

**Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students**

by

Michaela Gutierrez

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at  
Carthage College

Kenosha, Wisconsin  
Spring 2017

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

**Table of Contents**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Abstract.....   | 4  |
| Acknowledgements.....                                       | 5  |
| Chapter 1.....  | 6  |
| Introduction.....   | 6  |
| Background.....   | 6  |
| Statement of the Problem.....                               | 9  |
| Purpose Statement.....                                      | 11 |
| Research Questions.....                                     | 11 |
| Interview Questions .....                                   | 12 |
| Chapter Summary .....                                       | 13 |
| Chapter 2.....  | 14 |
| Literature Review.....                                      | 14 |
| Overview.....   | 14 |
| Opportunity Gap/History.....                                | 14 |
| Teacher Education Programs and Multicultural Courses.....   | 19 |
| Interacting with Diverse Students within the Classroom..... | 22 |
| Black Lives Matter.....                                     |    |
| Psychological Impact of Racism Stress.....                  |    |
| Benefits of Addressing BLM and Race Relations.....          |    |
| Chapter Summary .....                                       |    |
| Chapter 3.....  |    |

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

Methodology

Overview.....

Setting and Participants.....

Design.....

Instruments.....

Data Analysis.....

Chapter 4.....

Results

Overview.....

Analysis of the Results.....

Research Questions.....

Chapter Summary.....

Chapter 5

Discussion

Discussion of the Results.....

Implications.....

Limitations.....

Conclusion.....

Future Research.....

References.....80

Appendix 1.....83

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

### **Abstract**

This study examined the influence of the Black Lives Matter movement in an urban school in southeastern Wisconsin. It used qualitative methods to determine teachers' perceptions of how to address the Black Lives Matter movement with their students. There were seven staff members with varying levels of educational and career experience in one Midwestern middle school that were interviewed. A semi-structured interview structure was used with seven predetermined questions, supported by follow up probes. According to the qualitative findings, all staff members acknowledged the impact that the Black Lives Matter had on their students, however, few participants felt comfortable broaching the topic, and were unsure of how to support their students. As the conflict between marginalized communities and the police continues to dominate the news, students are continually exposed to the violence which undoubtedly impacts their mental health, and therefore their performance in school- both academic and functional. The participants identified avenues to move forward and supports they would need from the school, the district, the community, and even their teacher- education programs in order to address the Black Lives Matter movement with their students and provide a safe and accepting learning environment for all students.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank several people who supported me through this journey, which was at times incredibly stressful- though worth it!

First, I would like to thank my late Grandpa, Dave Keiser. He was always by my side and pushed me in so many ways to find success in and out of the classroom. He was able to make me laugh in the roughest times and reflect when I felt overconfident. He is an example of how to live life to the fullest and treat all people with kindness. I love & miss you everyday!

I would like to thank my family, especially my husband and father, who have stood by me and supported me in various ways through the last two years as I completed the ACT program and Master's degree process at Carthage. It was an extremely trying time and I could not have done it without the understanding from everyone as I pushed through to complete it by my goal of May 2017. I love you all!

I would also like to thank my friends who were always there and made time to review my paper and listen to my ideas and frustrations as I pushed through to the end.

I would like to thank all my students whose perseverance and resilience constantly motivate me and push me to do more. They are the reason I continue!

Lastly, I would like to thank my thesis committee-Dr. Christoun, Dr. Munk, and Dr. Thompson for their incredible flexibility in helping me ensure I finished May 2017. I cannot express the gratitude I feel for your ability to guide my academic journey through the chaos that has been the last few months. Furthermore, I was lucky enough to have each of you as professor and have gained invaluable knowledge that will continue to impact me as I continue my educational journey.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Background

Research on the impact of student's race relative to their educational experience is abundant and clearly outlines a significant issue when evaluating underachievement and lack of opportunity for Black and Latino students. Black and Latino students are more likely to be identified as students with special needs, drop out of school, score below national reading and math scores, and receive more behavior referrals. According to Howard "Disparate academic outcomes for Black children compared to their peers from other ethnic groups have been persistent and remains chronic..." (2016, p. 102). However, these issues transcend education, and the nation is seeing the impact "disparate outcomes" through the lens of struggling race relations, specifically those between black communities and the police.

As deadly situations between black people and the authorities are continually displayed across the nation, it is evident that these issues will impact our students and their daily lives. According to Stiles, Moyer, Brewer, Klaus, Falconer, & Moss : "The worst part of it is, it scars the hearts of our children. It scars the hearts of White children who grow unnecessarily fearful of somebody who doesn't look like them. It stains the heart of Black children who feel as if no matter what [they do they'll] always be under suspicion" (2015, p. 21).

The Black Lives Matter movement, referred to BLM moving forward, is a national response to the racism and subsequent violence between minority communities and the police that has been seen across the United States. One of BLM's founders, Alicia Garza, stated the purpose and need for BLM exists due to the lack of conversation regarding the continual denial of the basic human rights and dignity to Black people (Howard, 2016). It also looks to address institutional systems embedded within the country that consistently inhibit minority communities and put them at a disadvantage. Furthermore, "the

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
aspect of black people being deprived of 'basic human rights and dignity' serves as an impetus for why BLM's aims and goals have direct implications for the education of Black children in the U.S. in 2016" (Howard, 2016, p. 102). Until there has is a significant change in policy, not only educational, there will be little improvement in the lives of Black Americans. Subsequently, the need for the BLM organization will still exist until Blacks gain the rights they deserve and have been denied for centuries.

However, there is an accessible system, the educational system, which can be used to promote positive change and ensure that Black students are ensured the human rights and dignity that they deserve. Teachers have an extremely important role in the life of each child and therefore have a large impact- positive or negative impact- as students will forever remember their teachers for their action or inaction. To many, the educational system appears as an easy access point to begin supporting students through emotional, physical, and mental struggles from dealing with the trauma between BLM and police. Unfortunately, there are many areas in which teachers do not hold the specific expertise that is needed to adequately support students experiencing this trauma, which may lead to counterproductive results.

As stated above, Black students already experience an opportunity gap within the academic world which extends to life after: "For many marginalized people [as] education is either a pathway to liberation and economic prosperity or a pipeline to prison" (Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016, p. 9). Unfortunately, the pipeline to prison complex is more likely than achieving higher education for Blacks in the United States. At this point in history, it is crucial that teachers increase their knowledge of the Black Lives Matter movement to use it as an opportunity to address student concerns, fears, and as a tool to process such difficult emotional situations. Doing so will require that teachers be reflective in their own practice to also identify how they impede or support marginalized students through their disciplinary procedures, curriculum, and ability to form relationships with the students, their family, and the community. According to Howard, there are several focus areas that would help to alleviate the chronic gaps such as "put[ting] a focus on addressing the prevalence of trauma for all students, and ensure

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students appropriate supports are in place for students, parents, families, and school personnel” (2016, p. 111). In an effort to improve and diminish these gaps, the ongoing conflict between police and minorities must be addressing in an educational setting. Moreover, these conversations should occur with school staff members who are educated in the BLM matter movement to ensure students are receiving necessary attention to these traumatic situation, coupled with additional supports.

Unfortunately, these issues (BLM/police) may be controversial to some and as a result some teachers may not possess the confidence to address these issues in their classroom. This lack of confidence to address or discuss these racialized topics may in part be due to the fact that “the third highest rated critical issue facing teacher education is preparing teacher for diverse student populations” (Ukpokodu, 2004, p. 19). Even when teacher education programs offer diversity or multi-cultural courses, “Rarely do [multicultural education] courses provide preservice teachers with opportunities to experience culturally different students in intimate authentic contexts to help them gain a realistic and humanistic understanding of the cultural and social contexts that shape their experiences” (Ukpokodu, 2004, p. 20). Nonetheless, it is the responsibility of the teacher to appropriately address student fears that they may bring into class settings, especially when “45.1% of all students in American public K-12 schools were identified as minority students” (Henfield & Washington, 2012, p. 148 ); as a result, many of these students will attend school bringing their worry, apprehension and fear into class each day. On the other hand, since “...82.9% of all teachers in their country are categorized as White” (Henfield & Washington, 2012, p. 148) many teachers may not experience these same issues since they are not reflective of their students in terms of race.

In an attempt to bridge a cultural or racial gap of understanding, teachers should educate themselves about the complexities of race, oppression, poverty, and classism which will help them to better understand the necessity of movements such as Black Lives Matter and the questions and anxieties students may be experiencing. The objective of this study is to qualitatively evaluate teachers’ perceptions

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students of their responsibility in addressing student disquietude, increasing/sharing their knowledge of police and the Black Lives Matter movement, and identifying what are the most effective and beneficial ways to provide support to their students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although confrontations between the police/minorities have been pervasive throughout the media, there is minimal research on Black Lives matter and its potential effect on the academic classroom. This may be due to the short amount of time since it was established, however, there were very few articles that looked specifically at the teacher's role in addressing these topics in their classroom and how these "teachable moments" should be handled. Potential effects may include social, emotional, or behavioral outbursts. Students may be less engaged in class, critical of teachers' personal opinions, and have trouble processing their emotions as a result of the interactions between the police/minority communities. The relationship between student and teacher is integral to understand how students feel during these conflicts and to ensure they receive necessary support/services. Although teachers may be hesitant of potential issues, "both research and practice show that trusting, supportive relationships between students and educators are key to preventing conflict" (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014, p. 3). By establishing a trusting rapport with students, teachers can utilize these conversations to strengthen their classrooms and address student fears by providing a safe space.

The relative lack of research may be due to the short amount of time the Black Lives Matter movement has existed. Few studies have looked specifically at the teacher's role in addressing these racially and culturally sensitive topics in their classroom, much less their own perception of responsibility to address these topics or how it should be handled. "In the US most adults, especially those in educational leadership positions, ignored children's reactions to the Michael Brown shooting and the subsequent crisis" (Stiles et al., 2015, p. 22). This example serves as only one instance for the need to

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students determine why children's personal needs have been repeatedly ignored especially when the impact is direct and affects their livelihood and state of being which all students inevitably bring into school.

