

# Innovating the Teach-In to Transform the Faculty: Findings From a #BlackLivesMatter Teach-In

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*College students across the U.S. have been mobilizing their campuses in exposing institutional racism, biases, and curriculum structures that have historically marginalized students of color. As a response to ongoing racial justice movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, we developed a new teach-in model with the aim of creating a transformative experience for faculty and students. Our teach-in challenged faculty to incorporate topics related to #BlackLivesMatter to the discipline-specific content of their course during the same one-week period; this was followed by a campus-wide town hall event. Framed by critical race theory with the goal of creating transformative learning for faculty, we sought to assess the impact of the teach-in from the perspective of teachers. Our findings indicated that our teach-in successfully created an opportunity for faculty to interrogate their curriculum, engage students in race discussions, and develop the knowledge and professional skills needed to tackle a more inclusive social justice curriculum.*

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Over the course of recent years, students across American college campuses have been re-invigorated in vocalizing concerns with racist campus climates and institutional discrimination. Of focal concern among these campuses were events that transpired at the University of Missouri, eventually resulting in the resignation of the President in 2015 (Deutsch 2015). Students, faculty, and staff alike mobilized in support of students of color, exposing histories of systemic racism in classrooms, athletic programs, residence life, and more. At a critical time in our history, the need for transformational learning as it pertains to race in our classrooms and curriculum has never been greater.

In winter 2016, we convened a campus-wide #BlackLivesMatter teach-in at the university where we teach. The teach-in included 88 faculty members, 145 courses, and approximately 225

class meetings across 33 different disciplines. For this teach-in, faculty incorporated topics related to #BlackLivesMatter to the discipline-specific content of their course during a one-week period in February 2016, then the campus and community were invited to a #BlackLivesMatter Town Hall Meeting to share and discuss the experience and talk about next steps. This article reviews the framework we worked from, the steps we took to innovate the teach-in, and we report on faculty survey results following the teach-in. We utilized a critical race theory lens and engage the framing of the teach-in through a particular focus on transformational learning for faculty.

## **Context: Past and Present**

Our small (4,600 undergraduates and 1,900 graduate students) liberal arts, public university in Massachusetts is one of those college campuses around the U.S. engaging concerns

about racism and discrimination. When we began developing the teach-in in Fall 2015, we had several salient campus issues. Our multicultural center (now called “Center for Inclusive Excellence”) was central to processing and consciousness-raising regarding the many police shootings and the Charleston, South Carolina, church shooting from the summer of 2015. Around this time, an episode of hate speech occurred at our university that involved a student leader’s display of a Confederate Flag. Concern about the focal event was followed by examination of the timing, clarity, and accountability of campus entities in response to it (Murphy 2015). At this time, a senior film student, Avarie Cook, produced a 20 minute documentary about how students, faculty, and staff were experiencing national and local racist events (Cook 2015). Particularly pointed was the simple question Cook asked of several professors: What have you done in your classes to connect to these events? The larger context, Cook’s question, and the cumulative experiences on our campus drew us to focus on how to improve our classes and the community’s academic response to racist events that were a focus of these meetings.

As our vision coalesced for organizing a campus-wide #BlackLivesMatter teach-in, we relied on critical race theory as our frame, and used transformational learning as our method. The teach-in goals were multiple: support students and faculty of color, heighten awareness in the community about #BlackLivesMatter as a movement, and a protest of police violence and economic inequalities that are central to it. We sought to generate greater community activism and help to transform classrooms and syllabi across the campus with the recognition that this social movement is linked to every single thing we study in the university—not limited to courses called “race and ethnicity” or “sociology.”

The origins of the “teach-in” can be traced back to the 1960s. In the midst of the Vietnam War, universities across the country became

centers of political dissent against U.S. imperialism abroad and the quagmire that continued for years. Faculty and students galvanized behind anti-war messages that pushed the boundaries of traditional classroom environments. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March in 1965, the faculty at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor came together to disrupt business as usual. Over two hundred faculty cancelled classes in favor of anti-war discussions, seminars, and lectures. These open forums lasted hours – upwards of 12 hours at a time – and engulfed the campus in critical discourse. Shortly after, Columbia University adapted a similar model and soon, so did many other schools. This was the birth of the teach-in.

