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Colorism's Presence Within a Public School:  
A Professional Development Aimed at Creating a Curriculum Focused on Working Against  
Colorism in Schools

Salena Olvera Leos

A Project Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Education

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this project is to provide educators a resource for creating social justice curriculum via professional development on Colorism. The research offers an explanation of colorism as it is currently understood, the historical significance of colorism, as well as examples of how it is perpetuated in society and school systems. Teachers will be given examples and resources of how to construct lessons around colorism with a focus around student voice as well as structured time to manipulate pre-generated lessons to fit the needs of their individual schools sites.

*Keywords: colorism, professional development, schools, educators, education*

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## Chapter 1:

*In order to discuss colorism individuals are generalized in terms of “dark skin toned” or “light/fair skin toned.” These generalizations are not all encompassing and are merely used to help the reader navigate the text. These terms are used as a tool to demonstrate a separation of people into over simplified binaries. I write this as a woman of color who has benefitted from a level of privilege in two areas one being based on my fairer skin tone and by my educational experiences.*

### Introduction:

Colorism is a concept that has become a prominent area of concern among people of color. This concern links to a constant struggle to find adequate representation and visibility within the context of everyday life. Currently, the topic has gained momentum via social media pages such as those found on Instagram and Facebook. These pages include *Nalgona Positivity Pride* which also promotes inclusion for all body types; *The Unapologetically Brown Series* utilizes social media and public spaces to promote visibility of women of color; *Tonantzin Society* which offers culturally responsive pedagogy resources in order to educate and preserve Latinx/Chicanx and indigenous culture; and the *Chicana Motherwork* which works towards creating visibility for mothers of color within academic environments and culture. There is also a podcast titled *Bitter Brown Femmes* which focuses on deconstructing several –isms including colorism. All of the aforementioned organizations navigate and utilize social media and podcasts as tools to help promote social change and ultimately give visibility to individuals of color. Through the process of prompting social change and visibility the concept of colorism has been brought up in the discussions as an area of need within our communities.

Many may ask themselves, what does colorism mean? Simply put it is the discrimination of individuals based on skin tone rather than race. Colorism involves projecting negative attributes of human behavior and characteristics onto an individual largely based on a hierarchy which divides people, often of a similar race, by the shade of their skin. These distinctions vary

from, though related to, racism as it stems from a similar point in history. Colorism lends itself to upholding a specific group of individuals, typically white or fair skinned, are treated or viewed at a higher status than their brown skin toned counterparts.

### **Problem statement**

As educators it is necessary to facilitate and support positive learning environments for all students. This includes creating a space where all students are able to feel welcome and encouraged with the removal of tensions based on appearances. Unfortunately, these learning environments are not always possible when educators harbor their own personal biases, particularly those that are associated with colorism. Colorism involves discrepancies in the way students of color are often targeted more than white or fair skin toned. Research conducted in *Colorizing Educational Research: African American Life and Schooling as an Exemplar* by Carla Monroe (2013) makes mention to students displaying an increase in negative behaviors as a response to the negative or added attention placed on them for their differences. Monroe (2013) adds that the results of these negative behaviors and the practice of being targeted based on skin tone leads to the loss of instructional time and attributes to the academic gap which creates detrimental effects as students mature and enter adulthood with limited opportunities. Colorism affects the school environment by impacting the students identified or singled out by teachers and school staff, including administrators, based on skin tone which does not allow for fairness and equity.

Colorism is an observable occurrence within the public school setting. Evie Blad and Alex Harwin wrote an article titled *Analysis Reveals Racial Disparities in School Arrest* for PBS (2017), in which they indicated students of color are subjected to “random” searches on campus as well as being reported to police or law enforcement more often than white or fair skinned

peers. While this is one large occurrence across the United States, there are smaller more subtle ones that happen on a regular basis specifically at my school site in North East Los Angeles where the student population varies from African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, White, Pacific Islander, and recently Middle Eastern students. The staff at this given school site is of a similar combination with dominant groups including Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, and white. The school is considered to be Title 1 school, where all students are able to receive free or reduced lunch based on low income status of parents. Many of the parents at this school site are immigrants from Vietnam, Mexico, or Central America.

With a diverse group of students the assumption may be that there is limited need for the colorism discussion however, on more than one occasion students have been subjected to being associated with color rather than personal characteristics or even their names. I observed on multiple occasions, in which teachers and staff participated in conversations in which students' behaviors were discussed and referenced to by skin tone. Several students were identified as "Oh the black one? The dark one? The white one?" Or by calling students with the same name as either "the dark one" or "the white one" while both students are Hispanic and share the name "Johnathan." I also observed several instances where an African American male student, in a classroom full of male students, that had just completed physical education, was singled out for having excessive body odor. The teacher later specified that it must have been in part to the student's dark skin tone as it somehow made the student more susceptible to odor.

Colorism was also observed during considerably routine practices in school when students of a darker skin toned were asked to step out of class to be searched. Similar occurrences have been observed when students of a certain complexion were singled out in the hallways more often than their fairer or light skin toned peers. Colorism was then perpetuated by

the school staff members that were set in place to provide a level of security for the campus. These same students were observed as developing a negative self-image or association with their skin tone often by using phrases like "It's because I'm black" when one peer made a negative comment towards them. The student was not an African American student but rather first generation, non-white, Guatemalan student. By the given reaction, which was seen and heard multiple times by this student and a few others can be depicted as being a result of negative attributes based on skin tone differences. Another instance includes female students commenting on one another's appearance. These students have specified that their peer was "so pretty, she's so light skinned and her eyes are so pretty." Students have also been heard or observed using language such as "uhg, why am I so dark?! I look black." This again places a negative reference on skin tone and demonstrates a preference for lighter skin toned ideals that reflect some internalized systemic racial contributions.

Additionally, there was an isolated incident that I can recall within my class at a time when a sixth grade group of students read an excerpt from an episode of *The Twilight Zone* titled "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street." In this piece, there is a male character, Charlie, that becomes violent and shoots another character, Pete Van Horn, in a panic. Charlie blindly shoots Pete as he is unaware of the identity of the victim until it is too late. As the class had an initial first read of the script, students believed that the character with the gun was a person with a dark skin tone and the victim was a white male. Students immediately shouted out their ideas about the gun wielding character Charlie by stating "he's a black dude" or "not to be messed up, but how do you call it, he's like a moreno, dark skin guy." The students read the part as though the character was a person of color rather than a white character. Upon showing the clip of the actual episode students were taken back to see that Charlie was an overweight white male. They were

surprised to see all the actors were white. This alone seemed problematic as students had their initial thoughts about the characters and assigned an automatic racial identity based on the characters actions. This would just serve as a means of communicating the extent to which color plays a role in perceptions at varying levels.

Negative associations based on skin tone are apparent among staff and among the student population. In the company of colleagues, teachers and staff, I have observed the way in which they talk about students in terms of color. The language that is used among teachers and staff is linked to problematic perceptions of students related to skin tone and unfortunately appears in how students talk about themselves in school. In order to promote a more positive school culture and environment, it is necessary to name these instances and participate in a discussion around the concept colorism to educate staff and transfer those ideas into curriculum to support student needs. The English classrooms offer a space for colorism to be addressed as there are avenues to do this via literature and a combination of social strategies to implement. By intertwining colorism with English curriculum via literature selections and genre types, there may be a shift in how students of color perceive themselves, their peers, and allow for a separation of negative associations while moving to a place of acceptance and inclusion.

### **Project**

This project involved a small series of workshops geared towards educating staff on colorism by addressing terminology and development of concepts for it. First, Colorism was explored in the mainstream media. This provided for the exploration of colorism within the context of the real world including the way it is perpetuated within public school. Next, *The*

*Colorism Toolkit*<sup>1</sup> created by Teaching Tolerance<sup>2</sup> was used by each grade level in English Language Arts to serve as a supplemental or support tool to the teaching tolerance lesson. While the topic of colorism is controversial in nature it is necessary to illustrate the ways colorism exists on an unconscious level as well as the historical significance of colorism. The presentation to support the workshop series includes current explanations of colorism concepts, the historical integration of these ideas, and how colorism transpires into current thinking as simply being a cultural trait. The ending components of the workshops included discussions with colleagues on how they felt about colorism, the exploration of resources to teach colorism and then a planning session to integrate the resources and create curriculum for colorism.

The goal of this project is to promote more acceptance and inclusion within the classroom among students of varying skin tones in order to move away from colorism by first educating teachers on the topic. The second goal is to construct lessons that offer insights into colorism, utilize literature from people of color, and are focused on providing student centered writing pieces in which they explore colorism in either the private or public sphere.

## **Literature**

Colorism is evident within public school systems. It is carried out by teachers, staff and students that all interact with one another; colorism allows for levels of oppression to occur in schools and attributes to negative behaviors and perceptions of students as they become targets without legitimate reason. This narrative that dictates people of color as being a negative entity limits students' access to curriculum, prevents connections to content and divides schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Toolkit for "What's 'Colorism'?" (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2015/toolkit-for-whats-colorism>

<sup>2</sup> Teaching Tolerance is an organization that produces free resources to educators with an emphasis on social justice.

According to a study conducted by *NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development* (2017), findings indicated that students placed in a classroom with educators that uphold a type of racial bias will project negative concepts such as having low expectations onto their students; this will then translate over onto low performing students of color and a negative classroom learning environment. The study went on to state that there were instances when students felt this negative imprint and used it as a motivational tool to over perform in spite of the low teacher expectations. In either scenario, it would appear as though students are not able to feel comfortable in class and maintain positive school environment if they are being treated poorly based on race/skin tone.