This study is necessary because it highlights the role of the teacher in times needing social growth and change and how the education system can support students who are trying to process or understand these interactions and their place in the movement. From previous studies we know that "Students valued teachers who could cultivate safe, respectful, culturally sensitive, and responsive learning communities" (Sleeter, 2017, p. 9). Moreover, it identifies areas that need vast improvement within the academic world in order to best serve our students. Future implications of educational settings not playing a key role in discourse to resolve these concerns will most definitely be negative. "It is urgent that the nation protect Black children, as other children, from the psychological damage associated with the fear and real or perceived threat of premature death at the hands of police or from police-inflicted violence" (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p. 298). Although this may not have been an issue teachers were taught to handle, it has become a responsibility for all educators to embrace in order to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn in a safe, culturally inclusive place.

Additionally, if these issues are simply ignored, it may lead students to a feeling of microinvalidation- "Although perpetrators of microinvalidation may intend no offence, 'targets may perceive these microinvalidations as demeaning their minority group member experience, devaluing their identity membership, and minimizing its importance or relevance" (Stiles et al., 2015, p. 25). Moreover, a skillset to handle and effectively communicate one's needs or express concern/emotion following a traumatic event such as a cop shooting an unarmed black man, are social and emotional skills, which should be taught concurrently with academic content knowledge. It is clear through studies that social and emotional skills are or should be integrated into everyday curriculum to better prepare students for the future. "Nowadays, guidance in schools is no longer considered as an ancillary, crisis-oriented service delivered by a few individuals, but rather as a comprehensive program integrated into the curriculum that

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students aims to stimulate the social and emotional development of every student” (Jacobs & Struyf, 2015, p. 95). In order to move forward, schools should take a proactive stance in adopting socially just and equitable practices to ensure students and staff are receiving the necessary supports required to integrate social-emotional skills into curriculum so each individual is provided the skill-set necessary to handle witnessing these traumatic events. Additionally, it is crucial that teachers acknowledge events in an effort to avoid feelings of microinvalidations and to ensure all students know their life does matter.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to examine one middle school in southeastern Wisconsin and evaluate how teachers perceive their roles in and preparedness for addressing the Black Lives Matter movement with their students. This qualitative study employs interview analysis to determine what teachers perceive is the best way for schools to address student apprehension. If this study and similar ones do not occur, schools may continue to employ color-blind strategies which “leave children to construct hypotheses about causal links among race, class, and victimization without adult input” (Stiles et al., 2015, p. 26). Furthermore, throughout the interview analysis, the study will identify strategies that are working to address the Black Lives Matter movement with their students as well as the supports they would deem necessary to proceed in a manner which will benefit their students.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following questions:

*What should teachers do to address Black Lives Matter in their classroom and how should it be handled?*

*What supports do teachers need to address Black Lives Matter in their classroom?*

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

The research questions were used to guide the formation of interview questions, which the present study analyzes through interviews with teachers to study and evaluate their perceived impact of the Black Lives Matter movement within their classrooms and how they are addressing it.

#### **Interview Questions**

1. What interested you in becoming a teacher?
2. How do you involve current events into your classroom?
3. How do current events such as police/race relations impact your classroom?
4. What is your knowledge of the Black Lives Matter movement?
5. How do you think the Black Lives Matter movement impacts your students?
6. How should schools address student concerns with current events?
7. What would you (teachers) need to address Black Lives Matter in their classroom?

**Chapter Summary**

With the continual killing of unarmed black men in the media and evidence of police brutality, students, especially those who identify as minority students, inevitably will be impacted by these events and need emotional support as they cope with the violence. Educators fill multiple roles within the school which include counseling and addressing the fears and concerns of their students. It is their job to ensure their classroom is one that is safe and culturally inclusive for all. This study was created to determine how teachers currently perceive their role in addressing the BLM movement and what they are actively doing to address the worries and anxieties students are bringing to school, in an effort to better understand methods that do/do not work as well as what needs to be done to better the educational landscape for all students.

## **Ch. II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the ways in which the Black Lives Matter movement is perceived by teachers and their ideas in how, or if it should be addressed within their classroom. This chapter will offer an explanation of the historical context and significance of the education of Black Americans and the struggles that have ensued. Further, this chapter will evaluate the intended purpose of the BLM movement. The review of literature will incorporate a range of scholarly articles and include important factors that currently impact education in the United States, specifically in urban districts.

#### **Opportunity Gap/History**

The purpose of this study is to examine one middle school in southeastern Wisconsin and evaluate how teachers perceive their role and preparedness for addressing the Black Lives Matter movement with their students. Racism has been prevalent in the United States for centuries, with an undeniable impact on education for Black youth through a variety of systems of oppression that are inflicted on marginalized communities by the dominant group (Whites in the U.S) as they utilize their privilege and power as a tool against the minority. This system of oppression has been persistent throughout the history of the United States, even though over the course of the last century there have been several civil rights movements aimed at decimating these systems (Malott & Schaeffle, 2015). These movements have made slow progress, however, Blacks are still living with a pervasive disadvantage.

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

The role of education for African Americans has varied over the last century. When African Americans were finally given the right to attend state supported schools, they were typically channeled toward training for manual labor or domestic service, which led to unequal education that was carried on for decades past the Civil War (Ladson-Billings, 2000). It can be argued that the effects of the early funneling of African Americans to manual labor and domestic service can still be seen today. This effect can be noted in the mentality of African Americans and other marginalized groups. African Americans note higher levels of hopelessness compared to their White counterparts which can be directly correlated to a lack of expectation that they will be afforded opportunities and benefits to 'get ahead'. Without the belief that one may find success, whether economic or otherwise, there can be a significant negative psychological impact. This impact can actually further contribute to the disparate outcomes and opportunity gap. No matter how small the opportunity, those who know they have one are more likely to be successful, academic or otherwise (Davis, 2015).

As the role of education continued to change from the Civil War era, *Brown vs Board of Education* became the next crucial moment, as it should have led to desegregation and improved academic outcomes for people of color. In fact, many believe that *Brown vs. Education* led to the dismantling of segregation, however, "contrary to *Brown vs Board of Education* 1954 decision, public schools are one of the first places young people experience discrimination" (Watson, 2016, p. 240). In reality several schools are more segregated now than in the past. As a result, minority students from low socioeconomic households still face the repercussions of color blind and racist policies.

As school segregation continued and permeated the housing market, the tax allocation

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

system increasingly affected schools populated with youth of color in adverse ways. The system lead to underfunded schools that promote racial achievement gaps as well as higher rates of school dropout and lowered rates of college attendance for youth of color. There has not been significant change in the policies that have been enacted by school leaders and government officials to offset policies that crippled communities of color and maintained the status quo of poverty. The lack of change, for example in the tax allocation system, is a prime example of the unchanging systematic racism which adversely affects access and opportunity, coupled with individual acts of racism which can converge to affect the physical, mental, and economic health of communities of color (Malott & Schaeffle, 2015).

Within schools, the impact of failed policies, both academic and those regarding social programs, is seen everyday through students who come to school lacking shelter, food, supplies, and the mental readiness needed. Ladson- Billings states that "...Prospective teachers may recognize that limited access to goods and services, poor health care facilities, uneven police and fire protection, and unsafe and dilapidated play grounds all work against students' willingness to participate in school tasks" (2000, p. 209). However, many educators do not know the appropriate manner in which to begin to combat the realities of their students. Many schools do not have the resources, knowledge, or focus to appropriately support these students.

Raible and Irizarry have extensively researched urban school districts, classroom management techniques which contribute to the school-to-pipeline phenomena, and the Latinization of American schools. They state that schools also punish the neediest children because in many schools there is a fixation with behavior management and social control that outweighs and overrides all other priorities and goals (2010). Instead of trying to develop a

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

response to support the child and their needs, often these students are pushed to the side- or even out- in the name of classroom management and through the idea that one cannot deter the whole. The idea that one cannot deter the whole is then used as justification to eject these students from classes, which may eventually lead to them exiting school altogether. Unfortunately, this practice is common and ignores the issues that cause the problematic behavior, which contributes to the continued marginalization of such students (Raible & Irizarry, 2010). Furthermore, many of the issues that impact student behavior are often associated with government policies that affect housing, social welfare programs, and resources available to students and their families. Until the root of such behaviors is addressed, there will continue to be an entire population that is not able to fulfill their potential in the name of classroom management.

Due to the tax-allocation system, under-resourced schools are typically do not exist in suburban communities. It cannot be denied that a zipcode is an incredibly important key to the academic rigor and potential that a future student may obtain. For example, "...an individual in poverty with a gifted child attending an under-resourced, low performing school may not know the steps to take to ensure cultivation of the child's gifts...this lack of information may lead to continued intergenerational poverty" (Davis, 2015, p. 332). Since the parent was not aware of additional resources, a student with the academic skills to potentially overcome existing obstacles may be overlooked and remain in a school that does not offer the academic rigor needed to excel and secure financial aid/scholarships and move onto college. Instead, this student may continue in an under-resourced school, graduate high school and remain within the community, without reaching their potential, and increasing the chance that the cycle of poverty will continue.

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

When data is analyzed it is evident that Black and Latino students make up an increased percentage of students who do not meet grade level expectations, academically or behaviorally. “Overwhelming data suggest that Black children perhaps more than any other group of students experience unique challenges in school that interrupt their learning opportunities and hinder their educational outcomes” (Howard, 2016, p. 102). This unique set of challenges leads to the opportunity gap that many African American students experience. Though many believe in the idea of meritocracy which focuses on the premise that if you work hard you will find success academically and economically, without the knowledge that those with power and privilege hold in terms of navigating the educational system, it is extremely difficult to pursue the mythical American Dream and advance to the next level.

Although many may believe that schools or more specifically teachers will recognize all students intelligence and potential for success, it is clear through research that this is not always the case and most often leaves out those who do not fit the mold of advanced curriculum courses. Furthermore, at times those courses can further alienate students as because class separation and lower number of minority representation, depending on the school setting may influence the environment and turn it to one of hostility or separation (Howard, 2016).