At a point in our history when the U.S. incarcerates more of its own citizens than any other country, we also sought to disrupt business as usual, yet in a way that could reach the faculty and students of our community. As the #BlackLivesMatter movement continues to push the socio-political discourses on police brutality, mass incarceration, and the assaults on communities of color, the call for faculty to connect our classrooms and teaching in alliance with the movement emerged through conversation, and this is the story of a new kind of teach-in.

Sociology classes can be (at times) a site for activism, a place to deconstruct power, and a space that offers transformative lenses on the world. Such ideas are not unique to sociology, but for many other disciplines, the connections between social justice, activism, and teaching are not so intrinsic. We knew we could work with sociology, yet, we wanted to reach across all the disciplines. The proceeding sections outline our guiding frameworks of critical race theory and transformational learning. We then provide descriptive quantitative and qualitative results from data collected from faculty that participated in our teach-in. These data sought to assess the impact of our teach-in model on how participating faculty approach their curriculum, class content, and relate to their students.

*Critical Approaches to Teaching Race and Racism*

Engaging our community in #BlackLivesMatter revolved around organizers' shared understanding of critical race theory (CRT). Because racism is ordinary, as CRT holds, we aimed our project across the entire curriculum. In particular, recent college teaching scholarship presents different tools that college professors in the social sciences and humanities have developed to transform the preconceptions that college students [and faculty] may have about meritocracy, color-blindness, and the intersection between race and systemic racism. Because of interest conversion, our curriculum tends to express white interests unreflectively.

Furthermore students' views are not so different from popular opinion guided by the tenet, per CRT, that race tends to be naturalized. Thus students and others associate poverty, danger or laziness as rational explanations that prevent African Americans and Latinx<sup>1</sup> from succeeding. Because there are few voices of faculty, students, and administrators of color in higher education, students—and faculty—often go unchallenged when assuming or acting as if we live in a color-blind society. Critical race theory offers tools to shift these beliefs. We were interested in observing the extent to which a community-wide #BlackLivesMatter teach-in could offer broader strategies to address issues in our curriculum by focusing our work on teachers.

Why teachers? Although many tools can be creative and transformative of college students' views on race and racism, the long-term change effects on college students can be elusive (See Becker and Paul 2015; Chaisson 2004; Khanna and Harris 2011; Packard 2011). The growing number of teaching tools aimed at transforming college students' preconceptions about race and systemic racism provide greater focus on the role college teachers play in facilitating these changes. However, less attention is given to

address how these teaching strategies help transform the widespread Eurocentric and “we are all color-blind” assumptions that impede long-term changes among both faculty and college students.

*A Method for Critical Approaches: Transformational Learning for Faculty*

The substantive critical race approach weaves well with the model of activism that centered on teaching and learning; transformational learning offered this. Derived from adult education, transformational learning generally refers to:

1. Challenging students' perspectives by creating a dilemma within their frames of thought, and
2. Creating a discourse through which students can then collaboratively and openly talk through these issues (Mezirow 1990; 1997).

In parallel form, our approach aimed to *challenge teachers'* perspectives by creating a dilemma: how to adjust their courses and teaching strategies to incorporate #BlackLivesMatter. Challenging teachers within their disciplines was informed, further, by critical pedagogy perspectives that emphasize acknowledgement of instructor subjectivity, social practice in the classroom, and emancipatory teaching that promotes self-actualization within the context of oppressive power structures (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2003; hooks 2003, 2014). This required that participating faculty learn about the #BlackLivesMatter movement and mission, and it challenged faculty to re-think their traditional approaches to lessons.

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<sup>1</sup> Latinx is a gender-neutral method of describing “Latinos”.

We aimed to investigate the extent to which we could *stimulate a discourse* that involved teachers working with colleagues, community members, and students to engage the content of #BlackLivesMatter. With a focus on teachers, we recognized that teachers have a scholarly mission—in this case, how to formulate content that cohered broadly with the concerns of #BlackLivesMatter. We also saw that teachers have a communication mission—that is one where classroom practices, including the selection of content—communicates agendas and values, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. We asked teachers to lead students into their own experiences of awareness, understanding, and when possible, transformation, all while focusing on the uniquely compelling content of their specific course and discipline.