In *Colorizing Educational Research: African American Life and Schooling as an Exemplar* by Monroe (2013), there is additional discourse in the way the educational system perpetuates skin tone and racial biases via the assumption of increased behavioral issues and maintaining a low expectation of students of color, specifically African American and Hispanic/Latinx students. There was also an indication that students were more likely to participate in the discussions or organizations of intersectionality<sup>3</sup> perhaps based on the level of oppression being experienced on several levels that overlap. Monroe (2013) suggests that it is imperative for educators, counselors, and overall school staff to become more aware of their own potentially harmful views when interacting with students of color to avoid further harm on students and to make conscious efforts to formulate inclusive lessons to allow for visibility in schools. This is an area that will be addressed with this project.

These occurrences within the school setting may contribute to lasting effects of students of color. *The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality* written by

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<sup>3</sup> Intersectionality involves the overlapping of various social categories such as race, class, and gender, being interdependent systems (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.).

Hunter (2007), discusses how the impact of colorism attributes to inequalities in adult life involving, but not limited to, the social status, income variations, marital matches and even residential disparities. Hunter (2007) points out that while certain racial groups are already at a disadvantage that attributes to the above mentioned areas, the discrimination of individuals based on skin tone within a given race is used to maintain white supremacy as the ideal of this would be that white or light skin toned individuals can be taught more effectively and uphold the notion that European ideals linking to dark skin tones as being “irrational, ugliness, and inferiority.” In this way the hierarchy is upheld within the educational setting and thus mimics the reality that many people of color are faced to endure. This would then play out in the way school staff interacts with students and parents. These areas of a school environment cannot function appropriately when there are unchecked biases being perpetuated.

These ideals do not only flow from an area of one race over another, it is also relevant within a given race. This includes preferences to light skin Latinx or African Americans as being subjected to higher standards or by being observed as more desirable than their peers. It creates a hierarchy within communities to divide people. These links can be traced back to the European colonizers in Mexico and Latin America. Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, & Organista, (2013) explain this practice in *Skin-Color Prejudice and Within-Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino/a Populations*, by exploring the historical process that lead to how colorism is ingrained within Latinx culture. The discussion is centered on the enslavement of indigenous brown people at the hands of the white European colonizers; as this was a need to maintain status and slave labor. The conversation includes how the current state of media in places like Mexico or Latin America continue to focus on white, European standards and features as being linked to social status. If this is happening within a given culture, it will

then permeate onto the various other components of human existence especially as it is being described as a culturally, learned behavior to favor one shade over another.

Favoritism and negative perceptions based on skin tone contribute to the way individuals of color are then perpetuated via the media, thus impacting the factors of systemic racism as seen in *Moving the Race Conversation Forward: How the Media Covers Racism and other Barriers to Productive Racial Discourse* by Apollon, D. Keleher, T., Medeiros, J. Ortega, N. Sebastian, J. Sen, R. (2014), where examples are given related to news reports vilifying people of color regards if they are the victims of a crime based on perceived notions of characteristics related to color. The systematic racism which attributes to the ongoing colorism is a result of the "...the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color" (Apollon, 2014, p. 3). By this the progression and upkeep of the concepts of colorism transpire past individual cultures and leak into the mainstream as it becomes more and more common. It becomes part of a whole social structure and frame which is integrated into every aspect of life including the public school system.

Colorism and systematic racism are elements found within public schools. It is seen on several levels as existing not just at one school but throughout the educational system. In order to shift away from colorism and its roots in structural racism it becomes essential to create a non-traditional curriculum components. Cruz (2012) writes in *Making Curriculum from Scratch: Testimonios in an Urban Classroom*, about an alternative to the traditional curriculum guides by exploring the use of testimonies within the English Language Arts classroom as a means to move away from the traditional literary canon while providing students a voice; testimonies serve as a tool for social justice within the classroom as well. Cruz (2012) states that the use of testimony in

the classroom provide students and opportunity to critically examine their own experiences inside and outside of school settings. In relation to colorism, testimonies offer a vessel for students to dig into how colorism affects them as well as how they have observed it, which makes testimonios and ideal genre type for teachers to use within their colorism curriculum creations.

### **Overview**

While colorism may be considered a topic that is gaining more visibility it has a long history and roots within racism and oppression based on hierarchies of power which exist as a means to uphold or maintain a level of privilege for light skinned individuals over their peers or colleagues that possess a different skin tone. Colorism is perpetuated within the media, with cultural teachings, as well as within the microcosms of public schools. These systems enable students to react in ways that encourage the continued pattern while promoting a negative educational space as there is a struggle to gain acceptance and adequate experiences. In order to modify this practice, I argue that it is beneficial to discuss the variants with educational staff, teachers, counselors, etc. in order to encourage more meaningful interactions with students and modify curriculum to include or move away from the colorism/colorist paradigm.

### **Key words/Phrases:**

**Colorism** is an oppression/prejudices/preferential treatment of same race people based solely on skin tone; Writer Alice Walker (1982) is considered to have coined the term.

**Structural Racism** is racial bias among institutions and across society (Apollo et al., 2014)

**Intersectionality** is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) as a theory that asserts people are often disadvantaged by multiples sources of oppression.

**Testimonios/Testimonies** are first person narratives of socially significant experiences where the speaker is considered to be a member of the community as opposed to a traditional hero; it lends itself to solidarity with the reader (Cruz, 2012).

## **Chapter 2**

Colorism is discrimination of people based on skin tone, though related to, not directly consider to be racism. Racism involves discrimination based on race, whereas colorism is based on skin tone regardless of racial identity or background. Often times, it occurs within one's own culture/race. Alice Walker is often credited as being the first person to give colorism its name by defining it in her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* as "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color (Walker, 1983 p. 290-291). Colorism is something that is observed within classroom settings, among teachers, the community, families, in what seems to be several racial groups not just one.

### **Colorism's History within the Americas**

Colorism, while considered to be a concept the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has strong links to colonial times within America. Russell, Wilson, and Hall (2013) write in their book *The Color Complex (Revised): The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium*, the origins of colorism as stemming from hierarchies of privilege among slaves and white European settlers in America during the 1600s. Russell, Wilson, and Hall reference these beginnings of slavery as one that fueled racial divisions which are still relevant today. These divisions included laws that separated people of color from white people and propaganda which create negative representations of people of color and equated their existence with being considered uncivilized and primal (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 2013, p. 15). Racial divisions grew out of these laws and slanderous ideas along with the implementation of slavery and slave labor; in this process, the roots of colorism also took shape. Initially, there was a different approach to viewing lighter skinned individuals as they were

biracial and therefore considered to be intelligent for being part white (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 2013). This distinction leads to a division within the community of slaves. The division was created by differentiating the types of labor each group was subjected to participate. Preferential treatment was given to light skin toned individuals over those of darker skin tones. Domestic labor was considered to be better suited for the light skin individuals as they resembled whiteness and were believed to be intelligent whereas the rigorous, challenging manual labor was considered to be a better fit for dark skin toned individuals (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 2013). This division of people based on skin tone provided barriers and divisions among people of color; it placed those of lighter skin tones at a higher place on the hierarchy and kept the darker toned individuals at a lower standpoint.

The United States was not the only country within the Americas to experience levels of oppression as a result of colonization from White European settlers. According to *Skin-Color Prejudice and Within-Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino/a Populations*. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* by Chavez-Dueñas, N. Adames, H. Organista, K. (2013), the colonizers needed a hierarchy to maintain power over indigenous brown people by labeling them as heathens that required instruction in civilization. This hierarchy transferred over onto the subsequent social structures that followed, which included mixed or biracial individuals (Chavez-Dueñas, N. Adames, H. Organista, K. 2013). In order to eliminate differences among people within the subsocial structures, terminology such as Latino/x/a is used to encompass all the people of Mexico and Latin America. The term takes visibility away from communities of color, thereby removing the need to recognize the varying skin tones and utilize only mainstream European features as a standard. The standard revolves around authority and power. In this way, the visibility of people of color becomes obsolete and

only the visions of whiteness preserver, which contributes to the negative attributes associated with colorism and people of color.

Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, Organista (2013), indicate that there were specific practices of building whiteness among indigenous people by strategically placing fair-skinned women in areas populated by dark-skinned men with the hopes that there would be more light-skinned children to maintain a division among the people. The authors state: “The White elites believed that through interracial breeding they were going to “mejorar la raza” [improve the race] and dilute the African and indigenous characteristics from Latin America (Chavez-Dueñas, N. Adames, H. Organista, K. 2013, p 17).” This provides a background for these types of internalized and cultural notions of fair skin maintaining dominance and perceived as ideal.

### **Current Impacts of Colorism**

While the previous information would suggest that colorism's relation to power and inequities would fall into a past experiences, however recent studies in *Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade's Research on Families of Color* by Burton, L., Bonilla-Silva, E., Ray, V., Buckelew, R., & Freeman, E. (2010), explored connections between race, socioeconomic status (SES), and colorism's impact on family dynamics as well as colorisms implications for future generations in order to demonstrate lasting effects of colorism in all areas of life. Data was collected by interviewing members of various ethnic groups, including Mexican/Latino Americans, African American, Asian Americans and American Indian. Burton et. al, examined how these various groups of families form with consideration to SES, and segregated neighborhoods. There was also a discussion on the presence of whiteness within the above-mentioned groups and its presence in community and family dynamics. The author's

incorporated various other studies into their article in order to provide for background knowledge and information regarding the topics.