The impact of the lack of academic opportunity infiltrates all areas of student’s lives. Unfortunately, many of these students attend low achieving schools that do not offer the necessary resources and actually implement additional policies that may inhibit student success. Often times, these schools are increasing the amount of police officers on campus, and turning an academic setting into one that feels more like a prison- and in that vain supports the school-to-prison pipeline. According to the National Center of Education Statistics some 43% of

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

all US public schools, including 63% of middle and 64% of high schools, had police officers on their grounds. When students attend a school that feels like a jail, it may in fact lower their aspirations and as stated by civil rights advocates: “[They’re] concerned about the persistent police presence of conditioning young people to not questioning the persistent invasion of space and privacy...” (Howard, 2016, p. 104). The relationship between police and students may be further damaged by their role in an academic setting, by causing students to further distance themselves from an educational atmosphere, which will further hurt the students who are already at risk.

### **Teacher Education Programs and Multicultural Courses**

Nationwide, the United States is facing a massive teacher shortage that has been worsening over the last several years. Unfortunately, there are a variety of issues that negatively impact the interest of potential teacher candidates ranging from an increase in testing, teaching to the test, increase in responsibility simultaneous with a decrease in pay, time commitment, and inability to relate to their students which leads to heightened stress within the classroom for both teachers and students (Ukpokodu, 2004). However, when evaluating the demographics of teachers compared to their students today, there is a stark contrast. “If the national cohort of national pre-service teachers and teacher educators were to more accurately reflect U.S society’s demographics, approximately one in four individuals...would be of color, and one in five would come from a home where a language other than English is spoken” (Raible & Irizarry, 2010, p. 1200). Instead, the makeup of teachers nationwide overwhelmingly tends to be white women, many of which come from privileged financial backgrounds, and have not had exposure to the

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students lifestyle of the students they teach. If teachers were required to have such an opportunity to understand their students on a personal level, it would likely lead to improved educational outcomes for both teachers and students.

As stated by Ladson-Billings, teacher preparation programs are the biggest and most influential factor in the failure to appropriately teach candidates to effectively teach African American students. Very few schools require the integration needed to dismantle prejudices and misconceptions. An immersion into the lives of their students may begin to correct the stereotypes that white teachers undoubtedly bring with them into the classroom. White teachers are more likely to expect behavior problems, low academic achievement, and low motivation levels from African American students within their urban classrooms (Ukpokodu, 2004). Regrettably, the majority of teacher education programs do not require this type of immersion experience for teachers, which is detrimental to students who may feel ostracized, unimportant, and misunderstood, but also teachers as it may lead them to feeling overwhelmed and unprepared.

Race in the United States is an issue that instead of being addressed, is often avoided or swept under the rug in an effort to avoid potentially uncomfortable conversations (Graham, C. L., Payne, B., Thomas, S., Fox, D., & Sabinin, P. 2016). This same strategy is applied to the majority of teacher education programs, even those that offer courses such as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy or Culturally Diverse Learners. “Interestingly, although many educational leadership preparation programs have recognized the need to include the praxis of social justice in their curricula, the significance of race is often overlooked” (Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016, p. 4). According to a case study done by Ukpokodu, the lack of analyzing race in teacher candidate

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students programs and solely relying on one multi cultural class or student teaching experience can actually reinforce ideas of stereotypes (2004). It is incredibly important for all potential candidates to have opportunities to experience full immersion not only within a school, but a community. The teacher candidate must utilize multiple opportunities to research, examine and authentically experience culturally relevant pedagogy and instructional practices in order to be effective in their future classroom for *all* students.

Teacher education must be aggressive in its efforts to update curriculum and requirements to provide and mandate diversity field-based experiences that are integrated into pre service teachers' professional courses. Throughout a teacher education program, there should be numerous courses, immersion experiences (both school and community based). In order to do so, universities nationwide should undergo an updating of curriculum that best services not only teacher candidates but also their future students. As there have been increasing social, technological, cultural, and environmental changes that have impacted a multitude of professions, unfortunately teacher education has remained stagnant (Ukpokodu, 2004).

As stated above, many teacher preparation programs require one multicultural course offering, however, the focus of these courses tend to be impersonal stress the celebration of diversity and difference rather than oppression, and systematic inequalities. As teachers are released into the workforce, they are missing vital information that impacts their students daily lives, such as racism, and enter their classrooms without understanding inequality in the U.S, much less the intricate ways it infiltrates the educational system (Sleeter, 2017).

Christine Sleeter, an activist who has served as President of the National Association for Multicultural Education, completed a survey in the Southwest of the United States in which she

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students received responses from over 1,200 teachers about their perception of low academic achievement. When teachers were surveyed by her regarding culturally relevant pedagogy and their interpretation of lower tests scores for minority students, the majority of teachers referenced factors related to home life, whereas few noted school policy factors, or teaching related factors such as cultural match/relevancy, or poor teaching (2017). Although teachers may not be exposed to the reasons as to why students live in poverty, or do self work to understand the lifestyle of their student, they use them as justification for lower academic achievement rates, rather than reflect on their own practice and identify areas of improvement. Teachers and students cannot progress until teachers overcome deficit-thinking and hold high, rigorous expectations for all students.

As students experience prejudice and discrimination, it is unlikely that their teachers have shared in these experiences. Few candidates will enter the field with any exposure to oppression, racism, and systematic power relationships in the United States through their courses or own experiences. As a result, these teachers enter at a disadvantage before the school year has even begun.

### **Interacting with Diverse Students within the Classroom**

Even though there needs to a momentous adjustment and dismantling of current practices in teacher education programs, it is clear that teachers can, through their own initiative find success. Though they can't always identify with their students, this does not prevent them from creating inclusive classrooms where everyone's voice counts (Graham et al., 2016). In order to do so, teachers must on their own self direction and initiative, do the due diligence needed to

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students understand the forces working specifically against their minority students in order to offer their students a rigorous, caring, and racism free zone where students are not only comfortable, but willing to share their own experiences in order to create educational conversations for not only their teachers but also their peers. "Effective teaching of African American students almost always involved some recognition and attention to the ways that race and racism construct and constrict people's lives" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 207). Hopefully, methods may be adjusted for upcoming graduates of teacher preparation programs that require critical race theory and race analysis. However, for those already within their classroom, it is their responsibility to put forth effort into a potentially uncomfortable self-study so they are able to form authentic relationships with their students so they can truly understand the ways race and racism impact and construct people's' lives, rather than continue the status quo.

In order for this to occur, there must be a strong relationship formed between each student and the teacher; one that is based on a true understanding of each other and forged on trust and the ability of students to speak about their positive and negative experiences. "Schools [are] viewed as a logical place to engage in conversations and develop the skills necessary to navigate, disrupt, and dismantle oppressive institutions..." (Irizarry & Raible, 2011, p. 201). By taking initiative and working to understand their students and the systematic oppression facing them, teachers can begin to develop an environment within their classroom where all students will feel safe and respected which will allow barriers, from both the teacher and student, to be removed in order to provide a better understanding of each other.

Several qualitative studies indicated through interviews with parents, students themselves, and community members that a student's ability to connect with the school culture,

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students and specifically their teachers has a direct impact on their success. As stated by Howard, interactive teacher-child relationships are the most important dimensions of school climate for African American students (2001). Based on the fact that interactive student-teacher relationships are so integral to student success students, specifically African American students, these bonds are even more important when noted the implications these connections can have on a student's future: "a recent study found that school connectedness, 'defined as a student's feeling part of and cared for at school,' to be linked with lower levels of substance abuse, violence, suicide attempts, pregnancy, and emotional distress among young people" (Raible & Irizarry, 2010, p. 1202). Once a student is invested in the community, they typically find more academic success because they know the high expectations that have been set for them, which leads to not only academic achievement, but also lower displays of risk behaviors.

However, students cannot be expected to share their experiences if teachers are not able to be reflective and share their own. If professors are not willing to participate in a discussion it may potentially lead to feelings of vulnerability, they cannot expect their students to engage in similar practices. Educators must show their 'human' side to students who may not view them in such a way. It is important to allow oneself to show emotion with students and utilize it as an opportunity to model effective and healthy strategies when dealing with stressful, or vulnerable situations. In a study done that interviewed elementary students, they found that "Several students talked about how surprised they were to see a teacher who was willing to show such emotion and how that made them care more for her..." (Howard, 2001, p. 137). Further, the participants in this study then indicated a higher level of intrinsic motivation to please the teacher and make sure she was happy again. Regardless of whether a relationship is formed in an

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
academic setting or elsewhere, once trust is developed it can lead to a feeling of safety and love for both people, and an eagerness to ensure the other is happy.

If teachers are able to adopt this style, their classrooms will have a more familial feel that reaches outside of school walls. Teachers must have some knowledge of children's lives outside of their classrooms because without it they are unable to truly know their student's strengths (Ukpokodu, 2004). The explicit knowledge and compassion between teacher and student can set the stage for the deep and transformative change needed not only in their classroom but their school. "...At the heart of successful school leadership, particularly in urban settings, is a need for transformative leadership praxis centered on justice and race" (Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016, p. 4). If a teacher is able to set the tone as a transformative leader within the school, it can further influence their colleagues and leadership, which would not only impact their own classrooms but others within the building, thus providing a school-wide safe and accepting environment.

### **Black Lives Matter**

The Black Lives Matter movement began initially as a response to the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012. "Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of black people by police and vigilantes...Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, black undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all black lives along the gender spectrum." (Howard, 2016, p. 102 ). Although not all may see the connection between BLM and education, it is one that cannot be ignored for various reasons. For example, Dr. Heather Cherie Moore explains the intricate ways in which policing permeates

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students academic settings through the monitoring of culturally diverse students and the connections to police brutality that occurs outside of the classroom (2016). Although policing and education are seen as two separate ideas, to those who are marginalized, at the core they are both used as a system of control by those in power to wean out what they see as unfit as determined by their own experiences and cultural norms.