Transformational pedagogy focuses on common learning experiences in terms of student experiences. While changes in perspective can be deeply personal, transformational pedagogy arises through promoting a “common learning experience” (Mezirow 1997:10). The conventions of student-focused transformational pedagogy involve goals such as helping students “become aware and critical of their own and others’ assumptions” (Mezirow 1997:10) and facilitate collaboration to construct new meanings for students’ every day, taken-for-granted assumptions. For *teacher-focused* transformation, the common learning experiences are within the *classroom* with our students and across the campus in a *community of teachers* working in tandem in a linked-learning, purposeful environment, where we share the dilemmas and discourse of our project and offer our unique articulations for ways to contribute.

To build a teacher-focused transformation, our call challenged faculty to alter their curriculum, syllabi, and classroom time to link

their disciplinary content through the lens of #BlackLivesMatter. While faculty were not restricted or limited to any particular application, we shared the underlining mission of #BlackLivesMatter. The common ground shared by all was acknowledgement that our curriculum can be used to actively resist the dehumanization and erasure of black lives in American society.



### Our Teach-in Model, Described

When we talked about a teach-in, we paused at the question, how? Like other colleges and universities, our campus includes many students who are tied to full-time or near full-time employment and intensive family commitments. Students, open to learning and activism, are stretched thin by financial and family burdens. Thus, while #BlackLivesMatter teach-ins outside of traditional classrooms have been occurring at other institutions across the country (Cornell and Missouri to name two), our model was centered *within* our classrooms, and evolved into a campus-wide re-direction of our courses for a week during Spring semester 2016. Bringing the theme of #BlackLivesMatter to the classroom was also the most practical way to engage faculty in the issue, by giving professors an ample, proximate, and accessible space for them to be activists, in their own way. They were



faced with a “dilemma” and we appealed to their expertise and creativity to join the project.

Initial conversations began in early November, 2015, with sociology colleagues. One colleague had a simple idea: why not *just ask* our fellow faculty if they would adapt their Spring course content to relate to the #BlackLivesMatter movement? Would they be willing to adjust their courses during the same week? We asked, and we had 30 classes enrolled after a day of speaking to colleagues—our early adopters. As we formalized the model, we drafted a call to faculty that detailed our mission. The call included names of early adopters, and briefly described examples of plans for courses ranging from Shakespeare to Cognitive Psychology. The call asked faculty to dedicate one or more of their classes, during the same identified week, to connect #BlackLivesMatter with the topics of the course content. To enroll, faculty simply responded to the organizers with: their academic discipline and department, the class(es) they planned to include, and a brief description of what they might do with the class.

Organizers retained a database of engagement, and created a campus listserv for additional (though always minimal) communications. Our organization was independent of administration. However, from inception to completion, we kept administrators—whom we routinely work with on campus diversity initiatives and studies--informed of our plans. The early and highly organized information sharing, we suspect, aided in administrative comfort and buy-in even as we retained complete control. Collaborations with our director of digital resources in our library provided a space for sharing teaching materials as well as documenting the teach-in. The archive can be accessed at <http://digitalcommons.framingham.edu/blmt/> (Framingham State University Library 2016).

We provided several professional development opportunities beyond the many one-on-one conversations held between participating faculty and the organizers. During

our January faculty development day, we offered a round-table for people to exchange ideas. Similarly, we gave a workshop in early February, ahead of the teach-in, that addressed issues of bridging differences and coping with resistance in classrooms. In particular, discussion focused on ways to manage the “all lives matter” rebuttal. Ideas for rejoinders to “all lives matter” gambits were further developed in meetings of organizers, interested faculty, and students who became part of the collaborative organization of the teach-in. In addition, faculty and students developed a simple one-page factsheet that provided references, history, and description of #BlackLivesMatter and brief examples of systemic racism ranging from wage differences for college graduates to rates of incarceration.

Some examples of the topics submitted by participating faculty included: a Communication Arts professor discussed *Life Magazine's* coverage of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s with her Photojournalism students. A Psychology professor's Cognitive Psychology students looked at research related to implicit bias. In Biochemistry, a professor focused on Flint, Michigan, lead poisoned water and black lives. Very quickly and anecdotally, we began to hear of many professors having changed more than just this week in their classes to fit in more topics on #BlackLivesMatter and race.