It appeared that that focus was to examine the literature produced on the topics of whiteness within non-white communities as well as describe the discrepancies and/or disadvantages related to the absence of whiteness in the family dynamics that relate to levels of opportunities for advancement. One area, in particular, involves the comparison draw out between men in jail that share a racial identity and have similar criminal records. The evidence suggested that men that appeared to look more "African" were given harsher sentences than their lighter skin peers. This then lends itself to the issue of colorism. The conclusion is that the less European/Anglo features an individual possesses cause for the perpetuation of anti-darkness ideologies to be evident in these real-world situations with real consequences.

Additionally, linking still to the effects of colorism in society, the authors explored the creation of families, specifically mixed race or biracial family units and how there were commonalities among families to encourage their children to reproduce with white or light skinned members of their ethnic groups. The desire would then be the production of children with lighter skin tones to provide for more access to resources by society and having a higher level of expectations. Burton et. al, (2010) call out the differences among predominantly low income African American and Latino Communities in comparison to white communities as indicating that the level of access to healthier food options, educational resources, and employment. This leads to questions in regards to colorism and/or race and whether the factors are varied because of systematic oppressors of light and dark skin toned individuals.

While there are prejudices, biases and negative connotations associated with race, colorism adds an additional layer of oppression based on skin tones. In *The Persistent Problem*

*of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality* by Hunter (2007), there is mention of a type of ignorance when it comes to skin tone preferences as it is a concept so ingrained into the culture and way of thinking that it becomes systematic and a norm unless challenged. This is related to the push of European standards. Hunter states that this would include, “The maintenance of white supremacy (aesthetic, ideological, and material) is predicated on the notion that dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority (238).” White supremacy is called out as being linked to colorism as it continues to perpetuate the idea of being light with European features as better or more educated or educable, when discussing school context. This includes parent and staff interactions. Additionally, among the schools observed there was a discrepancy with the students that were pushed into college tracks versus those that were not and a link between the individual student's skins suggested to be a factor in this decision. In this way, the integration of colorism and its link to systemic racism has filtered its way down into the educational landscape.

A view was presented in Hunter's piece that differs from other literature on the topic; it brings up the negative identification concerns of the light skinned members of an ethnic group. The position presented suggests that dark skin members of the group would be considered more authentic than their light skinned counterparts. This would be problematic as those lighter skinned members would be unable to unite with their community and in some way become separate and apart. In some ways, the issue colorism has a larger impact than initially perceived. It also suggests that it is more complex and ultimately a dividing factor within communities. Russel, Wilson and Hall (2013) counter this idea as they documented individuals of lighter skin tones, within university settings, are often more present with regards to unity via activism.

### **Colorism in Education**

To better understand this, it is again necessary to observe the historical background of colorism in schools. As mentioned in a previous section, colorism has strong links to the American past which involve the preferential treatment of light-skinned African Americans over dark skin toned African Americans in regards to the type of labor allotted to each group. Russell, Wilson, and Hall (2013) identify the shift during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century where there was a desire to maintain a level of social acceptance and status within the racially divided hierarchy via the creation of private schools catering to “the lighter skin toned elite of the African American community (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 2013, p. 61).” These schools denied admission to dark skin toned students regardless of academic abilities to maintain a level of power within the community (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 2013) as they began to segregate within the African American neighborhoods. Furthering this examination, the types of education offered to students of color varied based on skin tone as well. Since the schools designated to accept the light skin individuals were tailored to maintaining a level of superiority over dark skin toned individuals, the schools offered more of a fine arts focus whereas the alternative centered towards vocational training for darker skin toned individuals (Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 2013). Colorism enters here with the separation of people based on skin tone and providing different expectation levels of education in order to deny access into certain spaces. Colorism was used as a tool of oppression by denying equal educational access and career opportunities based on skin tone within a community of people of the same racial background. Judgements were made to determine the value of individuals of color and level of intelligence based on skin tone.

Educators are often biased in how they interact with students specifically those of African American descent as well as Mexican or “Hispanic” students of darker complexion. There were assumptions of increases behavioral issues among these students by teachers and negative or low

expectations by counselors and school staff. Based on the data presented via the observations of school culture as it relates to colorism there are pieces that teachers bring into the classroom or school that are common practice based on this idea of white/whiteness is ideal (Monroe, 2013). If nothing else, this supports the concepts of internalized notions of color and race presenting itself within this systemic, institutionalized way.

The ingrained negative notions of intelligence based on skin tone presents a need for educators to develop plans for African American students and/or students of color to promote visibility and authenticity at school. This also includes educators making an effort to support marginalized groups of students. This involves the need to examine the colorism that exists at school sites. Educators may need to make conscious efforts to avoid negative preconceived notions of students with darker skin tones.

Colorism must be examined as a component of institutional, systemic racism. This level of racism occurs within institutions and systems of power including public spaces that allow for white people to have advantages over people of color (Apollon et al., 2014) in regards to colorism it would involve individuals with light skin tones not just white people in general. Systematic racism aids in the creation and maintenance of negative associations with people based on external factors and allows for this to be maintained at a level of oppression. In an educational setting systematic racism plays out as students singled out or inspected more closely in comparison to peers based on the differences of skin tone (Apollon et al., 2014). By understanding or giving a name to colorism, it is necessary to examine how these larger, systemic practices are brought into existence in our personal and professional spheres.

*There is limited research on direct correlations of colorism within the education system. Often the topic surrounds racism within schools, and does not directly address the impact of colorism.*

### **Representation in the classroom**

Colorism involves several elements including strong historical traditions, systemic infrastructures upholding levels of oppression and negative connotations, so then how can educators create a product that attempts to push away from the traditional. Cindy Cruz (2012), offers an alternative mode of creating curriculum that steps away from the traditional in her article titled, *Making Curriculum from Scratch: Testimonio in an Urban Classroom*. Testimonio is presented as a type of writing that allows for marginalized members of a community share their stories; the need for representation of all people can be initiated within the classroom by providing for a "I Listen, You Speak..."(Cruz, 2012, p. 461) approach to discussion on individual circumstances.

### **Summary**

Chapter two presented background information on colorism. Colorism's links to systematic racism, as well as historical presence illustrates the longevity of oppression and oppressive ideologies associated with skin tone. The literature presented demonstrates colorism as being related to a similar source across multiple cultures. The repercussions of colorism transcends over areas of modern life including time spent in the educational system. Students of color, specifically those of darker skin tones. are subjected to becoming marginalized members on campuses. The interactions between staff and students as well as between students creates an environment that does not allow for all students to engage in a learning environment as there is a disconnect. Chapter three will provide a detailed description of the professional development on colorism that can be replicated for use at other school sites.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Introduction:**

Colorism exists within the public education system. When it occurs, it creates isolating effects for students of varying skin tones. This isolated feeling transfers onto the negative

reactions and disparities among students of color especially when the school environment directly attributes to it. In order to better adjust and change this narrative, curriculum must be constructed to combat the systematic racism and marginalization of students so they do not feel disconnected to the content they are learning.

**Design:**

The professional development PowerPoint was created as an introduction for teachers, primarily English teachers, administrators and any other staff that was interested in attending. I utilized several resources to present the topic of colorism and how colorism is present in everyday life through media. The cultural relevance of colorism was also presented to demonstrate that colorism exists outside of just media production. Teachers and staff expressed their experience with colorism by sharing how their appearance or comments others have made about their appearance were centered around skin tone. By opening up the session in this, teachers were able to initiate connections to the content.

Educators were asked to then examine a comic strip and sample lesson on colorism taken from the Teaching Tolerance Toolkit; the sample teacher lesson allowed for teachers to work in small groups and explore colorism and discuss. Teachers were asked to develop questions or ideas about how to adapt the lesson on colorism for their students as well as what additional sources could be used for the next meeting. Colorism sample curriculum was developed with additional lessons and activities for students. Each group created a sample lesson to discuss colorism. The end result of the mini unit on colorism incorporated the testimonios (Cruz, 2012) discussed as a culminating task on colorism for students to demonstrate their understanding and share on a person or inspired experience.

**Intended Audience**

The purpose of this professional development and curriculum development is to facilitate an engaging and inclusive school environment for students by providing visibility. To do this, the desired audience would be school personnel. In this case, it consisted of middle school English teachers however it may be conducted among school staff and in interdisciplinary teams so as to build on additional curriculum components to focus on school inclusion. There was ease in presenting content to English teachers as the colorism and desire to explore the topic linked to various pieces of literature already embedded in the curriculum. The literature varied by grade level and teacher preference.

School administration was invited to engage in professional development in order to be aware of the desired shifts in school culture. Administration support was an ideal component to ensure adequate time for each area of the professional development and ultimately the end result. Administration was asked to join in one session each and be an active member of a designated group including a contributing member of the curriculum design component. Due to time constraints however administration was not able to adequately devote as much time as requested.

Overall, response from both groups varied. Initially, it drew attention as the topic was diverse. Colorism was perceived as an abstract that would be used to help student exposure to varying literature however when the time frame given did not prove to be sufficient there was some resistance from one or two members in the group.

### **Instruments**

In order to reach an audience, it was necessary to create PowerPoints with embedded social media references and videos to avoid lapses in engagement. This also offered support to different learners' experiences among teachers. The direct articles were provided though many

were also given summaries to help with timing. Additional sources were pulled from online sources including those of the Teaching Tolerance Toolkit.

Current curriculum resources were also pulled upon to help build colorism focal points in literature to use with students. These included excerpts from various authors. The piece from Cruz was also examined as being an anchor for the need to construct curriculum that places students at the center and allows for students to share their stories. Rubrics were discussed however none were created as a whole group.

