities in higher education.

Slide 34: Finally, as the student-led movements were concluding, the Conference of Critical Legal Studies was preparing to hold its national conference in Los Angeles, California. At that time, a group of black law professors asked to speak at the conference. The CLS granted this panel of young scholars the opportunity to speak—their work at the conference was eventually published in the *Harvard Civil Rights - Civil Liberties Law Review*—contributing significantly to the Critical Race Theory Movement.

Slide 35: Ultimately, all three noted experiences contributed to the development and progression of the Critical Race Movement: one through scholarship, one through prestige and respect, and one through advocacy and activism.

Slide 36: Now that we know the origins of the movement, let's learn more about the key contributors. Contributing groundbreaking research such as *Brown v Board of Education* and the *Interest-Convergence Dilemma*, Derrick Bell is considered an original component of Critical Race Theory. As the organizer of the first CRT convention as well as the person who named CRT, Kimberle' Crenshaw is known as one of the founding members of Critical Race Theory. Additionally, Richard Delgado penned over 200 journal articles and 20 books, which expanded the examination of inequalities within the U.S. Legal System. Correlating CRT to education, Gloria Ladson-Billings focuses on pedagogy that promotes equity and justice for all students. Finally, Daniel Solórzano continues the CRT framework within education by studying the impact of racial microaggressions that people of color suffer within everyday life, especially within the education system.

Slide 37: Although Session II of this training session will go into further detail, here is a brief overview of the principle concepts of Critical Race Theory. First: CRT believes that race is a social construction and that it is endemic to American Life. Next, CRT questions the claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy—as they actually perpetuate inequalities and the status quo. CRT also insists that we utilize contextual and historical analysis to gain a better understanding of American history.

Slide 38: CRT believes that we need to recognize the experiential knowledge of marginalized entities, especially within academic scholarship and research. Much like Critical Theory, CRT uses a collectively comprehensive approach to eliminating racism—working to eliminate ALL forms of oppression and domination. Finally, CRT values storytelling that is based on everyday experiences of marginalized individuals and their diverse perspectives.

Slide 39: If you want to know more about CRT and how the concepts of CRT can be incorporated into secondary classrooms, please join us for Session II of this series! We examine how CRT relates to Social Justice Education as well as Social Emotional Learning and Student-Centered Learning.

Slide 40 - 52: Before we conclude this session and move onto Session II, it is important that we review the key terms and concepts that we will be discussing throughout the remaining sessions. *Read each term and definition.*

Slide 53 - 60: As we come to a close, I would like to share some additional resources with you, in case you would like to further your own study in regards to Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory. Slides 54 - 60 offer suggestions for reading and viewing as well as online resources that will assist you in learning more about Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory

Slide 61: Finally, thank you for your attention! I hope that this initial training session has inspired you to not only learn more about these current educational trends but also to engage with the additional three modules that are waiting for YOU! If you have any questions or ideas for further training sessions, please feel free to reach out through email, and be sure to follow me on Twitter and Instagram to see how I am incorporating these concepts in my classroom, promoting equitable and just education for all students!

Slide 62: Please feel free to join me for Session II of Diminishing the Divide as we dig deeper into Critical Race Theory and how it correlates to Social Justice Education, Antiracist Education, Social Emotional Learning, and Student-Centered Learning!

Link to Session II Training Slide Presentation:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1frwhTVajnoA7zozMdebISgj4mKSjTWZ__b-LgMuBvww/edit?usp=sharing

Diminishing the Divide: Session II Training Presentation Script

Slide 1: (Introduction) Greeting, fellow educators. Welcome to the second session in a series of four training sessions called Diminishing the Divide—a comprehensive look at critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and secondary classrooms. This professional development series was created as my Master's professional project, but hopefully, will serve as a beginning to the much needed constructive conversations that educators need to have pertaining to race, racism, discrimination, injustice, and inequity that is found in classrooms across the United States.

Slide 2: As we begin our time together, here is what you can expect from this session: we will get into a more specific and contextual explanation of the key concepts and principles of CRT. I will also provide a detailed description and discussion of several current educational trends, such as: Social Justice Education, Antiracist Education, Social Emotional Learning, and Student-Centered Learning. Finally, I will provide support and evidence that connects the concepts of CRT and these contemporary trends in education.

Slide 3: Before moving any further, let me introduce myself. My name is Darci Brown, and I like you, am a high school educator. I teach Dual Credit Speech and Communication as well as Ethnic Literature and Creative Writing at DeKalb High School. As previously mentioned, I began this work during my Master's program at Purdue Fort Wayne. Having taught in a predominantly white, conservative, middle-class community, I have struggled with how to teach my students about concepts relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.

Slide 4: Therefore, I have composed a four-part professional development series to assist fellow secondary educators in their pursuit to provide more equitable and just educational experiences and opportunities for their students. Within this series of training modules, I will provide an historical and foundational overview of the intensely debated concepts of critical pedagogy and critical race theory. In the second session, we will dive deeper into critical race theory and how it can be implemented in high school classrooms through a number of ways, including: social justice education, antiracist education, social emotional learning, and student-centered learning. In the third module, I will introduce secondary education resources that can be incorporated into daily interactions, lessons, activities, and conversations. These resources are broken down in general terms as well as content specific resources. The final session of these series will discuss the various opposing views and opinions related to incorporating CRT into secondary education - modeling the difficult yet productive conversations and dialogue that need to be had in order for us to affect change within our classrooms as well as our world.

Slide 5: Finally, this professional development session has been broken down into the four major educational trends that are currently being discussed within educational circles. As I mention each, can I see a show of hands if you have heard about the concept? Critical Race Theory? Social Justice or Antiracist Education? Social Emotional Learning? Student-Centered Learning? With the show of hands, for some this might be a refresher course on the content, but hopefully, more beneficial on making the connection between them as well as providing an explanation of the significance of each one within our classrooms.

Slide 6: Let's get into it - CRT: What is it ~ Really?

Slide 7: Maybe you have some questions to start—such as: what is it? Where did it come from? Does it belong in my classroom? Is it real? Why is it being banned? Can we really get fired for teaching it?