We were impressed by the number of colleagues from disciplines that don't automatically come to mind who stepped up to the challenged. A Physics professor and her advanced physics students examined the status of Black physicists in their field. An Economics professor and his Money and Banking students looked at “The Color of Money” and red lining. A Computer scientist and his Information Technology students examined the role of phone-videoing and social media in revealing the details of #BlackLivesMatter events that have needed to come to light.

The culmination of the teach-in was a Town Hall Meeting that filled the biggest event space

we have on campus. Student activists facilitated small discussion groups before conversation return to the plenary session. It served as a chance for approximately 300 students, faculty, administrators, and other community members to hear from others about what they did. Our planning for this event, too, was basic. Avarie Cook's 20-minute video aired as participants settled into the room. Photojournalism students provided photo documentation of many of the classes, and the slideshow aired throughout the event. Then, students and faculty alike spoke in brief about the origins and influence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The central activity involved people sharing their teach-in experiences from the past week. We avoided holding some kind of panel or lecture. The creation of a common space after the week of teach-in courses bridged faculty innovation, student engagement, and activism. Holistically, hundreds of distinct classroom environments from a multitude of applied perspectives came together to deepen our community's commitment to the #BlackLivesMatter mission. Rather than a "conclusive" event, the Town Hall Meeting addressed not only where we are in the present but also where we are going.

The remarks at the plenary session included proposals for days of panels, structured dialogue, lectures, and more planning and other focused and topical demonstrations. As a result, students are developing a speakers' bureau to continue focused dialogues in dorms, clubs, and classrooms. But, this day was for students and faculty to see how vast and wide the significance of #BlackLivesMatter is and to consider deeper engagement by revolutionizing the curriculum and creating common learning experiences. The creation of the necessary spaces, dialogues, and momentum was the spark that bridged classrooms with activism. In particular, of central focus to this paper was how faculty were transformed by this experience.

We asked three broad questions to examine the impact of the teach-in on how faculty

engaged their curriculum with critical issues of race in America.

- First, did the teach-in challenge faculty to think differently about how they approach their subject areas in the classroom?
- Second, did the teach-in challenge faculty to learn more about the lives of their students?
- Third, did faculty report that participating in the teach-in helped develop their understanding of #BlackLivesMatter and how it relates to their professional skills?

### **Data and Methodology**

We used a low-cost online survey instrument to ask questions about the impact of the teach-in on how faculty viewed their curriculum/classrooms, students, and development as teachers. Questions were predominately closed, quantitative items with some open-ended questions that allowed faculty to freely write short responses. We utilized a convenience sampling technique by advertising the survey through the listserv of all participating teach-in faculty. After the teach-in and subsequent Town Hall meeting were complete, the survey link was e-mailed three different times throughout the Spring semester.

The analytic plan was simple and descriptive in nature. Primarily, we ran frequencies for measured effects of the teach-in as reported by faculty. Additionally, we examined reported change in knowledge on #BlackLivesMatter among faculty by utilizing a chi-square test of significance. For open-ended responses, we compiled the brief qualitative feedback from faculty. The first round of coding involved an exploratory method that engaged the data through holistic coding. Holistic coding extracts broad points in the responses from faculty. The second round of coding involved pattern coding; this developed the broad themes across the responses.

Altogether, 88 faculty participated in the teach-in and 60 completed a survey yielding a

response rate of 67 percent. Utilizing our institutional data, we were able to surmise that approximately one in four of all professors that semester (full-time and part-time) participated in the teach-in. While 51 percent of faculty during Spring 2016 were tenured or tenure-track, 82 percent of participants were tenured or tenure track. The majority, 53 percent, of participating faculty enrolled one course while 47 percent enrolled two or more of their classes.

## Findings

We organized our findings in order of how they answered our research questions. Additionally, we structured the findings around themes that emerged from the brief, open-ended responses. Our purpose was to guide our findings through the structure of our original research questions while providing more detailed context offered by the quotes from our participating colleagues. While demographic questions were asked, we only report race, gender, and subject area when volunteered by the participant. Further, demographic descriptions are not central to our discussion of how our teach-in facilitated a transformative learning opportunity for faculty as it relates to race in their curriculum.