### **Procedures and Evaluation process**

As colorism was observed within the middle school setting, it was necessary to construct professional developments to educate teachers on colorism's impact on individuals. This included familiarizing staff with terminology, observing examples of colorism, and being exposed to how it is seen within schools, as well as colorism's impact on students. Teachers were asked to pull from personal examples or experiences in which colorism may have occurred to help add to the conversation and further discussion on colorism. To help the process it was necessary to pull from mainstream media sources including images of artist from popular culture such as Beyoncé; YouTube videos were also used to provide examples and definitions for colorism via the online content creators of Mitu, a media component of BuzzFeed. The videos were selected as they were informal and provided everyday examples that help to explain colorism.

Once colorism was presented in this way, it was necessary to bring in an article from someone with firsthand experience in schools both as a student of color and as an educator of color. For this, a nonfiction article was pulled from the teaching tolerance toolkit. The article written by Sarah Webb, *Recognizing and Addressing Colorism in Schools (2015)*, presented

information on how colorism was apparent at a predominately African American high school in Louisiana. Webb cites from students comments such as “I’m ashamed because I got dark over the summer,” “I wish I was light-skinned like my mother” and “I don’t like dark-skinned people until I get to know them. Then I might like them” within her article to demonstrate the way skin tone affected the way students interacted with one another as well as how they perceived themselves. Teachers were able to identify how colorism occurs in public schools as well as how Webb, a teacher, handled it. This article gave teachers a starting point to create their own lessons around colorism.

Following the introductory dive into colorism, the literature was examined as a means to add value to the issue of colorism as a legitimate phenomenon. The relationship between colorism and systematic racism was a sensitive correlation as it is done to push teachers into viewing their own biases as a contributing factor to the school condition. The goal for the first day or portion of the professional development on colorism included the above mentioned material with an ending or reflection component in which teachers/staff participants are asked to anonymously consider real world application of the colorism ideas and a quick note on how to facilitate change starting in the middle school level.

The subsequent meeting following the first session of the professional development involved the brief review prior reflections on colorism. This opened the discussion for how to move forward with constructing lessons that help to examine colorism in a students centered manor. The first set of resources examined include the teaching tolerance toolkit on colorism which offers a short comic strip explaining colorism from the scope of a graphic designer. This resource offered guiding questions to examine. In order to help facilitate the professional

development participants were divided up into small groups. The groups were given specific questions relevant to the comic that were provided. These questions are as followed:

Essential Question

- How do colorism and color privilege affect my students' perceptions of themselves and others?

Thinking Questions

- Which characters and skin colors/complexions are being questioned?
- How do skin colors and race affect the meaning of the stories told in the frames?
- What might the race of characters in a story tell us about power and privilege? About bias and beauty?

(Toolkit for "What's colorism?" 2015)

These questions served as a tool for facilitating discussions among staff. The staff was assigned to subgroups in order to discuss the questions along with a sample of the comic strip that goes along with it. Each group reported back to discuss their answers and share additional thoughts. The staff was able to explore how colorism was present in a different media source and reflect on how perceptions shift based on color. It was also a way for self-reflection which created a check of personal biases. Staff explored how colorism was prevalent in the comic book industry as the sample from teaching tolerance was created from the perspective of a comic book illustrator.

Overall the staff was able to draw conclusions surrounding colorism and its relevance to the school environment. This allowed for a transition opportunity as a closing activity, staff was asked to generate brief ideas that would be returned to in the next session to explore teaching the topic to students. One suggestion from this was to embed similar activity for students as an opener for students however there was a need to change the type of comic used due to some of the graphics being too mature for middle school students. The remainder of the second session involved staff identifying additional pieces to include in their own curriculum development to support the day three planning session. Teachers engaged in these activities in small groups by first examining the lesson activity then following the step by step procedures for it. Teachers

then determined the validity or usefulness of the resource and whether or not to include it or add suggestions for modifications.

Day three involved a reflection of previous sessions. The reflection involved sharing out about one of the selected sources to be adapted or any thoughts on all the material and content shared. Teacher worked in teams to synthesize the knowledge acquired and demonstrate a level of understanding about colorism by producing curriculum for it.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this professional development is to educate teachers at my school about colorism. The professional development is also about sharing literature on how colorism has roots in racist practices which can translate over onto biased perceptions of students leading to negative interactions. Ultimately, it is about teachers having a realization about their own practice or the practices of others that allow for colorism to be present at the school.

### **Chapter 4: Project Presentation**

The purpose of this project is to create a professional development centered around colorism to educate teachers on colorism's presence on school campuses, in the real-world and build a toolkit to teach colorism within the classroom. The end result of the professional development is that teacher's created lessons centered around colorism with a writing piece component to serve as a finished product. consists of a sample lesson centered around student voice and advocating for inclusion of students with varying skin tones. During this three day professional development, teachers defined colorism, identified instances of colorism in the real-world, faced the reality of colorism within the middle school, participate in the Teaching Tolerance Toolkit on colorism, and then adapted material to serve students. Teachers were able to build background knowledge on colorism by examining excerpts of the literature about

colorism to then develop their lessons to combat colorism in the classroom and on school grounds.

### **Professional Development**

The following presentation was used to help facilitate a three day professional development around colorism. It presents colorism through a contemporary multimedia video and the image of a pop culture figure; the anticipated responses include positive remarks towards the light skin toned image as it portrays a specific level of beauty standard. The video and the image were used as a tool to open up the discourse around colorism and how it is present in the media; this opener offered participants a time to share instance of colorism, that they have witnessed or been a part of, to build on a concise understanding that will be used throughout the professional development. After front loading information on colorism, it was necessary to expose the staff to the literature behind colorism to demonstrate the historical significance of colorism and colorism's links to racism. The slides depict a few of the sources to condense the content in order to be mindful of time, prevent redundancy and maintain active participation. In order to monitor engagement, there were several checkpoints embedded within the first day's powerpoint and organizer. These points allow for the facilitator to check in with the audience at the describe and analyze portion to bring the audience into the fold and discussion around colorism.

Additional checkpoints were located at the interpretation point, literature portion, and conclusion. These steps were sequenced in this way to help with pacing and to offer opportunities for reflections. It was necessary to incorporate these points to share out ideas, thoughts, opinions and flush out possible interpretations since the way to help dismantle systems of oppression is to actively move away from it by first engaging in discourse. I felt it was

necessary to have the opening in this way so it is less formal and a low stakes series of activities maintain teacher engagement.

Day two of the professional development was created as more of an interactive component. This section offers teachers a set of focused teaching tools for creating curriculum on colorism. There are article choices from the Teaching Tolerance resource written from a teacher's perspective and graphic artist perspective that provide additional information on how colorism is present in schools and the real-world. Teachers are asked to read the articles, follow the short guide, and participate in the article/lesson activities presented in the articles. In groups or teams, the teachers decide how they may be able to use it in their curriculum creation. The teams are expected to modify material to ensure it is age appropriate.

Aside from the Teaching Tolerance samples lessons and articles, there are additional resources provided to teacher teams a variety of tools to bring into their curriculum building. If teachers feel the provided sources are insufficient, then they are able to pull from additional sources during day three. By the end of day two there should be at least two resources selected from the designated list.

Day three can be viewed as a planning session. It should open up first by a jigsaw activity requiring teacher teams to segment portions of *Making Curriculum from Scratch: Testimonio in an Urban Classroom* (Cruz, 2012) in order to set up the planning sessions with the focus of purpose and end result for students being a testimonio. The teams will read through their portions, annotate key details and discuss the points with their teams. Teams will be asked to utilize the organizer to respond to the following prompt:

- *As a team, discuss how can we apply testimonios to our colorism curriculum?  
How might this fit?*

Following the reading, discussion and response, teams will share out responses. The sharing out serves as a reinforcement of ideas and a checkpoint to ensure all teams are on the same page; the focus being the need to construct curriculum that offers students an opportunity to share their experiences with colorism.

The allotted time provides for teacher teams to build off of prior days knowledge acquisition, pull from the resources selected, search for additional sources or tools to bring into the classroom, and develop subsequent lessons using literature. Teams may utilize the core curriculum in place within the school for a smooth transition. Additionally, teams will be asked to follow the quick checklist to synthesize their knowledge of colorism to build brief the curriculum. At the end of the session, each person will be asked to reflect on their progress in creating curriculum around colorism and testimonios. Participants are also asked to indicate their confidence level, provide reasons and ask for what additional support they may need to be successful. It is advised that facilitator make it a point to answer questions and further build supports based on the feedback.

**Slides** *(may be modified to fit school needs)*: [Professional Development Colorism 3 Days](#)

**Sample Guide for Professional Development**

**Colorism**

By: Salena Lewis  
CSUSM Summer 2019  
Culminating Project  
Professional Development

**Do Now:**

Examine the two images to the right.

First, examine the differences. Second, list the differences. Third, make a choice as to which image you prefer.



**Share out**

Image 1 Image 2



**Think time**

Take about 3 minutes to reflect and construct a few sentences on colorism. Be prepared to share out.

Colorism

**Definition:**

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Share Out

**Colorism**

It is a type of discrimination based on skin tone that is not necessarily directly related to race as it often occurs among members of the same race.

This is a topic that I recently became aware of as being a part of how we are conditioned into viewing members of our communities.

I was curious to see how it is present in the educational setting (middle school) in relation to how teachers interact with students and how students interact with one another through this lens of colorism.

**Campus Connection**

How are these ideas viewed on campus? How have you observed these in the outside world?