Slide 8: So, where did it begin? If you took the first session of this training series, I gave an overview of how CRT began so this may be a reminder for you. CRT began on college campuses and in critical legal studies. (*click for Harvard to appear*) More specifically, it began as a movement with an instance at Harvard University. In 1981, Derrick Bell resigned from Harvard University to accept a position as Dean of the University of Oregon Law School. Instead of hiring another person of color to replace Bell, Harvard hired a white Civil Rights professor to teach Bell's class on race law. Students questioned the decision, eventually boycotting the class due to the lack of diversity within Harvard's faculty. The students resorted to creating an alternative class that met on the weekends and hosted a series of black professors from other universities to speak. The alternative class provided a continued critical analysis of race and American law - cultivating the key principles of CRT. (*click for UC Berkeley to appear*) Shortly following the Harvard incident, law students at UC Berkeley began questioning the lack of diversity within Berkeley's faculty—forming the Boalt Hall Coalition for a Diverse Faculty. With a lack of response from Berkeley's administration, students rallied together to

lead a national strike for diversity that extended to several other universities. This strike prompted student activism on college campuses across the country and drew national attention to the racial inequities in higher education. ([click for Los Angeles to appear](#)) Finally, as the student-led movements were concluding, the Conference of Critical Legal Studies was preparing to hold its national conference in Los Angeles, California. At that time, a group of black law professors asked to speak at the conference. The CLS granted this panel of young scholars the opportunity to speak - their work at the conference was eventually published in the *Harvard Civil Rights - Civil Liberties Law Review*—contributing significantly to the Critical Race Theory Movement. Ultimately, all three noted experiences contributed to the development and progression of the Critical Race Movement: one through scholarship, one through prestige and respect, and one through advocacy and activism. ([click for Madison, Wisconsin to appear](#)) In 1989, Kimberle` Crenshaw hosted the first convention to discuss these key works and writings, coining the term for it as Critical Race Theory. Throughout the 1990s until just recently, the work of CRT scholars quietly continued, but a storm was brewing. As Americans faced the COVID pandemic—that physically distanced people as well as racial tensions continuing to explode over the deaths of unarmed black people at the hands of police which socially distanced people—add to that a high contentious Presidential election that politically distanced us further, the term CRT became a tool that divides our nation—resulting in it being banned ([click for the first wave of banned to appear](#)) across the ([click for the second wave of banned to appear](#)) United States ([click for the finally wave of banned to appear](#))—which is where we stand today: banned.

Slide 9: As just mentioned, the progression of CRT began in the 1970s ([click for the 1970s to appear](#)) with legal scholars investigating why the Civil Rights Movement had not had a greater impact on equality for marginalized people in the US. ([click for the 1980s to appear](#)) In the 1980s, scholarship, activism, and academic respect culminated in the first CRT conference—hosted by Kimberle` Crenshaw. ([click for the 1990s-2020 to appear](#)) CRT research continued, expanding to include additional focuses such as: education, economics, and employment to name a few. ([click for 2020 to appear](#)) The summer of 2020 brought CRT to the forefront of racial and political discussion. ([click for Currently to appear](#)) And, currently, CRT and conversations of race, sexism, and classism are being banned in public school systems throughout the U.S.

Slide 10: So, what is CRT—Let’s break it down ([click for Critical to appear](#)) Critical is an approach that was noted in Session I more specifically, but briefly, it was a concept created by the Frankfurt School that studies the power structures within society with the focus of eliminating all forms of oppression and domination—this approach has influenced the study of history, education, law, literature, and social sciences. ([click for Race to appear](#)) Race is a classification of people based on common physical or social characteristics into groups normally regarded as distinctive within a particular society. Modern scholarship argues that race is a social construct, an identity which is assumed based on guidelines determined by society. ([click for Theory to appear](#)) Most people think the word theory means: an experimental idea or a speculation without supporting data, but in the academic world, a theory is a validated explanation of characteristics of the ordinary world or society that can integrate rules, suggestions, and truths. ([click for the complete definition to appear](#)) Therefore, CRT is an approach by which people examine the power structures within American society through a racial lens with a goal of eradicating all forms of oppression.

Slide 11: Now that we have a concrete definition of CRT, let's get into the details of it. The six key tenets of CRT begin with (*click for Racism to appear*) the belief that racism is a part of everyday life in America—therefore, it seeks to examine how our traditional values maintain the status quo of inequality and discrimination. (*click for Neutrality to appear*) CRT argues that race neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy perpetuate inequality as it privileges the American “norm,” which is considered to be White. (*click for Historical Accuracy to appear*) CRT questions historical accuracy and asks that it be contextually analyzed as the US judicial system was generated from a foundation of inequality—such as slave codes, Black codes, and Jim Crow laws. (*click for Knowledge to appear*) CRT suggests that the experiences and knowledge of people of color be recognized and respected, especially when analyzing law and society. (*click for Ideology to appear*) CRT—like Critical Theory—is derived from multiple ideologies. CRT questions the status quo by looking at race through various lenses—all in an effort to eliminate all forms of oppression. (*click for Storytelling to appear*) Finally, CRT values storytelling and argues that marginalized people's stories have been edited out of American history—resulting in cultural hegemony.

Slide 12: CRT calls it Counter Storytelling and believes that COUNTER storytelling allows marginalized entities to share their stories, perspectives, and viewpoints in an effort to challenge the dominant stories that have socially constructed the concepts of race through stereotypes, negative views, and false narratives—per Delgado & Stefancic.

Slide 13: Now, that we know the basics concerning CRT, (*click for How to appear*) how does it apply to education? I contend that it does through Social Justice Education and Antiracist Education (*click for What to appear*) And you may ask, what does it look and sound like in the classroom? I suggest Social Emotional Learning and Student-Centered Learning.

Slide 14: Let's figure out what they are and how we correlate them with teaching components of CRT in our classrooms.

Slide 15: I would like to begin with a foundation based on bell hooks' concept of Engaged Pedagogy—she stated: “To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. [...] To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.”

Slide 16: Therefore, I would suggest that Critical Pedagogy and CRT equate to Social Justice Education. Here is a video that clarifies this better. (*Click on video*)

Slide 17: Taking from the video, we can answer how Critical Pedagogy and CRT equate to Social Justice Education (*click for Know to appear*) by knowing your history we see concepts of CRT—we see concepts of Critical Pedagogy in (*click for Love to appear*) love for your Students (*click for Challenge to appear*)—Challenge kids to critically think (*click for Best to appear*)—as well as being mindful of what is in the best interest of our students (*click for Whole to appear*) and teaching the wholeness of our students—(*click for Incorporate to appear*) and finally by incorporating counter storytelling we can connect CRT to Social Justice Education.