### *The #BlackLivesMatter Teach-in as a Transformative Teaching Experience*

Our first research question was: did the teach-in challenge faculty to think differently about how they approach their subject areas in the classroom? Overall, 71 percent of participating faculty survey respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their participation in the #BlackLivesMatter teach-in was a formative professional development experience. The teach-in challenged faculty to be more creative about establishing connections between class material and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Additionally, 63 percent of participating faculty strongly agreed/agreed with the statement that

the teach-in challenged me to think about my subject differently. One professor reports:

*[The #BLM teach-in] was an amazing pedagogical experience for me, but also a wonderful personal experience. I had the opportunity to truly reflect on how racial injustice that happens in today's society and in the past has really shaped my identity and focus of thought. It encouraged me to find ways to include more about racial inequality and injustice in my curriculum.*

Similar accounts were echoed by other faculty who reported that participating in the teach-in led to a transformative experience in how they approach their curriculum in the classroom. Another professor adds:

*...the teach-in pushed me to create in-class assignments and foster more inclusive conditions in the classroom. This is something that I had not tried to actively do before the teach-in.*

This faculty member exemplifies how the teach-in model can challenge faculty to re-design approaches to their topics. Faculty who participated in the teach-in were encouraged to think through how tackling race topics relates to their ongoing discussions in the classroom. As evidenced by our findings, participating faculty made adjustments that they otherwise may not have done without the structure of our teach-in.

### *Approaching Class Fundamentals through the #BlackLivesMatter Movement: Innovations and Challenges.*

Our second question was: did the teach-in challenge faculty to learn more about the lives of their students? Fifty-eight percent reported that they strongly agreed/agree with the statement that the teach-in led them to learn more about the lives of their students. While not a majority, about 41 percent of faculty reported

**Table 1.** Faculty Perceptions of Teach-in Impact

Statement	Percentage Strongly Agree/Agree	Mean <sup>†</sup>
Preparing for the teach-in was a formative professional development experience.	71%	4
The teach-in challenged me to think about my subject differently.	63%	3.75
The teach-in allowed me to learn more about the lives of my students.	58%	3.69
The teach-in helped me develop a better understanding of the learning needs of my students.	41%	3.43

<sup>†</sup>5= strongly agree 4=agree 3=neutral 2=disagree 1=strongly disagree

that they strongly agreed/agreed with the statement that the teach-in helped them develop a better understanding of the learning needs of their students. Faculty participation in the teach-in also allowed them to gain insights about the lives and worldviews of their students. For example, a white woman English professor indicated that putting the #BlackLivesMatter movement at the center of her postcolonial literature course made her aware of the worldview of her students. This realization motivated her to switch the approach she uses to teach about cultural difference. She wrote:

*While I work hard in my foreign literature courses to get students to leave behind the American context, and to repress their local knowledge in the interest of learning from as well as about other places, I see now that I also need to do more comparison on the reverse side of things, like a true elliptical*

*dialogue. I begin by drawing contrasts between an American status quo and how those cultural assumptions don't work in a foreign context, but I need to do more with making that self-reflexive turn at the end of a unit, asking students how a given text brings the American context into clearer view, especially around the issue of inequality. I was emboldened by the teach-in to bring in more current events and to allow class time to make my course materials genuinely relevant and useful to students.*

This account demonstrates that the teach-in motivated faculty to transform their teaching practices to openly and explicitly discuss race and racial inequalities as it relates to student lives. In this case—as in others—the activity led to the course goals being *more effectively achieved* because of the perspective of #BlackLivesMatter. The teach-in was not an add-on, it was central to the core learning of the course. Themes across the open-ended responses revealed a series of innovations and challenges that were echoed by faculty as they thought through the application of the teach-in to their student's learning experiences.

#### *Innovations*

Faculty in the social sciences, the humanities, the health sciences and the natural sciences expressed that making racial inequality and the #BlackLivesMatter movement a focal point of their classes made them think differently about the learning needs of their students as it relates to topics of race. A white woman professor in the Food and Nutrition program shared one of the teaching tools she used to discuss racial disparities in nutrition. She said:

*I added a Discussion Board post linked to birthweight outcomes and infant mortality by race/ethnicity in the U.S. and Massachusetts. After the DB post, students talked in class about what they had learned. They were*



*particularly surprised to find that some interventions to reduce infant mortality actually increased disparities (because the functionally targeted white women), and they discussed ways to avoid such outcomes in interventions. One big topic was having high-level staff from the communities that are served by nutrition programs.*

Like the strategy this professor used, faculty in the sciences and humanities revealed that they had to use a great deal of creativity to integrate discussions about race and racial inequality in their curriculum. Approaches varied from openly discussing the goals of the movement, to examining different representations of the Confederate flag, to challenging students to make connections between the implications of environmental disasters and racial injustices. Other faculty used data on racial disparities or analyzed the differences between the Black Lives Matter movement and other movements as mediums to discuss race and racial inequality.