Share Out

**Demographic of our school:**

<p><b>Students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hispanic/Latino 492</li> <li>• Asian: 176</li> <li>• African American: 7</li> <li>• American Indian 1</li> <li>• Filipino 2</li> <li>• Pacific Islander 1</li> <li>• Two or more races 4</li> <li>• White 5</li> </ul>	<p><b>Teachers/Paraprofessionals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hispanic/Latino 42</li> <li>• Asian 9</li> <li>• African American 3</li> <li>• Filipino 1</li> <li>• Two or more races 1</li> <li>• White 5</li> </ul>
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**Describe:**

Within the hallways of our Middle School, there are plenty of opportunities for kids to say and do things that they would not do in the classroom. A few instances have occurred that involved the phrase "It's because I'm black..." or "ew, she's so dark." This includes phrases like "yeah whatever you're chocolate" or "Oh my god you don't even look Mexican. Like you look white." I have even heard one or two "Oh my god, she's so light so looks real pretty."

These types of comments and distinctions or judgements based on skin tone did not occur solely among students. There were instances in which teachers, behind closed doors, made similar remarks.

<sup>4</sup> Note: Image of Beyonce retrieved from Colorism/ Intro-racial: The Race Wars within the African Community. (2014, April 09). Retrieved from <https://sashapratt33.wordpress.com/2014/04/08/colorism-the-race-wars-within-the-african-community/> Left side of image is from a L'oreal Advertisement while the right side is from Getty Images.

<sup>5</sup> Note: Video retrieved from Mitú, W. A. (2017, March 12). Why Are Novelas So White? | The Kat Call | mitú. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tV\\_10CdkvSI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tV_10CdkvSI)

# Colorism's Presence Within a Public School 33

## Describe

I have been in classrooms where teachers refer to students with the same name as either being the dark one or the light one. Unfortunately I have even heard other teachers make comments about student's body odor being related to skin tone.

In another instance, while standing at my classroom door in between periods, I have noticed our school's white dean, patrol and single out students that are either African American or brown skin Latinos. It seemed as though there was an increase in "checking in" with these students.

13

## Share Out

14

## Analyze:

I noticed that students were aware of their differences in skin tone. Also, that there was a level of assumption around dark skin tones/black being a negative as students would state, "it's because I'm black" in response to being picked on or made fun of by peers. This was done by brown skin students in response to their light skin peers both being either Mexican or Central Americans.

The interactions among students and peers that centered around appearance involved the mention of skin color as a symbol for being pretty. This was interesting as it seemed to still have an impact on peer relationships within the school among female students whereas the above experience connected to males.

15

## Analyze:

It also appeared as though this similar assumption was made by members of staff that did not identify as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. There seemed to be a different layer to the interaction with staff as skin tone is being used as an identification marker, but also in how it impacts the level of interactions. As in the case with the student and body odor, the teacher constantly singled him out (African American male student) in a room full of other teenage boys after gym class for being unhygienic. To be clear, she asked the student to step outside before directly addressing the issue.

16

Write 1 comment AND 1 question you have at this point. *Be ready to share out.*

17

## Interpret +

18

## Interpretation:

How would you interpret the examples presented? Either from your own listing or from the examples presented. How might these examples justify examining colorism as it exist in school? *Be ready to share with table partner.*



19

## Share Out

20

## Interpret:

It became apparent that students were hyper aware of their own skin tone and it reflected onto the way students interacted with one another as well as how staff members approached and interacted with the students.

21

## Background

22

## Apollon, D. Keleher, T. Medeiros, J. Ortega, N. Sebastian, J. Sen, R. (2014). Moving the Race Conversation Forward. HOW THE MEDIA COVERS RACISM, AND OTHER BARRIERS TO PRODUCTIVE RACIAL DISCOURSE

- Defines the different components of racism and how it is viewed in the media.
- Takes into account events that occur in which people of color are made to be violent and white people are victimized or perceived as justified in their actions
- This also includes allowing for white/light skin toned individuals more space for privileges; it is acceptable to brush off instances of racism when it appears as an individual however fails to recognize the systems in place for allowing it to continue
- Provides recommendations for changing these behaviors

23

## Apollon, D. Keleher, T. Medeiros, J. Ortega, N. Sebastian, J. Sen, R. (2014). Moving the Race Conversation Forward. HOW THE MEDIA COVERS RACISM, AND OTHER BARRIERS TO PRODUCTIVE RACIAL DISCOURSE



24

Chavez-Ducenas, N., Adames, H., Organista, K. (2013). Skin-Color Prejudice and Within-Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino-a Populations. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, Vol 36, Issue 1, pp. 3 - 26.

Examines the hierarchy embedded in Mexico/Latin America that was initiated by colonizers as a means to withhold power from indigenous people; hierarchy involves white elite with more direct Spanish blood AND European features at the top with Afro-Latinos, Mestizos, etc in the middle and at the bottom direct indigenous blood and brown skin tones.

- ◆ "The White elites believed that through interracial breeding they were going to "mejorar la raza" [improve the race] and dilute the African and indigenous characteristics from Latin America."

25

Chavez-Ducenas, N., Adames, H., Organista, K. (2013). Skin-Color Prejudice and Within-Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino-a Populations. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, Vol 36, Issue 1, pp. 3 - 26.

Creates conflict and issues of discrimination among Mexican/Latino communities based on color. Those considered to be closer to indigenous have less credibility whereas light skin peers seen as reliable and trustworthy.

This type of discrimination of color lends itself to observing the ways in which students from similar backgrounds interact with one another. There are instances where students treat one another differently and it can be observed among students with different skin tones. Similarly, it can be apparent in how teachers interact or perceive students.

26

Hunter, M. (2007). The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality. *Sociology Compass*, 237-254.

- Hunter explained in detail the concepts of colorism and identified areas of difficulty for all members of the group.
- Hunter provides exemplars in the article about how these dynamics are forged and maintained.
- The maintenance of white supremacy links to colorism and oppression of people of color. In both instances white or lighter skin is viewed as the ideal.
  - ◆ "Lighter-skinned people of color enjoy substantial privileges that are still unsustainable to their darker-skinned brothers and sisters"
- ★ This piece seems to be one that develops the concept of colorism. It defines it, provides discourse to be carried on in this conversation as to how to change the status quo.

27

Monroe, C. (2013). Colorizing Educational Research: African American Life and Schooling as an Exemplar. *Educational Researcher*, 42(1), 9-19.

- Direct connections to educational outcomes that are pushed on light skinned ethnic group versus the dark toned equal.
- Informs educators have been so conditioned in colorism that it requires conscious efforts to reflect and alter interactions with students.
  - ◆ Increases in negative behavioral outcomes due to negative ideas about the students with darker skin tones. Based on the information presented, students with lighter complexion were less likely to be seen as negative or difficult members.
  - ◆ Specific groups learn about college; counselors push students that may not succeed.

28

Monroe, C. (2013). Colorizing Educational Research: African American Life and Schooling as an Exemplar. *Educational Researcher*, 42(1), 9-19.

- There is a need for visibility in schools that service multicultural student population. This is suggested to have positive impacts on students as they will be able to self identify and feel related.
- ★ In order to push back from colorism as educators it is necessary to be aware of these ideals circulating among communities and it is necessary to plan out how students treat one another.

29

**Conclusion**  
How can we teach students about colorism?

30

### Professional Development Day 1

**Do Now:** Examine the two images presented on the first slide.  
What differences do you see? List the differences.

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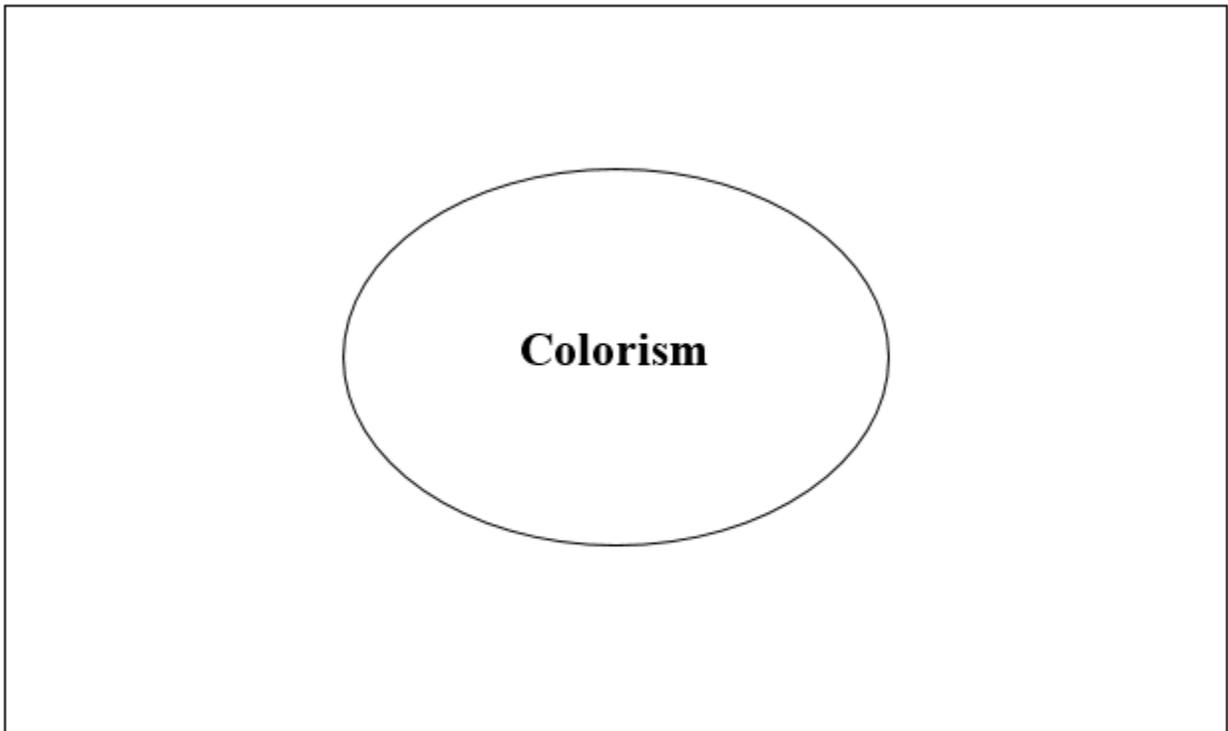
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Based on the images and differences decide which image you prefer.  
Why?

