

Chapter 14

Teachers' Commodified Relationships With Racial Justice Through Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores teachers' interpretations of racial justice-oriented professional development (PD). Findings emerge from surveys and interviews conducted with 74 teachers in Toronto, Canada. Data reveals that teachers' ideological positions have a direct relationship to their understanding of racial justice. Three patterns of thought emerged: 1) The majority of teachers interpreted racial justice to be a commodity that they expected be given to them. 2) Some teachers interpreted racial justice as a way to "save" racialized Others, and 3) a small number of teachers recognized racial justice to be an ongoing process of self-reflection. In this chapter, the authors argue white supremacist logics at the systemic level influence what racially just strategies and activities teachers imagine in terms of individual teachers' institutionalized ideological stances. Most importantly, the authors demonstrate how many teachers' uncritical interpretations of racial justice serve to reinforce white supremacy already present in the organizational norms of Canada's K-12 schooling.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores secondary teachers' interpretations of racial justice-oriented professional development (PD). Findings were drawn from survey and interview responses of 74 teachers from eight secondary schools in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The qualitative interview and survey data presented here on

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professional development are part of a wider mixed-methods study examining relationships between classroom conditions (understood here to include class size, composition, pedagogical delivery mode) and teachers' ability to successfully engage in racially just teaching. Findings on racial justice-oriented PD suggest teachers' ideological positionality can have a direct relation to teachers' understandings of racial justice within the various conditions of their classrooms. Participants described participating in various PD sessions that ranged in delivery modes and required time commitments. While some PD was self-directed and elective, most was mandatory. Some PD sessions were developed locally by staff at their schools, some at the board level, and others were presented by third parties. In this study, we were not concerned with the content or quality of racial justice-oriented PD sessions, rather, we wanted to explore teachers' interpretations of those PD sessions. Despite the variety in the types of PD sessions the participants received, three overarching themes emerged.

This chapter focuses on three emergent thematic findings that offer a rough typology of teacher engagement with and reflection on racial justice-oriented professional development: 1) The majority of teachers interpreted racial justice to be a commodity that they expected be given to them; 2) Some teachers interpreted racial justice as a way to "save" racialized Others; and 3) A small number of teachers recognized racial justice to be an ongoing process of self-reflection. The first two findings demonstrated that the majority of participants interpreted racial justice as something they needed "to do" (e.g., follow a specific activity, a lesson, or another resource) rather than "be" racially just. By equating doing racial justice to being racially just, teacher participants insisted that they needed to be explicitly shown the activities or lesson plan exemplars in order for them to know how to incorporate racial justice into the curriculum.

In this chapter, we interrogate the concerning insistence that teachers must be explicitly shown how to do racial justice in order to be racially just. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as our guiding theoretical framework, we argue white supremacist logics at the systemic level influence what racially just strategies and activities teachers imagine in terms of individual teachers' institutionalized ideological stances. Most importantly, we illustrate how the impact of racial justice-oriented PD, based on teacher interpretations, can serve to reinforce extant white supremacist logics in the organizational norms of Canada's K-12 schooling.

The first major section of this chapter offers an overview of the context and purpose of this work in terms of education policy, race, and classroom conditions. Next, we sketch our engagements with CRT as our guiding theoretical framework, with a focus on CRT in education. It is followed by a review of relevant literature on organizational PD surrounding issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, with a focus on in-service and pre-service teachers. We then offer an overview of our methodology and methods. The final section offers our findings and implications in three areas: Commodification of racial justice, white saviourism and othering, and (critical) self-reflection. We end with a brief conclusion.

Definitions

Several phrases are threaded throughout the chapter, such as "racialization," "othering," "doing racial justice," and "critical consciousness." To limit misinterpretations of those key phrases, we offer definitions that are consistent with prior literature referenced in this chapter.

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