A white woman art professor challenged students to create objects based on statistical data on police brutality, domestic and socio-economic issues. She elaborated on her teaching strategy:

*Part of the content I delivered to them was factual using the BLM websites and information provided by connections that the Librarians set up for us. Part of the content I delivered to them was expressionistic and experiential as I read poetry to them written about the BLM movement and as I showed them artwork by prominent Black artists so they could see how others have interpreted BLM.*

The way in which this faculty member used data to openly address the movement exemplifies some of the creative strategies faculty used to transform their teaching practices as participants of the teach-in.

Other professors confronted the “All Lives Matter” rebuttal to closely analyze what this

ideology was trying to accomplish and how they could have missed the mark. This was a useful foundation for an open discussion of the movement. This strategy allowed faculty to address fundamental debates about cultural difference, ethnocentrism and cross-cultural comparisons in their disciplines, much in keeping with explicit interventions that allow students to compare and understand the differences and commonalities between dominant and critical race ideologies (Bernal 2002).

### *Challenges*

At times, participating faculty expressed that connecting their content with the Black Lives Matter movement felt like a stretch. This experience was especially relevant for faculty in the sciences. These faculty perceived that teaching about race in science classes was almost out of context and that it felt like an “add-on.” A white man Chemistry professor revealed that making the connection between science and social issues was more challenging than he had anticipated. He wrote:

*It was extremely hard to link the teach-in to an introductory course in chemistry without being cliché. I believe that my approach was considerably abstract and was (almost) entirely out of context with what I normally teach. I think that the teach-in was beneficial in terms of sharing my own personal views with students so that they see me as more of a human being, but I don't think that I added anything new to the conversation that wasn't already being said.*

As discussed earlier, race focused interventions in higher education curricula are more common in the social sciences and humanities. Explorations of social inequality and racial oppression are topics in these disciplines, so they are taught more often than in the sciences. With race- and inequality-related interventions being less common in the sciences, it is not

surprising to learn about the challenges faculty in the sciences faced. Twelve (14 percent) of our 88 faculty were from Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM). While this was an underrepresentation of STEM faculty (who made up 34 percent of our teachers that semester), we do not have a way to estimate whether this participation was high or low when one considers the extent to which the direct links to #BlackLivesMatter are less commonly made in this area.

Overall, STEM faculty participation in the teach-in allowed these professors to appreciate interdisciplinary collaborations and to challenge their students to understand the societal implications of science. The following account by an Asian woman physics professor confirms such appreciation. She stated: “[It was] hard to incorporate topic (sic) in an upper level science class but (sic) helped make the connection between science and social issues; [I] want more opportunities to engage with humanities departments to explore this for the future”.

Although adjusting their teaching was challenging for some faculty, others used the teach-in to approach class fundamentals creatively. They demonstrated their ability to make explicit connections between their disciplines, racial inequality and the Black Lives Matter movement. This creativity suggests that faculty were able to change their teaching practices in transformative ways.

#### *More about Learning about Who My Students Are and What They Think*

A switch from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches to teaching was one of the central transformations some faculty experienced as a result of the teach-in. This switch allowed participating faculty to learn more about who their students are and how they understand and process course material. A white man professor in the humanities realized that hearing the perspectives and feelings of his students first before presenting his views on race and racial

inequality substantially increased the engagement of his classroom. He explained:

*I did the teach-in in two classes, and the comparison allowed me to conclude that it worked much better when I let students strongly lead the agenda to start out with than when I led with something that I had prepared. That said, the response of students can vary drastically depending on the make-up of the class (amount of socioeconomic diversity as well as simply individual personalities).*

This recognition suggests that teaching about a contemporary social problem might increase the level of engagement students have through a student-centered approach to teaching. In this case, as Pedersen and Liu (2003) propose, moving from a teaching-centered to a student-centered approach allows students to take ownership of their learning, while the teacher serves as a resource to work through the difficulties they might encounter in the learning process.