Slide 18: With that in mind, let's figure out the fundamentals of Social Justice Education—beginning with students: (*click for Students to appear*) this type of education encourages students to actively participate in their own learning process (*click for Educators to appear*) and ask

educators to offer an empowering, representative, and critical learning environment. (*click for Goals to appear*) Social Justice Education functions in two manners: as goals and a process. The goals are 1: to achieve complete and equal involvement from all students and 2: to meet the needs of ALL students. SJE does so as a 2-step process: (*Click of Process to appear*) 1: to deliver fair and impartial educational experiences and 2: by providing student-centered learning, implementing dialogue, and examining power struggles within the classroom and everyday life.

Slide 19: Moving on, Social Justice Education incorporates five (5) specific components (*click for Content Mastery to appear*) Content Mastery which requires accurate information and historical background as well as an examination of content and context of that information. (*click for 2nd Content Mastery point to appear*) For that to happen, educators should offer diverse sources and perspectives to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the world. (*click for the 3rd point for Content Mastery to appear*) Finally, Content Mastery evaluates and understands the impact of information, content, and context—which leads to the second component: (*Click for Tools for Critical Analysis to appear*) Tools for Critical Analysis—SJE proposes that education needs to equip students with the skills of critical thinking. (*click for point 2 to appear*) Critical thinking about knowledge students acquire in school and about how power is structured and maintained within their world. (*click for the final point to appear*) Finally, critical thinking requires considering various viewpoints, ideologies, power structures, and possibilities with respect to information and knowledge.

Slide 20: Additionally, SJE suggests that education should offer tools for social change. (*click for the first point to appear*) Students should be provided an opportunity to affect much needed societal changes—especially related to racism, sexism, classism, and any other form of oppression. (*click for the second point to appear*) SJE also values praxis—which requires individuals to personally reflect on what, how, and why they are taught, and then, take action with that knowledge to bring about change within their lives, communities, and world. (*click for the third point to appear*) Finally, these tools should counter the arguments that perpetuate the mindset that convinces marginalized students that there is nothing they can do about the systemic inequities present in their everyday lives. (*click for Tools for Personal Reflection to appear*) For Praxis to occur, reflection is required—from students and teachers. For this section, I am going to speak directly to you as educators. (*click for point two to appear*) Educators need to address the issues and impacts of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy within our classrooms—we need to understand where we stand within those concepts and also analyze how we might be perpetuating them in our classrooms. (*click for the final point to appear*) We can do that as white teachers by understanding and acknowledging our whiteness and how the dominant culture has determined white to be the American standard or norm.

Slide 21: The last component of Social Justice Education involves having an awareness of the multicultural group dynamics within the classroom and society. (*click for point one to appear*) First, educators need to be mindful of the socially constructed identities represented in our classrooms as well as how they interact and communicate with one another. (*click for point two to appear*) Educators should also focus on establishing a safe environment for ALL students to discuss social issues and concerns while maintaining classroom expectations that promote the sharing of varied personal lived experiences. (*click for the final point to appear*) Finally, educators should integrate culturally pertinent and cognizant content and curriculum that effectively enhances and benefits the multicultural dynamics within the classroom and throughout their communities. (*click for the end note to appear*) It is important to note that all

five components of Social Justice Education align with aspects of both Critical Pedagogy and Critical Race Theory.

Slide 22: Let's watch this two-minute video that outlines the four (4) approaches that educators can take when implementing SJE in our classrooms. (*click on video to play*)

Slide 23: Similar to Social Justice Education, Antiracist education is another avenue in which educators can incorporate concepts of CRT within their classrooms.

Slide 24: Let's dive into the five principles of Antiracist Education—per the center of Anti Racist Education (also known as CARE). (*click for principle 1 to appear*) First, it is education that affirms the dignity and humanity of all people. (*click for principle 2 to appear*) Second, it is education that embraces historical truths (*click for principle 3 to appear*) Third, it is education that develops a critical consciousness. (*click for principle 4 to appear*) Fourth, it is education that recognizes race and confronts racism. (*click for principle 5 to appear*) Finally, it is education that creates just systems within the classroom as well as within society.

Slide 25: With that in mind, let's discuss how that directly relates to CRT in the classroom. (*click for point 1 to appear*) First, it champions the diverse and complex experiences and perspectives of all humans, ensuring that all feel safe, visible, and heard. (*click for point 2 to appear*) Next, it focuses on eliminating the power structures and established social norms that often silence and dehumanize marginalized students. (*click for point 3 to appear*) Next, it offsets dominant narratives by including various perspectives as well as parallel stories of domination with those of intervention, opposition, and persistence. (*click for point 4 to appear*) It also looks to uncover the origins of present-day racism, injustice, and inequalities. (*click for point 5 to appear*) Furthermore, it discusses bias, racism, power, privilege, and oppression in classrooms as we work to eradicate stereotypes, which will inspire students to see each other more fully. (*click for point 6 to appear*) Finally, it works to demolish unequal structures, replacing them with equitable, unbiased, and fair systems that benefit ALL human beings.

Slide 26: How can we be antiracist educators? Let's watch this video. (*click on video to play*)

Slide 27: Now, that we know more about Social Justice Education and Antiracist Education, we can discuss how we can implement them in our everyday classrooms. Keep this quote in mind as we move forward: When students feel safe and supported they are truly ready and able to learn.

Slide 28: I am certain that we have all heard the term: Social Emotional Learning—especially recently within our faculty and department meetings. But what is it? And, how does it connect with CRT?

Slide 29: According to the Indiana DOE, they state that (*click for the first chart to appear*) social and emotional learning is the process through which students acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills—how they understand and manage their emotions—how they set and achieve goals—how they feel and show empathy for other—how they establish and maintain relationships—and how they make responsible decisions. Additionally, they believe that Social Emotional Learning will (*click for the second chart to appear*) enhance students' mindset, critical thinking, insight, communication, and communication skills.

Slide 30: Without directly noting CRT with the definition, the specific elements of SEL and CRT fundamentally connect, beginning process to acquire knowledge as well as to how we apply

attitudes and skills, especially related to emotions, goals, relationships, empathy, and decision-making.