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**Goals:** *The purpose of this professional development is to bring awareness to the issue of colorism as it exists outside of the school setting AND the ways it is present within our school. We will define colorism, make connections, explore Teaching Tolerance Toolkit resources, and generate ideas on how to adapt the resources into our classrooms.*



**Definition:**

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**Mitu Video: Colorism**

Thoughts? What stands out to you? Anything reminiscent?

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**Campus Connections:**

How are these ideas viewed on campus? How have you observed these in the outside world?

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**Describe and Analyze: Add any remarks/examples/ experience you would like to share.**

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**Write 1 comment AND 1 question you have at this point. *Be ready to share out.***

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**Interpretation:** How would you interpret the examples presented? Either from your own listing or from the examples presented. How might these examples justify examining colorism as it exist in school? *Be ready to share with table partner.*

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**Background:** Add *at least* one note for each section as we review the literature. *Full text available upon request.*

**Systematic Racism:**

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**Historical Significance:**

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**Colorism in the Education:**

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**Conclusion? How can we teach students about colorism?**

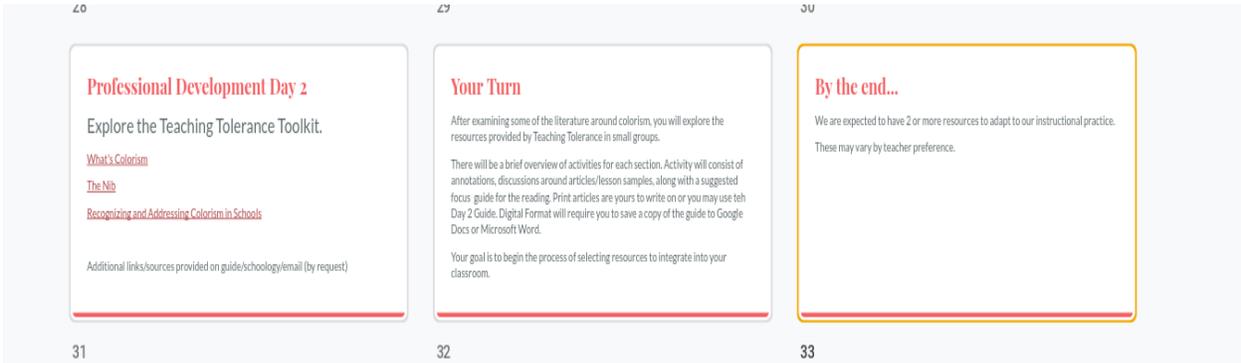
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**Professional Development Day 2: Observing Teaching Tolerance Resources for Colorism**



Resources	Activity	Designated space for quick notes/Questions/Comments
<p><i>Links to digital copies in blue</i></p> <p>Article “What’s Colorism?” by David Knight <a href="#">What's Colorism Link</a></p>	<p>Depending on the size of the audience activities 1 and 2 may be done as a “jigsaw”</p> <p>In groups of 2-3 teachers read article and annotate any significant points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pull out examples</li> <li>● Implications on teenage identity</li> <li>● Reasons colorism matters</li> <li>● Suggestions?</li> </ul>	
<p>Article “<a href="#">Recognizing Colorism in School</a>” by Sarah Webb</p>	<p>In groups of 2-3 teachers read article and annotate any significant points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pull out examples</li> <li>● Impact on students</li> <li>● Recognizing in schools (<i>any similarities?</i>)</li> <li>● Suggestions?</li> </ul>	
<p>Teaching Tolerance Toolkit <a href="#">Toolkit Online Link</a> Essential Question 1. How do colorism and color</p>	<p>Whole group:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read overview</li> <li>2. Discuss essential question (<i>what is it</i></li> </ol>	

<p><b>Resources</b></p> <p><i>Links to digital copies in blue</i></p>	<p><b>Activity</b></p> <p><i>Depending on the size of the audience activities 1 and 2 may be done as a "jigsaw"</i></p>	<p><b>Designated space for quick notes/Questions/Comments</b></p>
<p>privilege affect my students' perceptions of themselves and others?</p> <p><a href="#">Graphic Essay related to colorism on The Nib</a> (To be used as a model as content may not be age appropriate for middle school students)</p>	<p><i>asking?)</i></p> <p>In small groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Examine graphic essay (<i>thinking of essential question</i>)</li> <li>4. Respond to essential question using acquired knowledge/support from articles</li> </ol> <p>Independent:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. How can this be used in middle school classroom? How can we modify it to fit?</li> </ol>	
<p>Sample lesson resource</p> <p><a href="#">Lesson- Looking Closely at Ourselves</a></p>	<p>In teams,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● how can this be adapted to our classrooms?</li> <li>● Which areas can be modified or how can we successfully implement?</li> </ul>	
<p>Additional online resources</p> <p><a href="#">Colorism Healing</a></p> <p><a href="#">Thought Co, What is Colorism</a></p> <p><a href="#">What Hollywood Is Getting Right and Wrong about Colorism</a></p> <p><a href="#">Huffpost colorism</a></p> <p><a href="#">Bitter Brown Femmes Podcast</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Available for you to view at your leisure</li> <li>● Inquire for paper copies or email for direct links</li> </ul>	

Resources	Activity	Designated space for quick notes/Questions/Comments
<p>Links to digital copies in blue</p> <p><a href="#">Nalgonia Positivity Pride</a></p> <p><a href="#">Yesika Salgado "Brown Girl"</a></p>	<p>Depending on the size of the audience activities 1 and 2 may be done as a "jigsaw"</p>	

**Professional Development Day 3: Creating Curriculum Focus on Colorism and Student Voice**

*Note: this session may be on-going based on school/teacher/student needs)*

**Goal:** *The purpose of day 3 is to offer teachers planning time in order to utilize day 2 resources and create 1 (or more) lesson(s) around students' sharing their experience with colorism. The end result being testimonios in which students offer their own stories to build community.*

**Backwards Planning Focus/Desired end result:** Students construct a testimonio/testimony, either personal or observational, to demonstrate understanding of colorism and to help build community in the classroom. *(How can we reach this goal?)*

First, in our teams, jigsaw the article on *Testimonios* (see Appendix). Highlight relevant areas relating to curriculum.

As a team, discuss how can we apply testimonios to our colorism curriculum? How might this fit?

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*Checklist:*

- Identify which resource(s) you/your team would like to use
  - Sample lesson: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Article(s): \_\_\_\_\_,
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Multimedia: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Identify literature choice from unit or additional of your choice
  - Title and author: \_\_\_\_\_
- Connections to resources
  - How will you connect your literature choice to the resources you selected?
  
- Testimonios as a genre
  - Cruz, C. (2012, 07). Making Curriculum from Scratch: Testimonio in an Urban Classroom. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(3), 460-471.
  
- Constructing Testimonios
- Showcase?
  - Gallery walk?
  - Classroom only?
  - School?
  - Online Blog?

**Summary**

The professional development was created to inform teachers and school staff about colorism and the areas of concern that can arise from colorism. Colorism exists in the way students interact, staff interacts, and the way the two interact with one another. By presenting the issue of colorism to teachers and staff as a professional development spent over three days, teachers were able to participate in meaningful discourse and common plannings. Teachers were able to examine the literature and explore the found components to make rational decisions on

curriculum choices. Ultimately, this tool was created to support teachers in planning social justice curriculum to help build up the school community.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Introduction:**

The purpose of this professional development was to educate middle school staff on colorism as it is observed inside and outside of the educational setting. I have observed colorism occur at my school site over the past few years. Colorism was carried out by students that appeared to be hypersensitive towards their skin tone, the skin tone of others and the negative or positive attributes associated with skin tone. Colorism was also evident in the interactions between teachers, support staff and students; colorism was also evident in the way adults talked about students. The distinctions based on skin tone among students and staff negatively impacts students as there is a disconnect to the curriculum. In order to move past colorism, staff required professional development around colorism to develop understandings of colorism, identify instances of perpetuating or upholding colorism, to then work towards providing that awareness to students.

### **Lessons Learned:**

In this process, I have gained several insights into the construction of professional developments while building on my own understandings of colorism. The research and literature surrounding colorism indicated that while colorism has built momentum over recent years, colorism has been present since the beginning of colonization across cultures. Through my findings I came to the conclusion that while colorism is a part of the human experience, colorism is rarely discussed in the educational setting. The research involving colorism is more associated with race and racism in education rather than the impacts or effects of colorism.

In regards to creating the professional development, several of my colleagues became uncomfortable with discussing colorism and were almost resistant to participate due to colorism involving personal biases or cultural ideas. While I feel colorism is a relevant topic to discuss in education, it may not always be received well and perhaps considering the audience more carefully would have helped the professional development run a little smoother. Additionally, a take away from this experience would be to provide more of a detailed model or expectation with the lesson component and spend more time discussing the desired outcome.

**Recommendations for Implementation:**

This professional development would be useful for a school site interested in adopting social justice driven curriculum. The professional development was created with the purpose of providing resources to teachers including lesson samples, literature and discourse centered around colorism as a means to promote positive learning environments. Day one consists of openers to colorism to build knowledge and offer examples. The desire is that it serves as an introduction to the topic with low stakes demand from the audience; the focus should be identifying colorism in and outside of schools, building knowledge and open up a dialogue with staff. The day one material offers checkpoints for understanding throughout the presentation to build stamina and maintain interest; it is common for some members in the audience to check out of the presentation, so by segmenting portions and offering opportunities for the audience to be involved helps combat fatigue. The professional development can be viewed as a lesson cycle within classrooms and can benefit from positive management strategies as well i.e., positive reward systems.