There may in fact be a significant amount of confusion in mainstream media in defining what BLM is and what it stands for. Instead of being viewed as an organization aimed at ensuring and protecting Black Lives, it has been overwhelmingly portrayed as a terrorist organization or one that is anti-white and uses violence. Many times, the media ties BLM to any and all anti-police brutality protests- both violent and nonviolent. According to Troutman and Jiménez, “This movement has been stolen and reshaped by white mainstream media so much that the story of how it came about has been swept under the rug” (2016, p. 19 ). In typical fashion, white media has taken an emblem of hope, power, and equity and corrupted it to signify a racist, separatist organization that seeks to divide rather unite.

To further aggravate the issues, mainstream media, such as CNN continues to show clips from these murders that display the victims in an unsavory light in order to distract the audience from the fact that those who are serving to protect repeatedly kill people of color at significantly higher rates than Whites. For example, between 2005 and 2012 Black boys and men were brutally killed by police officers three times as often as whites. (Staggers-Hakim, 2016). This can be demonstrated by “...CNN repeatedly showed a clip of [Mike] Brown allegedly assaulting a convenience store owner. These examples, in particular, put these young men on trial after their murders instead of questioning the motives of the shooters” (Moore, 2016, p. 75 ). These clips

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students continue to perpetrate the idea of Black people as thugs in a situation where they are the victim and alters the story to view the police as under attack, even when previous events were unrelated (and not against them).

Many may make the argument that all lives matter, however, this is done without an understanding of the systemic oppression, prejudice, and discrimination ingrained in society that manifests itself through the killings of unarmed Black people at the hands of police. Ironically these officer are supposed to protect American citizens. According to Alicia Garza, co founder of BLM, “#BlackLivesMatter doesn’t mean your life isn’t important- it means Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation” (Shieh, 2016, p. 134). However, there is little being done to combat the lies of those who are anti BLM movement in the media. As a result, a misinformed audience has an endless source of false information to continue to justify their own prejudice, discrimination, and racism.

According to Troutman and Jiménez “Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression” (2016, p. 19). One may wonder why this is considered a radical idea when the core is to value and protect an entire portion of the population who literally built a significant piece of the United States, including the White House, as slaves.

Due to the amount of technology and the unlimited access to news, updated in real time, Americans, regardless of age are continuously exposed to events that occur throughout the day. It cannot be ignored that school age children are constantly exposed to the tension between minority communities and police and may even witness or experience it throughout their own

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students lives. “Whether incidental or chronic, research demonstrates that stress from discrimination, such as the targeted killing of Blacks by police, and the violence exposure, seeing videos of police killings, can lead to mental health effects” (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p. 391). Adults, much less children are able to handle the effects or understand the multitude of ways that these events impact their everyday lives. Students cannot be expected to come to school and leave all their worries, concerns, fears, and suspicions at home. Instead, these students come to school ‘on guard’ at all times, until a trusting relationship is formed that is able to provide a safe and inclusive environment. Teachers, who are also exposed to these conflicts show up to work g potentially unaware of the impact these events may have on their perception of students.

Therefore, it cannot be ignored that all members within the school community are impacted to some degree by these events. This may be through a teacher who does not understand, and tells her students “All Lives Matter” or it may be a student who is acting out as a result of an unsettling fear. Either way, “Discussions of race and racism are absent from educational discourse even when our conceptions of race are more embedded and fixed than ever before” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 211). This needs to be changed to benefit and support students and teachers as they work through these situations as a school community, even though the events may not have happened within a geographically close place.

In Staggers- Hakim’s qualitative study with Black male school-age students, he found that participants indicated minimal conversation regarding police brutality at school. Despite the constant reports of police brutality as an event that was deserved, students are not given an opportunity to discuss their thoughts, feelings and emotions which can be extremely damaging on a person's psyche (2016). Though some may believe that BLM/police/race relation is a topic

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

inappropriate for school, the participants stated that “Although the focus of the conversation was heavy at times, the boys did acknowledge that it was cathartic to talk about either community violence and or the national police killings” (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p. 397). Obviously, this would demand an intense level of training, education, and workshops for staff to ensure these conversations are productive for all involved and can be used to help the community redevelop in a manner that will promote the success of all participants. “It is critical that parents, schools, and the nation acknowledge the trauma that Black youth and Black boys, in particular, experience in light of the national epidemic of police killings” (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p. 398). There is a long road ahead before teachers are able to appropriately lead a discussion in a supportive manner when dealing with such brutal, sensitive topics that are rooted in the race system of the United States. However, the first step forward is an acknowledgement by the educational system that Black (and Brown) youth are constantly fearing for their lives, and living with a sense of heightened trauma.

### **Psychological Impact of Racism Stress**

As a result of the continued attack on marginalized communities that has been consistent throughout the last century, there are clear negative impacts. “Researchers across various disciplines have noted the physical, emotional, and economic effects of racism on persons of color. Harmful effects include, but are not limited to, hypertension, altered cardiovascular functioning, poorer self-rated health status, multiple manifestations of psychological distress, depressive and anxiety symptoms, reduced mental well-being, reduced academic performance, and numerous symptoms associated with trauma” (Malott & Schaeffle, 2015, p. 361). These

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
traumas are not contained to one sector of a person's health, rather they infiltrate all sectors (e.g., mental, physical, emotional) which undoubtedly alters one's academic performance. These detrimental sources of burden continue to impact not only this generation but continuing generations as there is less hope to succeed. There is clear evidence that supports the multitude, pervasive problems that ensue when living with racism as a part of daily life.

The psychological and physical consequences of racism, combined with the increasing awareness and divide between police and minorities further elevates the level of fear that marginalized communities are living in. Furthermore, fear comprises a primary element of psychological distress, which may include the fear of moving forward, change, or lost resources which may fuel mental condition such as depression, anxiety, racism, and sexism (Davis, 2015). This fear is one that must be addressed within schools, at a minimum. Schools are one place where all students should be welcomed and feel safe. If this cannot be done, how can teachers expect their students to learn with the pressure of the unknown fear constantly on their mind.

Although this type of approach would take intensive training, including all school staff- administration, teachers, counselors, psychologists, support staff- it is one that can and should be done. "A trauma informed approach is an additional way to understand racism and the negative effects of racism through a contextual lens. The framework allows counselors to recognize historical and ongoing experiences of racism as trauma-inducing for persons of color" (Malott & Schaeffle, 2015, p. 362). By increasing staff's knowledge of the trauma inflicted as a result of racism, there may be an increase in student success as staff begins to develop an understanding of why certain behavior or academic outcomes are occurring and therefore develop the appropriate response to the root of the problem. For example, "Disruptive behaviors are not met

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students with removal from learning environments, suspensions, or expulsions, but are addressed through a community-centered and restorative justice approach of trying to understand root causes of scholars' behaviors and identifying workable approaches to support students' needs" (Howard, 2016, p. 107). As previously mentioned, the slow pushing out of students from school leads to wider spread problems for future generations. Rather than argue 'one cannot deter all' the focus should be identifying what the student may be lacking in basic human needs/rights, allocate resources to support the family, and put an even stronger emphasis on that particular child's success.

Racism poses an inherent threat to all communities of color. The health of these communities continues to go unnoticed or simply ignored and as a result a significant portion of the population is abandoned. "African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious, psychological distress, including sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness than Whites" (Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p. 391). In order to address this, communities must continue to find new ways to support these communities as they are under attack, specifically in this case in school. Unfortunately, therapy is not widely supported in many Black communities and as a result, many students suffer in silence without the support of family, friends, or those there to protect and support them. In order to avoid these traumatic experiences, school districts should offer ample mental health resources to students at the minimum, if not their family. It is clear that mental health is essential to student success and for these reasons must be taken seriously as schools begin to consider community based schools (Watson, 2016).

### **Benefits of Addressing BLM and Race Relations**

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

Although there are significant hurdles to overcome to move forward, there have been successful examples of schools and universities that implemented curriculum to support their students in trying times. According to Jacobs & Struyf, “Implementing integrated social-emotional guidance in practice is not that simple. Schools have finite resources in terms of personnel and time and there are many competing demands for these resource” (2015, p. 96). The job of researchers, teachers, students, and parents moving forward is to push forward in demanding these social/emotional concerns are addressed as minority students try to cope with the trauma of watching authority figures constantly discriminate against their loved ones as a result of their skin color.

Although there may be a significant amount of hesitance in broaching racial subjects, it is clear from recent studies that it can be done. A study done in St. Louis following the death of Mike Brown by a white policeman, provided clear examples of exemplar schools that responded to their students needs following this traumatic event. An exemplar school employed techniques such as proactively sending staff to conferences on social justice and equity to increase the conversation surrounding race and launch those conversations that make such a difference.

Following the death of Mike Brown, the superintendent as well as principals sent out a letter to parents and the surrounding community, laying out what they were going to do which included counseling services, community members participating in an open discussion, and the formation of a club devoted to positive social relations. These led to age appropriate responses within the elementary, middle, and high schools. For example, young students could make create a “heart for Ferguson”, middle school students could participate in all day experiential conversations on diversity and equality, and high school students who knew Mike Brown

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students received one on one counseling. Another example included an area school district in St. Louis that received a grant to address the mental health needs of children affected by the Ferguson crisis which is indicative of changing trends in responding to similar crisis' (Stiles et al., 2015).

Teachers have the ability to immerse themselves in their students lives to truly understand them- strengths and struggles- to provide the best support. All other policies, reforms, and funded programs will remain obsolete without the full commitment from the teachers and administrators. Irizarry & Raible found this to be true in their study evaluating exemplar teachers: "...Reform efforts will have only a minimal impact if the majority of teachers and administrators attempting to implement these programs remain culturally disconnected from the communities they serve" (201, p. 188). Although teacher education programs are not preparing candidates, it is possible to become an exemplary teacher nonetheless as shown by one who was identified by her own community in California. The experience that helped this particular teacher the most was living within the city where she taught. This experience allowed her the opportunity to work with young people, not only in the classroom, but in general in an effort to related to the students (Irizarry & Raible, 2017). If the initiative taken by this teacher can be instilled in teacher education programs nationwide, the ability of teachers to communicate effectively with their community would increase as they would become a part of it. The community, in an ideal world, could be one where all participants are pushing for the success of all and work together to find a solution for those who are struggling. If a teacher views a community as broken, it is not their job to 'fix it', it is their obligation to immerse themselves within to understand the strength that exists and utilize it to propel their students forward.