Slide 31: Let's break down the process and application. *(click for process to appear)* First: Process *(click for next line to appear)* In order for students to apply knowledge, they must acquire it. *(click for next line to appear)* SEL and CRT both suggest that they do so by: *(click for first point to appear)* critically questioning and investigating content and context presented within their classrooms. *(click for the next point to appear)* They must also examine historical accuracy that has been traditionally presented. *(click for the next point to appear)* We must also respect storytelling that maintains ALL perspectives and viewpoints—especially those from diverse backgrounds. *(click for the next point to appear)* Finally, students must identify and acknowledge how power structures influence what and how they learn. *(click for Application to appear)* Now moving onto the application of knowledge—*(click for the next line to appear)* once students acquire knowledge, they can apply that knowledge. *(click for next line to appear)* SEL and CRT suggest that they do so: *(click for next line to appear)* through the competencies such as adaptability, collaboration, critical thinking, connection, communication, empathy, and integrity— *(click for the next line to appear)* also, by establishing authentic relationships that cultivate a better understanding of each other and our diverse lived experiences. *(click for the last point to appear)* And finally, by promoting and instilling justice and equity within the classroom for ALL students.

Slide 32: With that in mind, let's take a look at how SEL competencies align with CRT. *(click for Collaboration to appear)* First, we see it by engaging and productively working with others by listening and communicating with ALL students in the classroom. *(click for Critical Thinking to appear)* Next, we see it when analyzing and evaluating the information that is presented in the classroom and within the world—including power structures that create and establish social norms, stereotypes, and other inequalities. *(click twice for Communication and that point to appear)* As students exchange thoughts, ideas, and information in a constructive and equitable manner, we see how communication aligns with both SEL and CRT. *(click twice for Empathy and that point to appear)* Finally, by acknowledging, understanding, and respecting the diverse perspectives and stories of ALL students represented in the classroom, empathy is extended, which correlates to both SEL and CRT.

Slide 33: With all that we know about CRT, Social Justice Education, and Social Emotional Learning, we can tie them all together through Student-Centered Learning. Think about this *(click for the quote to appear)*: Every student can learn—just maybe not on the same day or the same way.

Slide 34: That brings us to our final section: Student-Centered Learning. What is it?

Slide 35: It is learning that: *(click for the first point to appear)* meets the physical, psychological, and safety needs of each individual student. *(click for the next point to appear)* It is learning that fully embraces who each student is. *(click for the next point to appear)* It is learning that gives freedom to exercise choice in pursuing students' interests. *(click for the next point to appear)* It is learning that teaches students how to solve real-life problems and issues. *(click for the next point to appear)* It is learning that provides a sense of belonging and positive identity. *(click for the last point to appear)* Finally, it is learning that incorporates skills that will be used in students' everyday lives.

Slide 36: In a nutshell, student-centered learning is (*click for Personal to appear*) Personal—(*click for Authentic to appear*) Authentic— *click for relatable to appear*) and Relatable to students and their everyday lives. (*Click for next point to appear*) It is learning that promotes: (*click*) Inquiry (*click*) Collaboration (*click*) Critique (*click*) Reflection (*click*) Productive Struggle.

Slide 37: Therefore, I believe we cannot have true, authentic, sustainable learning, if we do not care for the souls of our students, and in order to do that, we must be mindful of how they function socially and emotionally.

Slide 38 - 42: As we come to a close, I would like to share some additional resources with you, in case you would like to further your own study in regards to Social Justice Education, Antiracist Education, Social Emotional Learning, and Student-Centered Learning. Slides 39-42 offer online resources that will assist you in learning more about each of them.

Slide 43: Finally, thank you for your attention! I hope that this training session has inspired you to not only learn more about these current educational trends but also to engage with the additional two modules that are waiting for YOU! If you have any questions or ideas for further training sessions, please feel free to reach out through email, and be sure to follow me on Twitter and Instagram to see how I am incorporating these concepts in my classroom, promoting equitable and just education for all students!

Slide 44: Please feel free to join me for Session III of Diminishing the Divide as we dig deeper into how we can implement the daily practices, strategies, and activities of Social Justice Education, Antiracist Education, Social Emotional Learning, and Student-Centered Learning in our classrooms! The next session provides concrete resources and curriculum that you can use within your teaching. I hope to see you there as we bring the concepts from this session to life!

Link to Session III Training Session:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1XGvxOv5QmiGb53PyYmLtugVbXypSa61IoCFUUbYTk/edit?usp=sharing>

Diminishing the Divide: Session III Training Presentation Script

Slide 1: (Introduction) Greeting, fellow educators. Welcome to the third session in a series of four training sessions called Diminishing the Divide—a comprehensive look at critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and secondary classrooms. This professional development series was created as my Master's professional project, but hopefully, will serve as a beginning to the much needed constructive conversations that educators need to have pertaining to race, racism, discrimination, injustice, and inequity that is found in classrooms across the United States.

Slide 2: As we begin our time together, here is what you can expect from this session: Hands-on, applicable content that you can use within your classrooms. This session will provide content and curriculum such as classroom strategies and practices, conversation starters and guides, engaging and interactive classroom activities, as well as online resources that are broken down by general concepts and specific content areas. This session will be the most interactive as it will allow educators to work through the slides at their own pace as well as based on their personal and professional interests.

Slide 3: Before moving any further, let me introduce myself. My name is Darci Brown, and I like you, am a high school educator. I teach Dual Credit Speech and Communication as well as Ethnic Literature and Creative Writing at DeKalb High School. As previously mentioned, I began this work during my Master's program at Purdue Fort Wayne. Having taught in a predominantly white, conservative, middle-class community, I have struggled with how to teach my students about concepts relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.

Slide 4: Therefore, I have composed a four-part professional development series to assist fellow secondary educators in their pursuit to provide more equitable and just educational experiences and opportunities for their students. Within this series of training modules, I will provide an historical and foundational overview of the intensely debated concepts of critical pedagogy and critical race theory. In the second session, we will dive deeper into critical race theory and how it can be implemented in high school classrooms through a number of ways, including: social justice education, antiracist education, social emotional learning, and student-centered learning. In this (the third module), I will introduce secondary education resources that can be incorporated into daily interactions, lessons, activities, and conversations. These resources are broken down in general terms as well as content specific resources. The final session of these series will discuss the various opposing views and opinions related to incorporating CRT into secondary education - modeling the difficult yet productive conversations and dialogue that need to be had in order for us to affect change within our classrooms as well as our world.

Slide 5: Finally, this professional development session has been broken down into the five categories. I will review the introduction with you and then you will be given time to review the slides and links within each slide on your own so you can spend quality and productive time engaging with the content that is most suitable for you and your classrooms.