Overall, the Black Lives Matter teach-in was a revelatory learning experience for participating faculty as they were able to relate to their students’ lives and perspectives. Some faculty were surprised about how uninformed their students were about issues such as police brutality and mass incarceration. Other faculty became aware of how relevant discussions about racial discrimination and inequality for students that would not have seemed to be affected. A white woman history professor explained her astonishment when she learned about the diversity of stories that students disclosed in her class as a result of the teach-in. She revealed:

*Two supposedly "white" students shared that they actually each have a parent of color, and one "black" student shared that she had a Chinese grandfather. These disclosures helped all of the students to see that you have to check your assumptions about race and*

*identity at the door. It was after these students shared their experiences that everyone else felt comfortable to open up. I was thankful we had the opportunity to have a discussion about race and identity, in the end.*

The ability faculty had to access the worldviews and lived experiences of their students is an important testament of how the teach-in was indeed a disruption of business as usual.

Discussions about race and racial inequalities in the classroom also revealed the challenges of training college students towards long-term reflection and citizenship. Some faculty revealed that their students were comfortable discussing race and slavery in the past, but were less comfortable discussing the contemporary implications of the past and the continued existence of racial injustice. For example, a white woman professor in Chemistry exposed some of these challenges when she tried to discuss the connection between the Flint water crisis and systemic racism. She revealed:

*My students were happy to be able to discuss the science behind the Flint water crisis with others. 30 percent of my class were students of color, though not native to the US. They seemed appreciative of both my level of discomfort with participating in the BLM teach-in and the effort that I made to make the connection. They were very comfortable discussing the science, but very much happy to leave the race issues out of our classroom discussions.*

About half of survey respondents shared the observations made by this faculty member. Although most participating faculty were able to successfully integrate the Black Lives Matter movement in their curriculum, student engagement was a challenge. Faculty perceived that discussing the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the classroom created a “divided”

classroom experience. Some faculty found that the teach-in experience empowered students of color to speak up, while making white students visibly uncomfortable. An Asian woman professor revealed that the teach-in related discussion unintentionally divided her classroom leading to tension and discomfort among her students. She noted:

*White students (mostly) seemed hesitant to speak up, perhaps in worry that they would inadvertently say something offensive or feeling as if it wasn't their place to comment given the different experiences they have. Some who did speak up seemed to express liberal guilt though others made valid and insightful comments in an objective (non-offensive) manner.*

This account encapsulated many of the observations participating faculty made about their teach-in experience. While participating faculty demonstrated enthusiasm in front of the challenge of connecting their classes with the #BlackLivesMatter, about a quarter of survey participants were not able to observe significant changes in the engagement of their students. Some faculty, however, pointed out that connecting their course content to the #BlackLivesMatter helped empower students of color to participate and share how their experiences related to the class discussion.

#### *Faculty Knowledge on #BlackLivesMatter*

Our third question was, “did faculty report that participating in the teach-in helped develop their understanding of #BlackLivesMatter and how it relates to their professional skills? As Table 2 demonstrates, faculty who considered themselves very knowledgeable about #BlackLivesMatter moved from 20 percent to 29 percent—a significant change. This fundamental growth in awareness, along with the many changes faculty described in their classes, suggests that the campus-wide classroom-

centered teach in may be a valuable tool for transformative learning for faculty as well as students. These teaching experiences cumulate to suggest that their learning about their students and the expansion of their teaching repertoire suggest the answer is yes, as does the growth in knowledge specifically about #BlackLivesMatter. A black woman science professor reported:

*I learned that I could incorporate more about race in a science course. I was able to reflect on ways to really speak to the #BlackLivesMatter movement by addressing issues of racial injustice.*

Faculty not only reported an increased knowledge and understanding of #BlackLivesMatter, but they described how that acquisition of knowledge related to their professional skills as a teacher. Another professor in a STEM field stated:

*I learned that I need to do more to integrate this as a regular part of the course, as opposed to what may have felt like an "add-on" this year...*

Other questions pertained to how the Town Hall Meeting influenced plans for teaching. About half of our respondents reported attending the Town Hall Meeting, and fewer responded to questions about changing their syllabi. However, 15 faculty members who responded indicated

that they were planning to change their teaching or courses as a consequence of their experience, 25% of the overall respondents. This amounts to 17% of the 88 participating faculty. This increment of change, with continued community engagement, can reduce the divisiveness that occurred in some of our participants classes. Faculty were also asked about the transformation of their research agendas. More than one in four (27 percent—not shown) agreed or strongly agreed that the teach-in had re-invigorated the research agenda outside the classroom. Furthermore 36 percent reported they had a chance to work with faculty outside their department. The classroom activities and intellectual lives and even our patterns of collaboration were significantly changed, and this holds out promise for further movements to transform the academy.