Although there is a significant discrepancy in the number of teachers who identify as a

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
minority when compared to the students being educated, “The characteristics that were described by students [of exemplary teachers] are not race specific, nor do they require teachers to be members of the same racial group as their students” (Howard, 2001, p. 147). Though there should be an effort to increase the number of teachers who represent minority students, the research done by Howard and Irizarry and Raible indicate that teachers are in charge of their own destiny and are able to reach through barriers to work with and learn from their students when they take initiative.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the fundamental basis of the present study. The review of literature showed how current disparities, not only in education, lead to disparate outcomes facing African American children today. Furthermore, it presented a wide range of evidence supporting the inadequacy of teacher preparation programs effectively equipping teacher candidates for work in an urban district. It outlined a clear correlation between a lack of immersion and community experiences in teacher preparation to struggles within the classroom that impact both teachers and their students. The literature also explained the moment that served as the impetus for the Black Lives Matter movement, how the movement has been characterized by the white media, and the importance of integrating its acknowledgement into schools.

The review of literature continually demonstrated a positive correlation between racism and physical, emotional, and mental distress (poor health), which may impact students of all ages in their quest for academic success. It also presented examples of successful integration of the BLM movement into the curriculum and the ways in which it can be utilized in an academic environment to create a trusting community within schools. The literature presented a variety of approaches that are developmentally appropriate to ensure that each child had the opportunity to understand and work through the events which fostered an authentic school-wide environment of respect and rapport. The next chapter will present the methodology and procedures of this chapter.

### **CH. III**

## **Methodology**

### **Overview**

The present study examined teachers' perceptions of how to address the Black Lives Matter movement with their students through qualitative interviews. This chapter provides an explanation of the steps taken throughout the process. The methodological design, settings and participants, instruments, and data analysis process are defined in this chapter.

### **Design**

This interview study utilized a semi-structured interview with follow up probes to gather and evaluate the thoughts of seven staff members within this specific school. The study consisted of five individual interviews, and one joint interview. The joint interview was agreed upon because Participants C and D shared they were participating in the study with each other, and requested to do so. They are well acquainted and comfortable discussing these topics together. Interviews were set up at a time that worked best for the participant. All participants were aware and agreed to recording the interview. Interviews were conducted on six different occasions within the school. Interviews took place in classrooms and personal offices within the building. Five of the seven interviews took place in the afternoon following classes, and two took place before school. Recorded interviews between the researcher and participants were used to gather information to answer the guiding research questions and allow teachers to opportunity to express themselves that would not be possible with a quantitative format. The interviews were recorded using the Voice Memo tool on the researcher's phone. These interviews were then

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students transcribed verbatim, segmented and coded.

### **Setting and Participants**

This study occurred at a middle school in a southeastern city in Wisconsin. This city's population is approximately 78,000, of which about 22% live in poverty. The demographics of the city are White 62%, Black 23%, and Latino 21%. The school district serves 20,000 students of which 65% receive free or reduced lunch. The school district demographics are 42% White, 29% Black, and 26% Latino. In this particular middle school student enrollment is 718 students of which: 38% are White, 31% are Black, and 26% are Latino. Of these 718 students 65% qualify for free or reduced lunch, 17% are classified as students with disabilities, and 8.8% are limited English proficient. These percentages are reflective of the district as a whole as well as other urban districts nationwide, which increases the validity of these results being consistent across the district and other similar urban districts nationwide.

The sample that was used in this study was a purposive sample from one school in Southeastern Wisconsin, which is also typical in nature. A purposive sample was used because the researcher selected specific people representative of the demographics of the school who worked at levels of teacher, instructional coach, and administrator. Furthermore, the participants selected offered a range of experience, between one and twenty six years. It is also a typical sampling because it reflects average teachers that do not present any atypical situations. This sample is appropriate because the teachers reflect national norms in terms of being a majority of white, female teachers. There are approximately 61 teachers or instructional staff working in this particular middle school.

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Carthage College. All participants signed informed consent forms. The participants in this study include seven staff members, four of which are teachers, one who is the instructional coach for the building, and two administrators. Four white females participated, one black female, one white male, and one black male. The staff members selected were sent individual emails inviting them to participate and stating that the interviews would center on incorporating social justice themes within the classroom. All participants agreed to participate. The participants had a varying level of experience: participant A worked as an educational assistant for 13 years and is in her fourth year of teaching, participant B taught for 10 years and has been an instructional coach for 3, participant C taught Headstart for 10 years and is in her second year teaching, participant D is in her fourth year of teaching, participant E is in his first year in an administrative role following 5 years teaching, participant F is in her 26th year teaching, and the final participant, G, is in his tenth year in an administrative role following teaching for 13 years. Of the seven participants, two are in their first year at this particular district but have worked in urban districts beforehand.

### **Instruments**

All seven interviews used a list of seven questions that were used to guide the interview, followed by probes by the researcher depending on the length or quality of the interviewee's response. All interviews started with the question "What interested you in becoming a teacher", in an effort to ease into the content and for the researcher to have an increased quality of information and understanding of the participants motivation and background. The following questions were utilized in all semi-structured interviews:

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

1. What interested you in becoming a teacher?
2. How do you involve current events into your classroom?
3. How do current events such as police/race relations impact your classroom?
4. What is your knowledge of the Black Lives Matter movement?
5. How do you think the Black Lives Matter movement impacts your students?
6. How should schools address student concerns with current events?
7. What would you (teachers) need to address Black Lives Matter in their classroom?

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher merged the interview transcriptions so responses to each question were grouped in the corresponding sequence. This process was done by printing one question and the corresponding answers at a time to group all answers together. The researcher then segmented and coded the question and would then move onto the next question. The transcribed interviews were read five different days to find or identify major themes or differences.

The researcher identified segments and assigned codes in the left margin. The codes were assigned to segments that related directly to the guiding research questions- how do police/race relations impact students and therefore the classrooms and how should teachers be addressing Black Lives Matter in their classrooms. The coded segments were compiled onto a list to look for commonalities or overlapping codes that could potentially be combined. The researcher then grouped codes that had similarities or addressed similar concerns/thoughts to develop categories. As the units to exemplify the codes were found the researcher then again checked to ensure

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students codes were accurate. The results section was reviewed by three professors at the researcher's university for additional assessment of the assigned codes and categories, as well as two colleagues to ensure they were reflective and factually representative of the interviews.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

#### **Overview**

The purpose of the present research was to understand teachers' perceptions on how to address the Black Lives Matter movement with their students using a qualitative interview study. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, segmented, and coded to formulate categories. The results of the process are summarized in Table 1, and an analysis of the results followings. The analysis provided insights into educator's current awareness of BLM movement, their hesitance in approaching the topics, resources they would need to move forward, and perceptions of their students.

#### **Analysis of the Results**

The results from the interviews with seven staff members presented a significant amount of information, values, opinions, and beliefs to analyze. Since the interviews were semi-structured, each interview produced different topics and specific areas of concern or knowledge from the participants. However, there were many commonalities that were noticed through the analysis process that each interviewee spoke about. There were thirteen categories as a result which included: lack of confidence in approaching racial or emotionally-sensitive issues, ability/need to stay neutral, personal experience and bias, lack of time due to the importance and pressure of academic preparation, social/emotional needs, safe and welcoming school climate, creating a divide, Black Lives Matter, resources needed by teachers to progress, implementation in the classroom, cultural understanding and awareness, perceptions of education and authority,

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students and student perspective and experience.