Slide 6: Let's get into it. After engaging with Session II of this series (Diving into CRT), we learned the details of CRT and how they relate to education. *(click for next point to appear)* More specifically, we discussed Social Justice and Antiracist Education as well as Social Emotional and Student-Centered Learning. *(click for next point to appear)* This training session will take those concepts and directly apply them to the daily interactions within your secondary classroom, which promote equitable and just education for all students!

Slide 7: Here is an overview of the content.

Slide 8 - 12: Let's begin with Classroom Strategies. *(Click for the next slide to appear)* Slides 9 and 10 will provide steps to building equity within the classroom. *(Click for the next slide to appear)* Slide 11 gives a number of strategies and resources related to Social Emotional Learning, and slide 12 *(Click for the next slide to appear)* reviews strategies for Student-Centered Learning. You will be given time in a few moments to go back and review this material on your own.

Slide 13 - 17: The next few slides give insight to protocols and procedures for building equitable classrooms *(click on slides 14 - 17 to show them what to expect)*.

Slide 18: The next section will provide information, insight, and resources for conversation starters within your classroom.

Slide 19: First, we have a quick video that encourages educators to SHOW UP to have these conversations. *(click on video to play)*

Slide 20: Here are 9 Tips for Planning Difficult conversations within the classroom (per Waterford.org) *(click for point 1)* First, plan the discussion with specific goals in mind. *(click for point 2)* Next, set a respectful tone for the discussion early on. *(click for point 3)* Next, as much as possible, be aware of individual student traumas. Although this one is hard to do, be mindful of the nonverbal cues that your students are communicating during these conversations.

Slide 21: Next *(click for point to appear)* provide classroom rules as a framework for the discussion. *(click for point 5 to appear)* Next, give your students an opportunity to share their voices—meaning we should not be doing all the talking.

Slide 22: Tip #6: *(click for point to appear)* be sure to establish common ground while discussing divisive topics. *(click for point to appear)* #7: Lean into discomfort when it arises—meaning do not shut it down just because you feel uncomfortable.

Slide 23: Tip #8 *(click for point to appear)*: Be sure to encourage students to listen and ask questions—encourage them to only share your own perspective—let others share—learn about your classmates and their lived experiences. *(click for point to appear)* Finally, make time for reflection at the end of the discussion—sometimes, this is when they learn the most!

Slide 24 - 25: The following slides contain online resources that you will have time to review in just a few moments. *(click on each slide to show them what to expect)*

Slide 27-29: The next section will offer online resources pertaining to interactive Social Justice Activities that you can do within your classrooms. Again, you will have time to review these slides more specifically in a few moments. We have one more section to overview, and then the time will be yours! *(click on each slide to show them what to expect)*

Slide 30: Finally, the last section of the training will provide you with additional resources that pertain to social justice education (slides 31 - 36) as well as content specific resources. Slide 37: Art, Slide 38: English, Slide 39: Math, Slide 40: Music, Slide 41: Science, Slide 42: Social Studies, and Slide 43: covers Agriculture, Business, P.E. and Theatre. *(click on each slides to show them what to expect)*

You now have the rest of the training time to work through the various resources and links. I will be making my way around the room offering assistance as needed. Please do not hesitate to call on me if you have specific questions or concerns.

30 - 45 minutes later, I will bring them back together to debrief and conclude the session. This could be a time where teachers share out what they learned or what they found to be most valuable from the various resources.

Slide 43: Thank you for your attention! I hope that this interactive training session has inspired you to implement these practices, strategies, and activities within your classroom! Please note that there is one more training module that engages with the opposing views of CRT in education as well as insight and resources for having difficult conversations when we do not agree! If you have any questions or ideas for further training sessions, please feel free to reach out through email, and be sure to follow me on Twitter and Instagram to see how I am incorporating these concepts in my classroom, promoting equitable and just education for all students!

Slide 44: Please feel free to join me for the final Session of Diminishing the Divide as discuss the various views and opinions surrounding Critical Race Theory and the implementation of it in

secondary classrooms. We will also work through how to conduct difficult conversations—especially when we disagree. The next session provides concrete resources and curriculum that you can use within your teaching. I hope to see you there as we bring the concepts from these training sessions to life!

Link to Session IV Training Session:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OTFL-1LjBiTWJdpFtUZKtllbQF99M99_C8zEGXQLZ3g/edit?usp=sharing

Diminishing the Divide: Session IV Training Presentation Script

Slide 1: (Introduction) Greeting, fellow educators. Welcome to the fourth and final session in a series of four training sessions called Diminishing the Divide—a comprehensive look at critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and secondary classrooms. This professional development series was created as my Master’s professional project, but hopefully, will serve as a beginning to the much needed constructive conversations that educators need to have pertaining to race, racism, discrimination, injustice, and inequity that is found in classrooms across the United States.

Slide 2: (*click for the words and pictures to appear*) As we have worked through these training sessions, the debates over CRT in Education have continued to rage—as more and more school board meetings experienced volatile and even harmful situations. . .

Slide 3: (*click for the pictures to appear - then click for the words to appear*) creating more division within our country.

Slide 4: How do we get to a place where we can talk about ending racism within our country?

Slide 5: As we begin our time together, here is what you can expect from this session: we will clarify the contemporary concerns surrounding CRT, and then go into more detail about the arguments against implementing CRT within secondary classrooms. Next, we will talk through productive steps to take for engaging in difficult debates and conversations about race and racism within the U.S. Finally, my hope is that this session will demonstrate the respect and empathy needed to unify us as we work towards a more equitable and just world that has eradicated all forms of oppression and domination.

Slide 6: As a reminder, I have composed a four-part professional development series to assist fellow secondary educators in their pursuit to provide more equitable and just educational experiences and opportunities for their students. Within this series of training modules, I provided an historical and foundational overview of the intensely debated concepts of critical pedagogy and critical race theory. In the second session, we dove deeper into critical race theory and how it can be implemented in high school classrooms through a number of ways, including: social justice education, antiracist education, social emotional learning, and student-centered learning. In the third module, I introduced secondary education resources that can be incorporated into daily interactions, lessons, activities, and conversations. These resources are broken down in general terms as well as content specific resources. The final session of these series will discuss the various opposing views and opinions related to incorporating CRT into secondary education - modeling the difficult yet productive conversations and dialogue that need to be had in order for us to affect change within our classrooms as well as our world.