Day two offers a model for teaching colorism in the classroom. The resources have been gathered for participants to examine, read through, and then complete either what the lesson

sample activity explicitly asks or by completing the miniature guide provided. The teachers or audience are separated into grade level teams however content teams or interdisciplinary may be utilized to vary groupings. The facilitator should introduce each article and briefly explain the activities. The amount of time spent will vary by the size and pacing of the groups. At the end of this day, teachers should have their selections to bring into the classroom and reflect on the process. I suggest utilizing a quick post-it note response per participant with one to two final thoughts. Day two is set up in this way to offer teachers an opportunity to be the student and go through the steps in a similar model to support instructional delivery.

Day three is designed to be more participant led. Teachers will reflect on the material presented over the two previous days and return to their selected activities. Teachers will then, in teams, build their instructional curriculum with the added resource on testimonios (Cruz, 2012). Teachers are provided the focus or desired end result to then weave together their own colorism lessons. Based on teacher experience, it would be beneficial to bring in additional planning tools like graphic organizers for unit plans, lesson plans, and pacing plans in either digital or print copies. During this process, teacher stamina may run low, so scheduling breaks throughout the session schedule and providing positive reinforcements such as those in a classroom setting may help maintain momentum. An accountability component should be added as well to monitor progression and possibly plan subsequent sessions if needed.

**Limitations:**

The process of completing this professional development allowed for realizations on the lack of literature there is around colorism in education. There are topics that relate to colorism including the historical significance, institutional and systemic racism and educational gaps that are more evident in specific demographics than others but they are limited in explicitly calling

out colorism among teachers and students. Further research conducted over several months or years exploring interactions based on skin tone across multiple educational settings is needed.

The pacing of the professional development was not as effective as anticipated due to time constraints. The gaps in between sessions prevented the sequence from flowing appropriately; recall was a challenge despite utilizing the prior sessions handout and brief reviews at the beginning of the sessions. If there were more days allotted to complete and further monitoring of lessons within the classrooms throughout one or two school years make a difference on the time spent and allow for further exploration and curriculum development.

Another limitation presented itself in the form of several educators expressing resistance to being active participants in the sessions. This resistance limited their completion of tasks and overall engagement. Part of this resistance was from, what appeared to be, an uneasiness around the content. The hesitation to identify colorism in school presented a shift in the responses received throughout the sessions. This made it difficult to maintain by in from staff especially on the third day when it was time to synthesize the material. However, the use of positive reinforcements and tone setting for day three did make a slight difference.

There were also limitations with the staff effectively accessing materials as their skill sets were different. This required for differentiation within the small groupings and throughout the professional development. The time spent making in time accommodations and brief reteaching or rephrasing prevented for additional time spent completing portions in other areas. There were hard copies and digital copies to help in this process, but not all participants were able to access some of the multimedia resources.

**Future Educational Implications:**

The literature around colorism indicates that it is a systematic, generational practice used to demonstrate a hierarchy placing those of light skin tone as being higher than dark skin toned individuals. Colorism is observed across cultures and creates problematic environments, so why then is there such a limited number of research done on colorisms implications in education? Colorism needs to be explored or observed further in multiple settings relating to schools and tracked to observe negative and positive consequences. I feel once the topic has been explored further there can be better ways to construct social justice driven curriculum to adequately support all students. Through continued study and evaluation school environments can become areas for change.

**Conclusion:**

The purpose of this professional development was to educate staff on colorism, explore content that has been created to teach colorism awareness in schools, and then to synthesize the components to create a guide for teaching colorism awareness to students. The desired end result involved creating an environment of inclusion for all students and a deconstruction of colorism for staff, so as to engage in positive exchanges with students and colleagues separate from skin tone distinctions; this is a result that will take additional time after the professional development cycle has ended to build within the school. The professional develop offers literature resources, teaching resources, a model of the presentation that can be adapted to various other schools, and suggestions for modifications.

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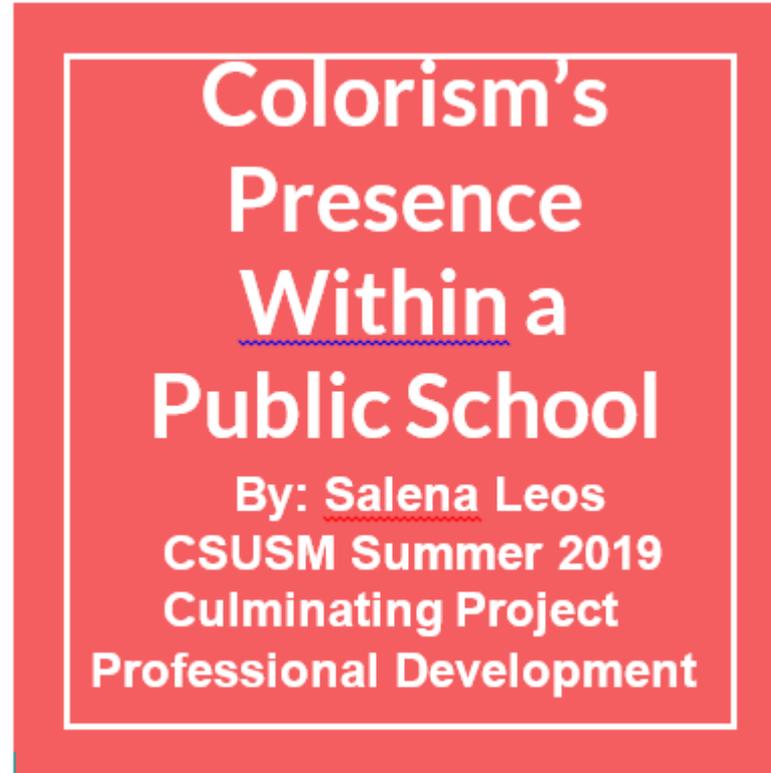
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**Appendix: Powerpoint Slides**



# Do Now:

Examine the two images to the right.

First, examine the differences. Second, list the differences. Third, make a choice as to which image you prefer.



# Share out

Image 1

Image 2

# Colorism

YouTube

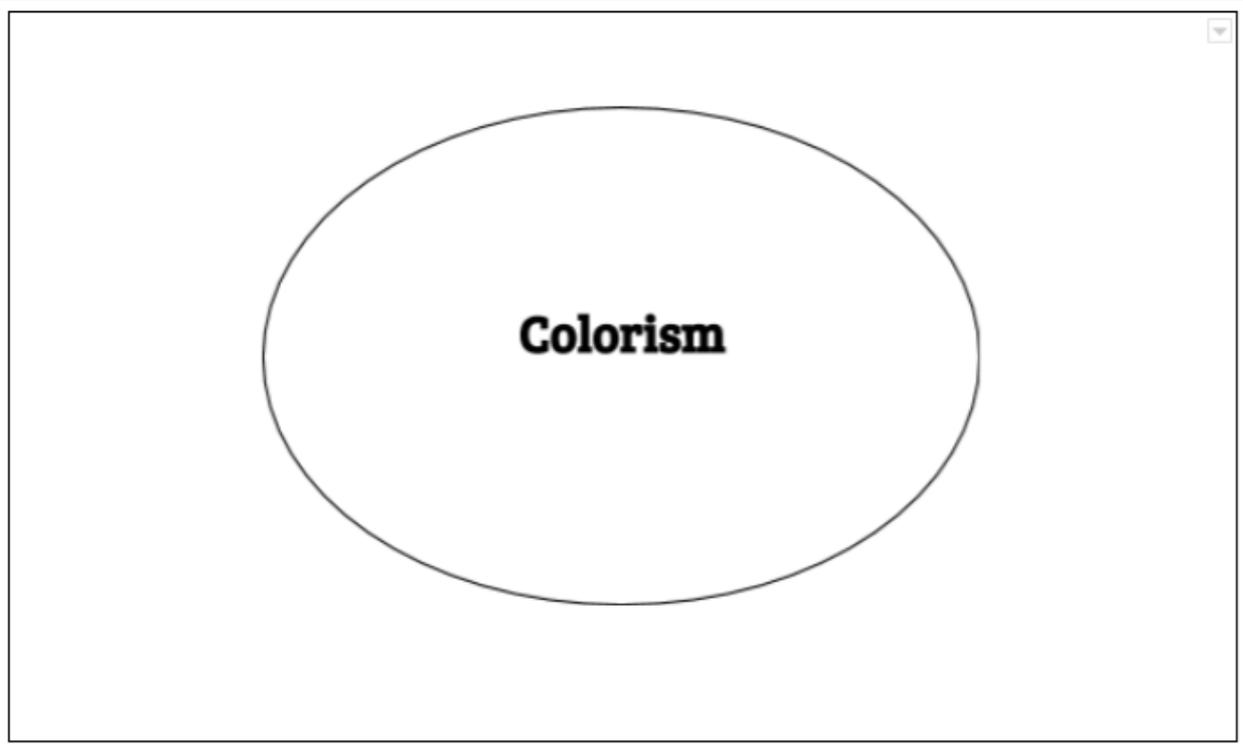
([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tV\\_10CdkvSI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tV_10CdkvSI))



Think time

Take about 3 minutes to reflect and construct a few sentences on colorism.

Be prepared to share out.



**Colorism**

**Definition:**

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Share Out

# Colorism

It is a type of discrimination based on skin tone that is not necessarily directly related to race as it often occurs among members of the same race.

This is a topic that I recently became aware of as being a part of how we are conditioned into viewing members of our communities.