| <b>Table 1<br/>Results</b>   |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Category</b>  | <b>Codes included in this category</b>                                  | <b>Units that exemplify this category</b>  |
| Lack of confidence in approaching racial or emotionally-sensitive issues | apprehension, uncomfortable, changing role, teacher preparation, engage | <p><i>“I can understand how teachers might be a little nervous, especially a white teacher and they are saying something they don’t want to be offensive, they don’t, so I feel like it may come to where they are uncomfortable”</i></p> <p><i>“But I also don’t think then, if I think about school I don’t think that they prepare us to handle the emotional needs of our students, especially now. I think about the emotional needs of my students when I first started 14 years ago and it was nowhere near”</i></p> <p><i>“I think we stay away from that, maybe because it makes people uncomfortable, um, and maybe because a lot of people did not go into teaching to deal with emotions...that’s like the guidance counselor’s job”</i></p> <p><i>“I would say I think it’s you know being a teacher, you’re afraid to touch certain subjects because you don’t know who agrees and who disagrees and where it will be heated and I think it is important to just kinda of barrel through that and talk about it even if it is uncomfortable because you’re not going to get through that barrier if you don’t like start to break it down”</i></p> <p><i>“Um, I think, I think my experience just as a social studies teacher helps that, and maybe my knowledge of global issues, because that’s something I’ve always been interested in and politics has been something I’ve studied for years. Um, as opposed to someone maybe in math or science who doesn’t know how to engage in, in debate or policy issues which, which could be um, disruptive to many people.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yea, um we did have one class, um, that, that talked about it. It was like a cultural education or I mean it’s been awhile so I can’t exactly remember, I remember it, the focus of the class ended up being a lot about student sexuality and dealing with like LGBTQ group and, and um, I think that might of come from the professor of that class was gay himself, so I think that was kinda his focus. He was an African American gay man, so, so he tried to teach as much from those perspectives as he could. I think</i></p> |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|                                     |  |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
|                                     |  | <p><i>um, especially, as the public school university that I went to it was kinda accepted that, that this is something you can do. But I think you're going to have issues with, um, religion, and a lot of religious institutions in the acceptance of that, um and knowing that a lot of teachers are trained at institutions that have a religious perspective, whether it be Carthage, Marquette, in the area as opposed to Parkside or UWM, um, leads to difference of opinions by the educator themselves on what they should be taught dealing with, um, but yea, I definitely think an education program needs something like that."</i></p>  |
| <p>Ability/need to stay neutral</p> | <p>maintain neutrality, show both perspectives, opinion, unbiased, politics, direct impact</p> | <p><i>"I think it's really important when it comes to current events to maintain a very neutral ground, because I don't feel anything is neutral in our world anymore, and I don't want kids to feel a certain way or know my beliefs"</i></p> <p><i>"I mean I think that we have to present both sides of the story, and stay very neutral especially with this past election to stay this way especially when people do come in angry, um, but I think we have to so that we respect everybody because there may be students whose parents think differently and the last thing we want to do is um, go against what their parents beliefs are"</i></p> <p><i>"Now, and, and nothing they do is wrong or what they do is justified, when, when everything needs to kind of be split down the middle and I think that's the teacher's role to show both perspectives as well as, as the facts and let students develop their own ideas as to whether they support or go against"</i></p> <p><i>"I also as an educator didn't feel like if I have a specific viewpoint that's going to be different than a student, I didn't want to alienate that student and feel like they, they couldn't share their idea because Mr. Paulson's idea is different, so when we do, and I do tell my opinion, I try to keep it as vanilla as possible and also say, "I'm not saying that my opinion is right or wrong, this is that everyone is entitled to their own opinion and my opinion might change based on things that happen,""</i></p> <p><i>"Um, I think anytime you have teachers, teachers dealing with political issues they have to be very careful. Uh, because of the different viewpoints that you're going to have; parents complain on either end, whether they're too conservative or too liberal. And, and I think that teachers need to be able to present issues but keep their opinions out of it and allow students to voice their opinions to a certain extent"</i></p> |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|                                     |  |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
|                                     |  | <p><i>“So when something impacts you very directly, it’s hard to be um, unbiased on the situation, so even when dealing with Act 10, kids would always be like ‘Oh, you’re against it because you’re a teacher,’ they’re taking that perception for me when I even when teaching that with them, would have to be very unbiased, just facts, and let them develop their own opinions. So just like I said, I think it comes from the classes I took and the groups I engaged in but also my belief, that I personally do not want to persuade my students, because I don’t believe that is my job as an educator. Um, and I think it’s more important for me to have them develop their own opinions and their own ideas because they’re going to be doing that their whole life”</i></p>  |
| <p>Personal experience and bias</p> | <p>unaware, privilege, middle class, fear, color blind, white teacher, diverse demographic</p> | <p><i>“Well, I don’t really think about the race. For me, I really don’t look at somebody’s skin color and that’s the same thing as looking at someone’s hair to me”</i></p> <p><i>“I think our own personal beliefs help drive whether, help drive whether or not we’re going to have those conversations. So you may have those teachers who have been raised or they live in um, they’ve been raised not to talk about things just to kind of ignore them but I think um, there are some teachers who would sit and talk about it”</i></p> <p><i>“I think teachers might be afraid to talk about things, and/or say the wrong thing. Not working in a diverse demographic before coming here, um, it’s probably if I were to use a word I might say it may have been easier to talk about things because many of those students didn’t ever deal with some of the situations that are happening”</i></p> <p><i>“Yea, so I definitely think that they, they feel what is felt around them, so I think that being a teacher, you know, being very privileged and you know, no matter what you’ve seen you know you have this privilege and you can just feel a lot of fear, and feeling a lot of worry and how much the weight of what is going on in current events weighs on them”</i></p> <p><i>“I also believe that teacher’s perceptions of who her or his students are impacts how they teach, and what they expect from their students, so yea, I believe it makes a significant difference.”</i></p> <p><i>“No, because a lot of them, you think about a lot of the teachers here, I’m pretty sure, well um, they come from middle class, majority of the teachers here. And they</i></p> |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|   |   | <p><i>dealing with kids with a, a financial problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“Okay, well we had our family night, 7th grade family night, and they had extra pizza and water, so a couple parents went out with 10, 5, 15 bottles of water, boxes of pizza, and a couple of teachers were like ‘I know they get SST’ and ‘I know they do this...so why they, why they taking all this food?’. Well we don’t know about they situation at the house. Maybe they need that water....let them take it.”</i></p>  |
| Lack of time due to the importance and pressure of academic preparation | loss of instructional time, collaboration, Not equipped, academic preparation       | <p><i>“I think I would probably want to work with my team to make sure that what I was presenting wasn’t one way or another but was more factual”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t know, I think there are people that would for sure want to do that as well but I think that people are also afraid to touch those really heated subjects, or to lose instructional time, or you know to get off track“</i></p> <p><i>“Yeah I think that as teachers we get really caught up in oh we have to get through this and get through this but you’re actually teaching them a bigger lesson by stopping and letting them talk and teaching them coping skills, social skills. What would happen if this happened, what would happen if that happens. So I wish there was more time to do that“</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you come in upset about something, you’re now a day behind where I need you to be by the end of the year and I think that’s the mentality that teachers have. I’m not saying it’s a good or bad mentality, I just think that as teachers we think our job is to get them academically prepared. I hear it all the time ‘well they won’t be ready for high school’ ...okay, they’re 12”</i></p> <p><i>“I think a lot of times we’re like “shh it’s not the time, shh it’s not the time” or “don’t talk about that now” or “that’s not appropriate right now” well then when is the time?”</i></p> <p><i>“I didn’t have the time to teach them proper ways to engage in civic debate without getting upset, or it going in a different route.”</i></p> |
| Social/Emotional Needs  | lifelong skills, coping, processing, respecting viewpoints, listening to understand | <p><i>“But I would also like to see acceptance classes and/or classes where kids, not necessarily academic classes, but preparing students emotionally, um, I mean would be in my perfect world they would take some sort of class to handle their emotions or an outlet in order for them to communicate frustrations”</i></p>   |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|                                   |  |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
|                                   |  | <p><i>“And when one student got upset it 9 times out of 10 caused a big fight. So we had to get all parties calming down, we had to get them to realize that it’s okay to ask questions, it’s okay if you don’t feel the same as someone else but what makes it better is listening to someone else and respecting eachothers viewpoints”</i></p> <p><i>“I think we have to do a lot of listening, I think you have to really hear where everyone is coming from and teaching them to listen is really important because you are teaching them a skill that they don’t even realize is like one of the biggest skills”</i></p> <p><i>“I think that that the social emotional piece is so important and without teaching that or how to cope with social and emotional situations that you won’t ever get to content. So it’s a lot of my teaching style that focuses on that. How can I make you okay so you can at least focus on that, so you can understand or even care about it because you may have other things going on in your life that are hard”</i></p> <p><i>“Well it’s teaching them to investigate further into things they really care about and I think that’s really important to um, just teaching them that you’re allowed to have and view and think the way that you think but you have to have stuff to back it up and so I guess that’s just, it’s just another one of those lifelong skills that we don’t always push in school, that I think is really important. Believe what you want to believe but have information to back it up with”</i></p> <p><i>“The problem is that people get so heated that they’re afraid to have those conversations, but again it goes back to teaching kids how to have a, a discussion even if you disagree in an appropriate manner it’s okay to discuss things that you may not agree on but we’re not going to come up with answers and we’re not going to change things unless we talk about it.</i></p> |
| Safe and welcoming school climate | Acceptance, Diversity, Safe place, Open-mindedness | <p><i>“I am thinking of our classrooms here and I wouldn’t want anyone to feel like they one, couldn’t share because that’s not the type of community I want to build in my classroom, or two, like someone was threatened in a specific way, I would never want that”</i></p> <p><i>“Well I think that if I were thinking of political, current events right now, it would be politically driven, um, so I think acceptance and diversity would be like the hot topic right now if I were to turn to the media but I don’t feel like</i></p>  |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|                   |   |  |
|-------------------|---|--|
|                   |   | <p><i>the media is a safe haven for information either. Very disappointed in media, especially like things I see on Facebook, because I feel like everyone thinks that what they read is true so I think if I were to do one thing right now, it would be about diversity and acceptance because I feel like that is the hot topic today but I also feel like the media does a job of dividing the world."</i></p> <p><i>"I guess in all cases I have to model what I expect them to do, I have to be open minded and realize that my way is not always the best way"</i></p> <p><i>"It's really trying to always encourage them to be open minded and not judging if anyone is different, but also always making sure they realize they are safe in whatever way that is scaring them.</i></p> <p><i>"I think if we started here in a very safe place it would probably help conversations out there which is a very unsafe place"</i></p> <p><i>"Even just those little three minute conversations are awesome because it changes your thinking and it lets you like look into you know other people's lives and how that has molded them"</i></p> <p><i>"It isn't truly just the Black Lives Matter, its like, its like, all hatred of any group. The hatred of LGBT, it's the hatred of the, the race, the hatred of the Muslims, it's, it's all of that. You know that needs to be brought up in a way that is more, more open-minded and understanding"</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes, like it's not that bad you just need to know the kids you dealing with and where they came from. But I would still want someone from outside who really studied it and you know, can uh, really lay it out and get that 'wow' effect from them, like 'Wow, I didn't know that.' But they gotta be open-minded...if they're not open minded, you know it's really not going to matter..."</i></p> |
| Creating a divide | Divide, argument, impressionable, ability of students to participate respectfully | <p><i>"I do feel that media is biased completely in one direction or the other um, and I wouldn't want to necessarily create a divide in my classroom"</i></p> <p><i>"I guess, probably, because it affects, it affects the children. I think, I think sometimes not talking about it leads into that fear to be greater. Um, but I'm not sure the best way to lead into it. Because sometimes, it just adds more tension, and I don't know if the attention that it always gets is positive. So I guess, if it's in a way that brings people back together, then I guess 100% I'm for it.</i></p>   |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|                    |   |   |
|--------------------|---|---|
|                    |   | <p><i>If it's in a way that almost creates that divide bigger, and makes it more one side against another, then I'm definitely not for it"</i></p> <p><i>"I just tried to keep the opinion part out of it. Um, whether people think this is right or wrong, because I didn't want, we have such a diverse view and different demographics in the classroom, I didn't want there to be an argument"</i></p> <p><i>"I mean obviously, it, it depends on the student and their ability to um, comprehend and take those perspectives, with, without being defensive or, or upset that someone is different or saying that they're wrong, which is a lot of students just believe that you're saying that I'm wrong and what I believe is not right and then it becomes a personal attack as opposed to, I have nothing against you, this is just how I feel about it. Now there were two students, both who are very intelligent, that seem to engage in conversation with each other, um, and, and were amicable. Whereas you had other students who would just shout things that were, 'if you don't support BLM you're racist' which I don't believe is true. Or 'if you support BLM, you're a criminal' which is also not true so you have that part of it, which comes with middle school, which comes with being nieve, which comes with all types of different factors, but I think that's the part that you have to eliminate as quickly as possible. Um, I just don't think that a lot of students where they're at this age can engage in that, um, without it getting to be a personal attack."</i></p> <p><i>"Um, I think middle school is kind of a tough age to deal, to deal with that, at that point. Because their brain is so, so malleable and influenced by, by people around them"</i></p> <p><i>"Yea, I mean again, our kids are so impressionable I mean, they're looking for history, they don't know a lot of history, where all lot of Black people come from over the years, they don't, they don't understand that history so when that movement, they kinda jump on it, even when like you talk to the guys, like the athletes like Colin Kaepernick, those guys, I mean our kids don't have leaders, like some of our leaders, so when guys make statements like that, our kids are looking to follow people, their movement."</i></p> |
| Black Lives Matter | BLM, All Lives Matter, racist organization, minimal awareness, involvement, comparing student's and teacher's | <p><i>"It's one of those like you want to teach them like police are good people they're here for you, and at the same time understanding I've never had a family member or a loved one or anyone targeted or injured or whatever by someone in authority like that"</i></p>  |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|  |             |  |
|--|-------------|--|
|  | experiences | <p><i>“I don’t, I don’t know how Black Lives Matter impacts our students, I think it depends on their home life and what they hear at home. Um, because I don’t see anyone talking about it in school so I think our students are gathering their information from either a, home environment and/or, whatever they see on television”</i></p> <p><i>“Not much, you know I hear about it and I think that there is some truth in it, some things in certain areas where people believe they don’t matter, but you know I’m just someone, I embrace, I mean All Lives Matter, to me, I mean it just, it’s just the way it is. When we see the news, what we see in the news, of course people are going to riot on that, that they’re not being fair to Black people, you know those movements kinda take over, when times happen, but when things aren’t happening I think that’s when we can build, we’re not always focusing on some areas when things happen. I mean focusing on BLM or All Lives Matter all the time, the movement, the movement would be great, would be better to me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Um, so how do they promote a group that’s passionate about their culture but also promote safety and recognition of what authority does so I think it’s, it’s difficult“</i></p> <p><i>“My knowledge of the BLM, um, it was organized, I believe based on Trayvon’s incident, um, I don’t think it’s a racist organization, because some people think it’s a racist organization, it’s an organization to let us, to open up people’s eyes to what’s going on, um, that racism is still alive and strong and the difference for if an African American got stopped versus a person, a Caucasian gets stopped, um what would happen....you know, like the guy who was selling cigarettes...he was out selling cigarettes, that was his hustle, and then he got killed because of that, they choked him. Um, just basically to me, it’s informing things that’s going on, that really doesn’t get out, you know....so that’s one of my, uh, I get a lot from Facebook of BLM”</i></p> <p><i>“So Black Lives Matter to me is just a big recognition, it’s almost like a nod to a culture that has been like ignored and pushed back and told that it doesn’t matter. So again I think that it’s hard as a middle class white person to stop and take a look at yourself”</i></p> <p><i>“I think it would really have to be a situation that hit close to home that would have to relate to me personally. Um, because I feel like a lot of those movements and the people</i></p> |
|--|-------------|--|