Slide 7: Finally, this professional development session has been broken down into the four major focuses. *(click for point to appear)* 1: Concerns about CRT within current conversations. *(click for point to appear)* 2: Arguments opposing CRT and aspects of CRT in high school classrooms. *(click for point to appear)* 3: Productive steps towards positive engagement that demonstrates respect, empathy, and unity. And finally, *(click for point to appear)* I will provide insight to the benefits that CRT in the classroom can provide students, educators, and society as a whole.

Slide 8: Before we move forward, let's take a moment to consider your personal engagement with CRT. *(click for point to appear)* What have you heard about CRT through the Media? Social Media? Family or Friends? *(click for point to appear)* Now think about this, do you typically engage with like-minded sources when reading about CRT? Or with like-minded people when discussing CRT? *(click for point to appear)* Finally, have you ever experienced a productive or positive interaction with someone who thinks differently than you do about CRT? If so, please share it with the group.

Slide 9: As we move towards productive conversations about race, let's begin by clarifying some of the concerns.

Slide 10: What are some of the concerns about CRT?

Slide 11: *(click for point to appear)* Politicians have stated that it is racist— *(click for second point to appear)* some believe that CRT's concept of "white privilege means that white people have not struggled or that white people are to blame for marginalized people's problems." *(click for the last point to appear)* And President Trump clearly stated that CRT is toxic propaganda—ideological poison—and if not removed, it could destroy our country. With harsh words, terminology, and phrasing, it is not surprising that talking about CRT can be difficult and uncomfortable.

Slide 12: For us to move forward, it is important to take a few minutes to discuss the known concerns about CRT. *(click for Racism to appear)* As Senator Cruz crassly stated, some people believe that CRT is racist because it focuses only on race and identity. *(click for Racial Lens to appear)* After extensive study, I would argue that CRT proposes that we critically analyze society utilizing a racial lens so that we can examine how societal norms have been constructed and maintained. *(click for Meritocracy to appear)* Some believe that CRT negates the value of working hard to earn or accomplish something. *(click for Inequity to appear)* Whereas, I believe that CRT proposes that ingrained inequities have stalled and even regressed—creating equality for marginalized groups that negatively impact their ability to "work their way out of it." *(click for Storytelling to appear)* Some scholars do not agree with personal narratives being a respected and valued aspect of academic research—whereas, *(click for Perspective to appear)* CRT suggests that stories and lived experiences can serve as valuable and diverse perspectives within academic research.

Slide 13: Additionally, *(click for Hierarchy to appear)* some believe that CRT demands a reversal in racial hierarchy as a means of "evening" the score. On the contrary, *(click for Equality to appear)* CRT does not want a reversal in the hierarchy—they want the hierarchy to dissolve—they seek to eradicate all forms of oppression, resulting in true equality for everyone. *(click for Color Blind to appear)* Some believe that CRT should embrace the concept that we are one race and stop being divisive. *(click for Diversity to appear)* CRT actually

believes that we should embrace and respect the diverse perspectives and lived experiences for ALL Americans. (*click for Balanced View to appear*) Some believe that CRT only values the perspective of marginalized people—negating all other views. (*click for Unique Voice to appear*) In reality, CRT seeks to have the unique voices and perspectives of marginalized individuals to be respected and heard - they are not looking to silence anyone—they want everyone to be heard.

Slide 14: Now that we know the overall concerns related to CRT in general, let's dive into the specific arguments against CRT in the classroom.

Slide 15: (*click for first point to appear*) Some arguments that have been voiced are: CRT teaches kids to hate each other and for white students to feel guilty for being white. (*click for the second point to appear*) That CRT wants to rewrite history. (*click for third point to appear*) That CRT is indoctrinating kids.

Slide 16: Let's discuss the various arguments out there concerning CRT in the classroom. First, (*click for Hate to appear*) some believe that CRT teaches kids to hate each other based on race; whereas, I would say (*click for Empathy to appear*) that CRT provides an avenue for students to better understand each other, cultivating empathy and compassion for each other. (*click for Guilt to appear*) Some believe that CRT fosters feelings of guilt for white students. (*click for Perspective to appear*) Again, I would suggest that implementing aspects of CRT into the classroom can give students an opportunity to gain different perspectives of the diverse experiences represented within their classroom. (*click for Indoctrination to appear*) Some believe that CRT is a form of liberal and radical indoctrination. (*click for Awareness to appear*) To that I would argue that CRT creates an awareness of the power structures and systems that are found within the classroom and the world our students live—providing real-life learning experiences and knowledge.

Slide 17: Additionally, (*click for Rewrite to appear*) some believe that CRT wants to rewrite history by adding non-traditional perspectives; whereas, I believe that (*click for Diversity to appear*) CRT proposes that ALL lived experiences and perspectives should be included in American history. (*click for Division to appear*) Some believe that CRT is pitting students against each other. (*click for Unity to appear*) But in reality, CRT proposes that students come together to eliminate all forms of inequality, inequity, and injustice. Finally, (*click for Indoctrination to appear*) some believe that CRT expects students to accept the ideas, content, and context presented to them without critically examining them, when in truth, (*click for Awareness to appear*) CRT suggests that teachers and students should BOTH critically evaluate the structures and systems that create the world in which we live.

Slide 18: Now that we know the issues, how do we take productive steps towards positive engagement - especially when we disagree?

Slide 19: Taking from Martin Luther King Jr, “we must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

Slide 20: Here are some do's and don'ts when having difficult conversations with disagreement (*click*) Don't let frustration overcome you—try to channel it in a positive manner (*click*) Don't assume the worst in people or what they are saying (*click*) Don't launch verbal grenades—be mindful of the words and phrases you are using (*click*) As hard as it might be, don't use sarcasm

and refrain from speaking in sound bites (*click*) Also, don't be condescending—that will create more division and tension.

Slide 21: On the other hand, (*click*) Do tell people that they matter. (*click*) Do acknowledge fear that may be lurking under the surface. (*click*) Do share your sources so everyone has a better understanding of where your information is coming from. (*click*) Do show that you understand even though you may disagree with them. (*click*) Do teach and be teachable—keeping an open mind and perspective. (*click*) Finally, do thank them for taking the time to talk with you and for being open to having this difficult conversation. Without these conversations, we cannot move forward in bringing about change—in bringing about a more equitable and just world for our students and our country.

Slide 22: If you are interested in learning more about having productive “disagreement conversations,” please feel free to click on the logos to access the attached articles.

Slide 23: With these steps in mind, one good conversation can shift the direction of change forever.