## Conclusions

Our adaptation of the teach-in model resulted in evidenced transformation of faculty and how they approach their disciplines, classrooms, and curriculum. Critical race scholars have proposed to adopt a critical race methodology to teaching, as an effort to challenge the Eurocentric ideology that informs educational policies and curricula in higher education institutions today. Our teach-in model, framed from a CRT perspective, offered the opportunity to create a program that would bring faculty into a common conversation about crucial issues on race in America. Critical race

**Table 2.** Faculty Knowledge on #BlackLivesMatter

Statement	Very Knowledgeable	Mean*
How knowledgeable were you about the #BlackLivesMatter movement before the teach-in?	20.0%	3.80
How knowledgeable were you about the #BlackLivesMatter movement after the teach-in?	29.1%	4.13
Chi square $p < 0.0001$	43.47***	

\* 5=Very Knowledgeable 4=Somewhat Knowledgeable 3=Informed/Aware 2=Not Very Knowledgeable 1=Not At All Knowledgeable



methods openly challenge “the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race, neutrality and equal opportunity and exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color” (Solórzano and Yosso 2002: 26). In our teach-in, the transdisciplinary and pervasive quality of the event was our step towards such a challenge.

Instead of avoiding direct racial language or omitting race as a topic of discussion (Bonilla-Silva 2002), critical race methods intend to make experiences of race, racism and the intersectionality with other forms of oppression explicit and central in the process of teaching and learning. By making this project a widely dispersed reflection on #BlackLivesMatter, no one could avoid making participation in this teach-in a simple or mere “celebration of Black History Month” event. The theme called on all of us to start with the knowledge that our classrooms like our large social systems are punctuated by racism.

Because this approach validates the experiences of people of color through critical analyses, the critical race perspective argues that it would help recognize all students as holders and creators of knowledge (white students and students of color alike); a potentially transformative approach for faculty. One of the pitfalls of this approach is that only college instructors in the social sciences and the humanities are likely to adopt it as part of their teaching methods and philosophies. This niching might delay or delete the positive effects of critical race teaching methodologies. In order to remedy this problem, we encouraged the application of critical race methodologies to teaching in different disciplines through a campus wide teach-in.

We have reported on several of the limitations of the project: not all faculty members had positive experiences. Often these accounts were accompanied by a realization that additional training for faculty would be of use. They also suggested that deeper community

stakes and multifaceted engagement of #BlackLivesMatter and recognition of systemic racism would help to reduce such resistance. White students, like white faculty, are less likely to be exposed to information and messages about systemic racism. Ongoing, community-wide, classroom-based approaches to delivering this message are our method for changing this.

In our experience, early adoption by a critical mass of faculty, working independently without a close tie to administration, and care to allow a high level of academic freedom were all practical matters that led to the widespread and uncontroversial adoption of our program. By holding the logic of critical race theory with the goal of transformative learning among faculty, we tailored our simple communications to hold that logic without ever conveying the jargon of the approaches.

At our end-of-the year faculty development day, our university President and our Provost both identified the #BlackLivesMatter teach-in as the most important thing to happen this year. However, we noted that it was not so important that it was profiled in the Fall 2016 alumni magazine. We suspect that kind of transformation may take longer.

We encourage others to try this, and we are eager to share more details about how we ran this program and what we are likely to do next on our campus. We observed that faculty participants were overwhelming tenure, tenure-line, and full-time faculty. Not reported as an aspect of findings in this paper, faculty of color were overrepresented in the teach-in as well. While we propose that if you “build it, they will come”, we also propose that the more faculty of color in tenure-line and full-time positions we have, the more opportunities for faculty and student transformation we will have.

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