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  |  | <p><i>involved have had issues with the police or have had relatives involved or connections that, that have had their rights violated by the police and that personally, as, as a white male that's, that doesn't usually occur especially where I live in the suburbs. As opposed to inner city, being a minority. So I think it would really have to hit home to me to be a close friend or a direct relative to have me get involved in something like that"</i></p> <p><i>"I, I think the majority of non-minorities view the police as somebody who is there to protect them and a lot of minority students who have had issues relating to them or their families with the police kinda view it as a disturbance to their lifestyle. Um, so I think it changes their perception of how they view the world around them and who is keeping them safe and protecting them, opposed to myself"</i></p> <p><i>"So I, I believe everything is considered political because of the way people spin it. Um, people don't have information regarding it and now some Black Lives Matter groups have acting differently than others. I don't think there is one coherent movement, I think there is a lot of sub-movements within it."</i></p> <p><i>"I think, I think teachers should take time to look into it, what's in the news, what's going on. Try to talk to kids, like yea those are unfortunate situations but at the end of the day ALM, I mean black people, white people, whoever, I mean ALM, I think that teachers do need to kinda understand that certain aspect because it is in the news and we do kinda have a, our population who kinda follow that news and are involved in that movement so they should know a little bit about it. So I think our staff members should make themselves aware of the situation"</i></p> |
| Resources needed by teachers to progress | community advocates, discussion, understanding before teaching, professional development, effective and efficient, school district | <p><i>"Well I think first of all, I think we need some speakers from the community brought in. From, you know, maybe sharing what it actually is that it means for Black Lives Matter and how Black Lives Matter isn't really against white lives matter, that it's for being treated equal and being treated with the same amount of respect and that that's where they're feeling the lack is"</i></p> <p><i>"I think it's our district's job to bring our teachers in and give them more than a day or just a couple of hours of this kind of training, I mean I think, I think this is major stuff, if we're going to move our district, or even our school forward I think our teachers and our parents and our students kinda gotta be on the same page. You know not every time they're going to be but if we can get them on</i></p>  |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p><i>the same page majority of the time, than we can create some great relationships between teachers, students and parents. But I think it's our district's, our district has to put more training, more emphasis on training people, you know, not a couple of hours, not a day, you know however long it takes for us to figure out how this thing works."</i></p> <p><i>"I would say that, that school districts should put into place the, the idea of this discourse can occur but it needs to occur in a certain way and it's the teacher's responsibility to have information about it and if it becomes political, then, then it needs to top. But, but I don't see how it's feasible because I don't know what the next issue is going to be in a month. Maybe BLM comes back to to the forefront, maybe, maybe some other issue comes up with you know social programs, or welfare, that you know we don't know what they're going to do, so how are we going to train teachers to be able to address it as quickly as it needs to be addressed."</i></p> <p><i>"So we need to bring in some community people in first, to get some like, honest, and open minded discussion going, and then maybe it would be nice to have some support and then in the morning when we have our announcements, that maybe there's a 10 minute time when we can have an open discussion on a question of the day, something that relates to the community, that relates to the people, and then that theme can be carried over"</i></p> <p><i>"I think the other thing, um, there's a book called Discussion as a Way of Teaching which is very good at how to integrate different types of discussion into the classroom. Um, I think that would be something that would be very good for teachers to understand especially if they're going to try to do current events issues that might be more hot button and, and um political, then they should look into that. Getting the information, the factual information, for themselves first, then they know it forwards and backwards before engaging is the most important part."</i></p> <p><i>"I, I think the first thing that teachers need to understand it themselves. I mean you can't teach math without knowing math, you can't teach an issue like BLM or immigration, or you know, any tax/financial policies without knowing it yourself, so the teacher first would have to do their own research or be educated on the topic themselves before going forward with it. Because if they, if they don't know it they can't put down those potential personal attacks or misinformation that is put out there from, from either side or either agenda and can't keep</i></p> |
|--|---|