Slide 24: So, how can we (students, educators, and society as a whole) benefit from these conversations and this type of learning?

Slide 25: For students, studies have shown (*click*) that CRT and discussion of race in the classroom have: (*click*) increased attendance (*click*) decreased dropout rates (*click*) boosted test scores and graduation rates (*click*) and improved political engagement (*click*) for marginalized students.

Slide 26: In relation to all students, the benefits of CRT in the classroom include (but are not limited to): (*click*) it allows students an opportunity to identify and appreciate commonalities with peers. (*click*) It can improve communication skills among students. (*click*) It can assist teachers in maintaining high expectations for ALL students. (*click*) It also can enhance students' feelings of being valued. (*click*) And finally, it promotes students taking ownership of their own learning.

Slide 27: Additionally, CRT in the classroom can spark activism in students. (*click*) This activism can support long-term (*click*) educational (*click*) professional (*click*) political (*click*) and civic (*click*) outcomes. (*click*) It can also (*click*) ignite passion (*click*) improve academic performance (*click*) shape future choices (*click*) and increase volunteerism in young people.

Slide 28: If you are interested in learning more about the benefits for students, here are a few more resources for you. Feel free to click on the logos to access the attached articles.

Slide 29: For educators, the benefits are continually expanding, but here are a few that I found to be important and meaningful. First, (*click for Understanding to appear*) implementing principles of CRT and SJE in secondary classrooms allows educators an opportunity to get to know and understand ALL students, which will assist in creating an open and safe learning environment. Next, (*click for Empathy to appear*) incorporating elements of CRT and SJE in secondary classrooms gives educators an opportunity to demonstrate empathy for their students by being more mindful of each of their student's academic and social needs. Another benefit (*click for Awareness to appear*) involves awareness. Applying aspects of CRT and SJE in secondary classrooms affords teachers an opportunity to become more aware of their own bias as well as

the power structures within their classrooms, schools, and communities. And finally, (*click for Learning to appear*) integrating concepts from CRT and SJE in secondary classrooms provides educators a chance to not only teach their students but to also learn from their students by allowing them to share personal experiences and perspectives.

Slide 30: Finally, the benefits of CRT and Social Justice Education ultimately correlate within our society by (*click for point one to appear*) establishing equality for all citizens. Secondly, (*click for the next point to appear*) we will be able to create a society with justice for all. Finally, and most importantly, (*click for the last point to appear*) we will work towards eliminating racism within the United States.

Slide 31: In closing, my hope was to cultivate positive and productive conversations and resources for secondary teachers so that we can build equitable, just, and antiracist educational experiences for ALL students in our classroom.

Slide 32: I would like to leave you with one final piece of encouragement. Remember, Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire! (*click*) GO LIGHT THE FIRE!

Slide 33: Thank you for your attention! I hope that you have found this professional development series beneficial for you and your students. If you have any questions or ideas for further training sessions, please feel free to reach out through email, and be sure to follow me on Twitter and Instagram to see how I am incorporating these concepts in my classroom, promoting equitable and just education for all students!

Slide 34: Please be on the lookout for additional Diminishing the Divide training in the future. We are working on concepts of Whiteness, CRT and Education Case Studies, SJE Best Practices, and Practicing SJE Classroom Exercises. We look forward to working with you in the near future!

CHAPTER 4

Implications and Conclusion: Challenges, Impacts, and Final Thoughts

As we bring this project to a close, it is important to discuss the challenges and obstacles that were experienced as well as to stress the significance and impact that a project like this could have on students, teachers, and education as a whole. Finally, I would like to share my personal reflection of the moments that led me to creating and composing this professional project—the moments that combined my passion for teaching and the awakening of my critical consciousness, allowing me to implement Freire and hooks’ concept of praxis within my classroom as well as encouraging and empowering fellow educators to do the same.

Although this work was meaningful, powerful, and life-changing for me, it did present a few challenges and obstacles along the way. Personally, I debated with myself as well as with my professors throughout this entire process on whether or not I should even attempt this project. After reading Delgado’s “The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature” (1984), I questioned if I, as a white woman, had a right to speak about Critical Race Theory in education. After much research, discussion, and soul searching, I realized that I not only have a right, but a responsibility as an educator, to share my voice. Being mindful of not minimizing or silencing marginalized voices or perspectives, I determined the focus of my research needed to communicate to white people, more specifically to white educators—which leads to another obstacle that this research faces.

Professionally, this work faces the obvious challenge of adamant opposition from a large number of educators, particularly in the conservative state of Indiana. I learned early on in this process that although I am extremely passionate about examining the power structures within education as well as discussing the benefits of incorporating constructive conversations about

race, racism, and other forms of oppression in the classroom, not many of my peers would say the same. Therefore, I was challenged with the issue of presenting this important work in a manner that would be receptive and meaningful to those who may not agree or may not truly understand it—which leads to the another obstacle this project faces: misinformation.

Although the ideas and concepts of CRT began back in the 1970's, it has only become a household name in the last couple of years. Even more importantly to note, the manner in which CRT became a household name contributes to the obstacle of misinformation. Being used as a political tool to create division and animosity within our country, news outlets and social media have contributed to the spreading of incorrect information about CRT, resulting in destructive, harmful, and contentious conversations and discussions pertaining to race and racism within the United States. As debates over race and racism raged throughout mass media, it also made its way to the streets (through protests) and public forums (most notably, school board meetings)—which leads to an addition obstacle: parents, administrators, and legislators who oppose and often threaten this work.

Facing the genuine fear of losing the job that I love, this project challenged me to have conversations with school administrators, school board members, and concerned parents—most of whom obstinately oppose CRT or any type of “divisive” discussion. In order to produce effective professional development material related to CRT in education, it was important for me to get to the root of their opposition. It was also imperative that I put my work into practice by conducting productive dialogue with not only my peers, but also decision-makers within my profession. Although we had moments of agreeing to disagree, these conversations motivated me to not only complete this work but also maintain my focus on the significant impact that this work could have on students, teachers, and education as a whole.

For students, this work will help generate more equitable and just classrooms for ALL students. Training educators to be more mindful of the perspectives and life experiences of each of their students will help create an open and safe learning environment for all students. Within an open and safe educational setting, students will be encouraged and empowered to share their stories and perspectives, to take responsibility for their own learning, and to connect that learning to their everyday lives. This training will also assist teachers in implementing social emotional learning as well as student-centered learning, which can assist students on a number of levels: social, emotional, educational, and professional.