I was curious to see how it is present in the educational setting (middle school) in relation to how teachers interact with students and how students interact with one another through this lense of colorism.

# Campus Connection

How are these ideas viewed on campus? How have you observed these in the outside world?

Share Out

# Demographic of our school:

## Students:

- Hispanic/latino 492
- Asian: 176
- African American: 7
- American Indian 1
- Filipino 2
- Pacific Islander 1
- Two or more races 4
- White 5

## Teachers/Paraprofessionals:

- Hispanic/Latino 42
- Asian 9
- African American 3
- Filipino 1
- Two or more races 1
- White 5

# Describe:

Within the hallways of our Middle School, there are plenty of opportunities for kids to say and do things that they would not do in the classroom. A few instances have occurred that involved the phrase “It’s because I’m black...” or “ew, she’s so dark.” This includes phrases like “yeah whatever you’re chocolate” or “Oh my god you don’t even look Mexican. Like you look white.” I have even heard one or two “Oh my god, she’s so light so looks real pretty.”

These types of comments and distinctions or judgements based on skin tone did not occur solely among students. There were instances in which teachers, behind closed doors, made similar remarks.

# Describe

I have been in classrooms where teachers refer to students with the same name as either being the dark one or the light one. Unfortunately I have even heard other teachers make comments about student's body odor being related to skin tone.

In another instance, while standing at my classroom door in between periods, I have noticed our school's white dean, patrol and single out students that are either African American or brown skin Latinos. It seemed as though there was an increase in "checking in" with these students.

Share Out

# Analyze:

I noticed that students were aware of their differences in skin tone. Also, that there was a level of assumption around dark skin tones/black being a negative as students would state, “it’s because I’m black” in response to being picked on or made fun of by peers. This was done by brown skin students in response to their light skin peers both being either Mexican or Central American.

The interactions among students and peers that centered around appearance involved the mention of skin color as a symbol for being pretty. This was interesting as it seemed to still have an impact on peer relationships within the school among female students whereas the above experience connected to males.

# Analyze:

It also appeared as though this similar assumption was made by members of staff that did not identify as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. There seemed to be a different layer to the interaction with staff as skin tone is being used as an identification marker, but also in how it impacts the level of interactions. As in the case with the student and body odor, the teacher constantly singled him out (African American male student) in a room full of other teenage boys after gym class for being unhygienic. To be clear, she asked the student to step outside before directly addressing the issue.

Write 1 comment AND 1  
question you have at this  
point. *Be ready to share out.*

Interpret +

# Interpretation:

How would you interpret the examples presented? Either from your own listing or from the examples presented. How might these examples justify examining colorism as it exist in school? *Be ready to share with table partner.*



Share Out

# Interpret:

It became apparent that students were hyper aware of their own skin tone and it reflected onto the way students interacted with one another as well as how staff members approached and interacted with the students.

Background

**Apollon, D. Keleher, T., Medeiros, J. Ortega, N. Sebastian, J. Sen, R. (2014). Moving the Race Conversation Forward. HOW THE MEDIA COVERS RACISM, AND OTHER BARRIERS TO PRODUCTIVE RACIAL DISCOURSE**

- Defines the different components of racism and how it is viewed in the media.
- Takes into account events that occur in which people of color are made to be violent and white people are victimized or perceived as justified in their actions
- This also includes allowing for white/light skin toned individuals more space for privileges; it is acceptable to brush off instances of racism when it appears as an individual however fails to recognize the systems in place for allowing it to continue
- Provides recommendations for changing these behaviors

# Apollon, D. Keleher, T., Medeiros, J. Ortega, N. Sebastian, J. Sen, R. (2014). Moving the Race Conversation Forward. HOW THE MEDIA COVERS RACISM, AND OTHER BARRIERS TO PRODUCTIVE RACIAL DISCOURSE

## INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RACISM

**INTERNALIZED RACISM** lies within individuals. These are our private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture. Internalized racism can take many different forms including racial prejudice toward other people of a different race; internalized oppression, the negative beliefs about oneself by people of color; or internalized privilege, beliefs about superiority or entitlement by white people. An example is a belief that you or others are more or less intelligent, or beautiful, because of your race

**INTERPERSONAL RACISM** occurs between individuals. These are biases that occur when individuals interact with others and their private racial beliefs affect their public interactions. Examples include racial slurs, bigotry, hate crimes, and racial violence.

## SYSTEMIC-LEVEL RACISM

**INSTITUTIONAL RACISM** occurs within institutions and systems of power. It is the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.) that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they reinforce racial inequities. An example is a school system that concentrates people of color in the most overcrowded schools, the least-challenging classes, and the least-qualified teachers, resulting in higher dropout rates and disciplinary rates compared with that of white students.

**STRUCTURAL RACISM** is racial bias among institutions and across society. It involves the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal actors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. An example is the overwhelming number of depictions of people of color as criminals in mainstream media, which can influence how various institutions and individuals treat people of color with suspicion when they are shopping, traveling, or seeking housing and employment – all of which can result in discriminatory treatment and unequal outcomes.

**Chavez-Dueñas, N. Adames, H. Organista, K. (2013). Skin-Color Prejudice and Within -Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino/a Populations. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, Vol 36, Issue 1, pp. 3 - 26.**

Examines the hierarchy embedded in Mexico/Latin America that was initiated by colonizers as a means to withhold power from indigenous people; hierarchy involves white elite with more direct Spanish blood AND European features at the top with Afro-Latinos, Mestizos, etc in the middle and at the bottom direct indigenous blood and brown skin tones.

- ◆ “The White elites believed that through interracial breeding they were going to “mejorar la raza” [improve the race] and dilute the African and indigenous characteristics from Latin America.”

**Chavez-Dueñas, N. Adames, H. Organista, K. (2013). Skin-Color Prejudice and Within -Group Racial Discrimination: Historical and Current Impact on Latino/a Populations. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, Vol 36, Issue 1, pp. 3 - 26.**

Creates conflict and issues of discrimination among Mexican/Latino communities based on color. Those considered to be closer to indigenous have less credibility whereas light skin peers seen as reliable and trustworthy.

This type of discrimination of color lends itself to observing the ways in which students from similar backgrounds interact with one another. There are instances where students treat one another differently and it can be observed among students with different skin tones. Similarly, it can be apparent in how teachers interact or perceive students.

**Hunter, M. (2007). The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality. Sociology Compass. 237–254.**

- Hunter explained in detail the concepts of colorism and identified areas of difficulty for all members of the group.
- Hunter provides exemplars in the article about how these dynamics are forged and maintained.
- The maintenance of white supremacy links to colorism and oppression of people of color. In both instances white or lighter skin is viewed as the ideal.
  - ◆ “Lighter-skinned people of color enjoy substantial privileges that are still unattainable to their darker-skinned brothers and sisters.”
- ★ This piece seems to be one that develops the concept of colorism. It defines it, provides discourse to be carried on in this conversation as to how to change the status quo.

**Monroe, C. (2013). Colorizing Educational Research: African American Life and Schooling as an Exemplar. Educational Researcher, 42(1), 9 -19.**

- Direct connections to educational outcomes that are pushed on light skinned ethnic group versus the dark toned equal.
- Infers educators have been so conditioned in colorism that it requires conscious efforts to reflect and alter interactions with students.
  - ◆ Increases in negative behavioral outcomes due to negative ideas about the students with darker skin tones. Based on the information presented, students with lighter complexion were less likely to be seen as negative or difficult members.
  - ◆ Specific groups learn about college; counselors push students that may not succeed.

**Monroe, C. (2013). Colorizing Educational Research: African American Life and Schooling as an Exemplar. Educational Researcher, 42(1), 9 -19.**

- There is a need for visibility in schools that service multicultural student population. This is suggested to have positive impacts on students as they will be able to self identify and feel related.
- ★ In order to push back from colorism as educators it is necessary to be aware of these ideals circulating among communities and it is necessary to plan out how students treat one another.

# Conclusion

How can we teach  
students about colorism?

# Professional Development Day 2

Explore the Teaching Tolerance Toolkit.

[What's Colorism](#)

[The Nib](#)

[Recognizing and Addressing Colorism in Schools](#)

Additional links/sources provided on guide/schoology/email (by request)

# Your Turn

After examining some of the literature around colorism, you will explore the resources provided by Teaching Tolerance in small groups.

There will be a brief overview of activities for each section. Activity will consist of annotations, discussions around articles/lesson samples, along with a suggested focus guide for the reading. Print articles are yours to write on or you may use the Day 2 Guide. Digital Format will require you to save a copy of the guide to Google Docs or Microsoft Word.

Your goal is to begin the process of selecting resources to integrate into your classroom.

# By the end...

We are expected to have 2 or more resources to adapt to our instructional practice.

These may vary by teacher preference.

# Day 3 Planning



# Backwards Planning Focus

Goal: Students construct a testimonio/testimony, either personal or observational, to demonstrate understanding of colorism and to help build community in the classroom. (How can we reach this goal?)

Cruz, C. (2012, 07). Making Curriculum from Scratch: Testimonio in an Urban Classroom. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(3), 460 - 471.

In our teams, jigsaw the article. Highlight relevant areas relating to curriculum.

As a team, discuss how can we apply testimonios to our colorism curriculum? How might this fit?

Share Out

# Designated Planning Time

Utilizing the organizer, follow the suggested checklist to develop a plan for brief outline or implementation guide for the colorism curriculum you are piecing together.

# Exit Ticket

Using a post-it, answer the following questions.

- How confident do you feel about applying the colorism curriculum to your classroom? Why?
- How can I support you?
- Any additional comments.

When you're done, please place exit ticket in designated area.

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