For teachers, this professional development provides accurate information pertaining to a number of current trends and issues within education. By completing this training, educators will gain a concrete and concise understanding of Critical Race Theory as well as how to productively incorporate aspects of CRT within their everyday classrooms, especially through Social Justice Education, Antiracist Education, Social Emotional Learning, and Student-Centered Learning. As educational standards and focuses shift to meet the holistic needs of all students, the information, resources, and support provided by this training will equip teachers to do so.

For education as a whole, this work will assist in effecting much needed change so that we can meet the needs of ALL students by providing equitable and just education. With a foundation in critical pedagogy, education must focus on not harming students. We must work towards eradicating all forms of oppression and domination so that all students can become self-aware, socially-aware, self-reflective, and self-managing. We can do that by equipping and empowering students to be critical thinkers, collaborative contributors, and empathetic human beings.

Additionally, I would like to note that this project offers important and significant contributions to the current academic and scholarly research pertaining to critical pedagogy, CRT, and education. Although this project relies on previous and current scholarship, it does actively expand that work by taking it a step further—by participating in praxis with the research. Specifically, this project directly applies the principles and concepts of critical pedagogy by suggesting and encouraging the implementation of CRT within secondary curriculum and classrooms. Having thoughtfully reflected on the academic content, I was able to then put those theories, concepts, and ideologies into practice by composing meaningful instruction and training for fellow educators in a manner that will bring about much needed change within secondary classrooms—moving towards more equitable and just educational opportunities and experiences for all students within the United States.

In closing, I would like to leave my final thoughts by incorporating an important aspect of CRT: *storytelling*. By sharing my story, I hope to inspire and empower others to recognize and evaluate their own experiences that could shed light on how we can cultivate more constructive and productive conversations that discuss and address the fear, anxiety, apprehension, and hate that systematic racism perpetuates in our country—resulting in a movement towards a more equitable and just American education and society.

My Story

Sitting in a classroom full of high school seniors taking a college level communication course, the anticipation and even anxiety was palpable as students tentatively watch for the large screen in front of them to come to life.

Shattering the awkward silence, one could hear a voice come over the classroom speakers, “Mom—Mom, are you there?”

The screen enthusiastically lit up with friendly, smiling faces and excited hands waving back at us. My daughter and her classroom full of high school juniors were joining us for our first live video chat. If a stranger walked into either classroom, he or she would instantly notice the distinctions between the two classrooms. The glaringly obvious one is: one classroom is filled with all black and brown students and a white, female teacher and the other one is composed of all white students and a white, female teacher. But to me, the more interesting observation is found in what is not being said. My students, who have had limited experiences with those from another culture are quiet and apprehensive. Their body language is tight and closed—not on purpose—just protective. Whereas, on the screen, my daughter’s students are jumping around in front of the camera—shouting, laughing, dancing, and even singing. They are open and full of energy. They ask questions, wanting to get to know my students.

As I sit there taking all of this in, I am mentally catapulted back to the moment that instigated this interaction taking place—a moment that happened almost five years previously—a moment that took place far away from the rural communities of Auburn, Indiana, or Weldon, North Carolina. But a moment that shifted my mindset as a mother and educator—a moment that opened my eyes and heart to teaching my daughters and now my students to “climb inside of his skin and walk around in it,” as my favorite author, Harper Lee once eloquently wrote in To Kill a Mockingbird.

The moment took place on Saturday, July 13, 2013. Relaxing at our usual place, Funky Buddha, a newly opened, locally-owned brewery, we sipped on craft beer, played cards, and heard the buzz of various sporting events taking place on the multiple TVs throughout the establishment. It was a normal Saturday night for us, until “Breaking News” interrupted every one of the TV broadcasts. Within seconds, reporters who were standing in front of the Seminole County

Courthouse began exclaiming that the jury in the George Zimmerman / Trayvon Martin case had come back with a verdict, after only sixteen hours of deliberation.

Exchanging a concerned look with my husband across the table, he simultaneously stated, “Finish your drink—quickly. We need to be ready to leave immediately.”

*Our two high school daughters, sitting at the table with us, did not have a clue as to what was about to take place or understand why the tension in the building suddenly went to an extreme level—but everyone in the crowded building could feel that tension and anxiety. All eyes were glued to the screens as the jury (six women: five white – one mixed black and Mestizo ancestry) took their seats—as George Zimmerman stood to face them, we all collectively held our breath as the verdict was read aloud: **Not Guilty**.*

Instantaneously, bottles and glasses were thrown—shattering against the walls and floor. Panic and uncertainty filled the room, and as we grabbed our belongings and ran to the door, the chaos moved to the parking lot and streets.

“Get in the car and keep your heads down—do not look up—stay down!”

Those were the words my husband kept saying as we drove home—as the street began to fill with people—noise—and frustration. During that car ride home, I had one thing on my mind: protect my children. All I could think about was how summer school would be for my daughters on Monday. How would their friends treat them? What conversations would happen in their classrooms? Would they be harmed because of this verdict? You see, my daughters were the minority at their high school—their classmates and friends could have been Trayvon Martin. My daughters were now considered “the enemy.”

It was in this moment that I realized that I played into the systematic racism that is perpetuated daily in our country. By the end of the 30-minute fearful ride home, I realized that Trayvon

Martin's mother was not afforded the opportunity to protect her son, but I had been given that chance not only during that ride home but every other day before and since then. Although my daughters faced the backlash at school in the following days, they were still safe—they were protected—they were privileged. The backlash allowed for honest, open conversations with my daughters as well as with their friends where they were able to share differing perspectives that we, my daughters and myself, had not experienced or even previously comprehended. By opening our ears, hearts, and minds, we were able to truly hear their stories, empathize with them as they faced challenges we would never experience, and ultimately, realize that change needed to occur—and we needed to be an active participant in that change.

This moment began the journey that eventually resulted in our future students meeting, which provided them the opportunity to learn from diverse perspectives by having difficult yet productive interactions discussing race, racism, as well as students' personal, authentic experiences relating to race and racism. This moment led me to focus my Master's studies on cultivating constructive conversations that address established power structures, inequality, injustice, and racism within secondary classrooms as well as throughout the United States. This moment nurtured an opportunity to merge education and communication in a manner that can address the fear, anxiety, apprehension, and hate that systematic racism perpetuates in our country. This moment cemented the creation of "Diminishing the Divide" and profoundly impacted my life's continued work.

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