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|                                 |  |  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
|                                 |  | <p><i>everything factual”</i></p> <p><i>“Yea, I mean I think with our district, where we are should address those things, because I mean it’s kinda a big deal, it is a big deal to the people who live here. People who live here, their students are going to school here so I think our district should address it”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m more just a believer that you can tell people what to do but if you don’t give them that training, I mean, what are we doing if teachers aren’t trained or what about culturally responsive education, or classes, or lessons or whatever, but if teachers aren’t being trained or being allowed to really delve into the culturally responsive stuff, I mean just being able to ask questions and not being judged about, if you don’t know...you don’t know. You gotta ask somebody so you can ask questions and not be judged about, well they didn’t know this, yea that’s why they’re asking for help, to help our kids. So that’s the kinda person I am, like in different situations, we gotta get down to the meat of it, people always talk about there’s an elephant in the room, I mean let’s get it out, I mean, people don’t know.”</i></p> <p><i>“We could sit down and brainstorm and do an assembly on certain things, bring people into speak but I think that if that’s what they want to do, teaches in the classroom, then we need to brainstorm ideas that are going to benefit our school. So I think if a group of teachers, want to get together and do things like that, talk about BLM, I think, do some research, see what we can bring in to talk to our kids and our classrooms and just get themselves involved in what’s going on.”</i></p> |
| Implementation in the Classroom | student interest, connect to content, teacher driven | <p><i>“So like, uh, immigration. We looked at it from the European standpoint from the Syrian refugees, and then you make a connection to US Immigration policies and how it’s, it’s more relatable to kids in what they’re actually experiencing in the classroom. Or, um, write a story from the perspective of an immigrant. You’re coming to the US and so on and so forth. Um, so whenever I see there’s a, a current event issue that’s related to the topic being taught I try to bridge that connection and make that”</i></p> <p><i>“I think that it needs to be more teacher driven and teachers need to make or understand that the connections between current events makes the content relevant to the teacher, or excuse me, to the student”</i></p> <p><i>“Uh, yeah, mostly, mostly, in the enrichment classes we</i></p>   |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|                                      |   |  |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
|                                      |   | <p><i>do close reads on issues like should we stand for the pledge of allegiance, or related to the Colin Kaepernick sports things. We would do things like also, I was civic minded um, we went through, um, essentially the Bill of Rights and I gave them scenarios”</i></p> <p><i>“So in February we did um, Black History month, so we went to the movie to see Hidden Figures and then we came back I had my students to do um, research on a particular, on particular African Americans, so, so here is some of the stuff they did. So I don’t know if you want to see....Frederick Douglas, Rosa Parks, E.B Debois, I mean some of these people they never heard of and then um, like Colin Powell and then um Langston Hughes”</i></p> <p><i>“The intention in class was just to read the poem and then use it as an anchor text for something else and it turned into kids asking questions and then, you know, about these very big issues and um, we ended up spending 30 minutes in class just talking about it and letting them discuss it and it was the best class I’ve ever had, I think in the whole time I have taught here. And um, it’s usually a very rough class but um they were so passionate about what they were talking about that I just, we couldn’t stop and um they were amazing. It was such good conversation”</i></p> <p><i>“Well, in the past, I have told people you know, like growing up in the hip hop age, when I started, a lot of kids think they know a lot about music, so we did a lot of things with music, we did a lot of things, myself, when I was a teacher, the first way I started my class was always a section called current events and um, what did you learn overnight or something like that, so the first 5 minutes of my class I would always put up a current event and things, good news bad news that you have for me, so...that kinda stuff.”</i></p> |
| Cultural Understanding and Awareness | Black culture, Black history, roots, role models, | <p><i>“Um, well you know I have a high level of African American boys but I never really talked to them about that....stuff like BLM. But next year I wanted to do different Black organizations, like BLM, NAACP, Voter’s Rights, they need to know all that and like another one they Would be interested in I think is the Brown vs. Education, they need to know where we stood back in the day versus where we stand now. You know, because like, you know there used to be a time where we couldn’t even come to this public school, it was against the law, it was against the law for us to know how to read, and they was, um, surprised that we would get killed, as an African American, if you was a Black person you would get killed for knowing how to read.”</i></p>   |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | <p><i>“I, I feel some of the parents here are, are....I’m not going to say racist, just ignorant of other cultures, and they’re scared to step out and learn. I can give you an example just here in the school.....the day, the first day of Black history month I came with a flag and I was silly, I was running up and down the hall with the flag like I was in the Olympics, and people was like ‘What flag is that?’ and I went in the office and they was like ‘What flag is that?’ and I said ‘Ya’ll don’t know what flag this is’ and they was like ‘no’ and I said ‘this is the African American flag’ and they was like ‘ohh’. And we was in a meeting, a 7th grade meeting and we was talking about doing stuff with the Black history, and I mentioned the African American flag and somebody, I can’t remember who, was like ‘Ya’ll got a flag? What about the white people?’ There your flag right there (pointed to U.S flag). You know? So you know, some of us here, are not knowledgeable about the Black history so that’s why I put the Black history stuff out there, you know, and kids have stopped and looked and said ‘I didn’t know this, I didn’t know that’...mhmmm...so”</i></p> <p><i>“Well, we could have a Black history program, or it could be more into the social studies, you know. I don’t know if they even have a section just for the Black history month, you know because, a lot of people don’t realize that slaves built the White House. A lot of people don’t know that, for free, a lot of people don’t know. Slaves built America and people don’t want to realize they did this for free, you know. We came over here by force, we didn’t want to come, but, the Africans didn’t want to come, they wanted to stay with their families, you know. So the kids need to know that, when did slavery start 1600’s, how long did it last, close to 1900’s, you know, almost 3-400 years we was, we was in slavery. And they need to know that we’re not all, uh, that not all Caucasians were bad, there were some good Caucasians. They need to know this.”</i></p> <p><i>“So, so we need to have a program, we need to set aside, educate the teachers so they can educate the kids. These kids need to know where they come from. We ‘bout the only race that don’t know really where we came from, you know, everybody started from Africa, but where did we go after Africa, nobody knows. You know, I don’t even know”</i></p> <p><i>“I, I know when I walked in I was surprised, looked around, I ain’t see any teachers look like me, I was like, what’s what’s going on....you know, um, some of the stories I heard, why teachers left. But um, I gotta let my people know what is expected and they have to know that we gotta do 10 times better than the next person, you</i></p> |
|--|--|--|

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  |  | <p><i>know.....um, especially the African American boys, they gotta know that the world is against um, you know in my eyes the world is against them, you fear for their lives. You just walk down the street and you never know what might happen to that boy.”</i></p> <p><i>“First of all I think some of the teachers might need to take a course in Black culture or Black history. They need to know first, before they can teach. Um, a lot of people don’t know we have a Black Holocaust in Milwaukee, a museum that you can visit. Um, to learn some things, um, or as we learn, we could, we could do maybe one of the family nights in February we could do, instead of global, we do Black history global, you know. Just something different, that’s more informing. Because if some of the people find out what we went through, they might be shocked.”</i></p> <p><i>“I just think they gotta bring in families who’ve been through some traumatic situations, or families who live in the area and interact with the police and teachers you know just, we got kids who are going through a lot of stuff here and some of our teachers might not know, you know I don’t even know.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some people didn’t grow up in an urban area and they’re working in an urban area. Do they want to be here, I think they want to be here or they wouldn’t be here. I mean they can probably find somewhere else to teach but they’re here, so let’s educate them, let’s help them out and give them access to things that will help them in their classroom”</i></p> <p><i>“Well I use for like the Voter’s Rights, um, how important it is to vote and what people went through for us to have the right to vote. I want them to understand that, that it was a lot of people that died for our rights to vote, so when it’s time to vote you need to get out and vote, um, whoever you like, you need to vote and it’s um important for us, because we can look at the President we have now you know, um, if everyone would have gone out to vote, or if they wouldn’t have changed these different laws, you know, one of the laws was, you have to have an ID, and when I first started voting all you had to do was have an address with your name on it, and you could vote and now they want a picture ID. You know, you either got your state ID or your driver’s license or something with a picture, um, so I think that’s messing with the voting. A lot of people don’t have ID’s and they can’t afford to get ID’s, so....”</i></p> |
|--|--|---|

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | <p><i>"We don't acknowledge that, we don't, we have a melting pot here, I came from no melting, it was a melting pot, but everybody was white, it we really dug into people's culture, sure we could get there but here I look at the diversity and we do nothing to celebrate our diversity so really what are we doing to communicate to our parents, what are we communicating that we have done for cultural acceptance because I'll hear kids call each other , ya know, whatever in the classroom, or all sorts of derogatory terms and I just don't think we don't do a good job promoting, so I almost feel like there does needs to be someone in charge of, is it culture promotion, it sounds weird to me but a cultural coordinator...?"</i></p>   |
| Perceptions of Education and Authority | authority figures, protection versus punishment, value of education, building relationships, understanding, bridging the gap | <p><i>"We as administrators, kinda gotta be that bridge because you, you count on the police so much, we just count on the police so much in our everyday life. And sometimes our kids and their families will be, or in our urban neighborhoods, they don't trust the police. And so myself kinda growing up in those situations I understand that why they don't trust them, but we still gotta trust them and hope that they're going to do their job in the best interest for our students, our families, and even our school because we call the police, every once in awhile we call the police, so we have to understand, I have to understand that they're going to do what's best for our students. I do sometimes, I feel like that bridge between our police officers and our students and their families sometimes"</i></p> <p><i>"Um, I don't see it touching those issues, but yea, I, I think that if it's general, because I don't think that issue's going away in the next 20 years. Um, that, that it could be discussed and teachers probably should be trained, um, on how to deal with the perception of education from different perspectives."</i></p> <p><i>"I just think, that again, being in that situation you gotta be fair. And talking to police officers, again, I think that's their whole mindset, you gotta be fair, and in each situation, each situation, is different, there's no cure for every situation because they're all different situations you know, it may be similar, but there's no one way to cure all these different situations, so I just think being fair with my kids and just understanding each situation."</i></p> <p><i>"I also think it impacts how they view authority, just in general. So when they come to a school and they might see that every teacher in the building is white but half the building is African American and the majority of police officers in the U.S, this is guessing, I'm just guessing, are white, and they're, they could make that connection like</i></p> |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p><i>why are these white people always trying to control or manipulate me and tell me what to do. I also think it comes from, they make the connection between administration and that.”</i></p> <p><i>“I, I think the perception the police and the administration sometimes gets connected between those students because they see both of them as punishing, for a lack of a better word, for actions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Um, we had that uh, that talk about how important education is, and I don’t think the kids nowadays, their parents are talking that talk like my parents talked to us.”</i></p> <p><i>“I mean even when you’re watching TV, or music, or sports, you tend to like people that look like you, or you tend to build a relationship or make a connection with people that look like you. So if the people that you’re, that, that the teacher’s teaching don’t look like them, the, the students might have a harder time building a relationship with them based on their preconceived perceptions of who that person is and what that person believes, or how they’ve been treated by people who look similar to them in the past and they’re going to project them onto the educator whether that’s fair or not”</i></p> <p><i>“I think our teachers struggle with, struggle with the whole relationship building and not being where some of our kids are from you know they’re, some people have the belief, the belief that the police are always fair. And that’s their belief, because where they live they are, but these kids, see where sometimes they’re not fair, so I think teachers, trying to get some of our teachers to think that in that mindset it’s not the way they grew up, where they grew up, some of these kids are growing up different”</i></p> <p><i>“I think we need to kinda meet, get some families in here and some teachers and the police department, like a liaison, or the people who work with those families. I think it’s a good idea that we’re going to try to get officers in our buildings during the day, because I think those officers are in the neighborhood, they know people and see these kids and can relate to these kids and give our teachers some assistance, you know tell the teachers this kid’s going through this, this works with that kid, you know that kinda stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think that cause, I just think that police officer knows the building, knows the kids, knows the teachers and then especially if, if we can get that relationship where kids are really like respecting, you know these are our police</i></p> |
|--|---|

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   |  | <p><i>officers, they're helping us, I think we can do, I think that can be big because you know they got that kind of authority figure and it gives more of a sense of community you know with the authority figure, it just makes them look up to the police officers, if we can get that ingrained, that they're here to help us, not here to arrest people, or take kids out, they're here to help build our community and our school building."</i></p>  |
| <p>Student Perspective and Experience</p> | <p>fear for lives, vicious cycle, responsibilities, poverty, experience, rights, misinformation, political</p> | <p><i>"You know you think, oh they're 13/14 they don't understand, you know the drugs, or the politics, or... or the money yet, but they really, really do. Because they are seeing it in their homes everyday, and while it may be like a skewed vision, I think it has a lot to do with the way they grow up which I mean without getting into a 45 minute conversation about getting in a viscous cycle, and you know cultural stamps and all of that"</i></p> <p><i>"So in my enrichment class I had two kids who were very vocally conservative and I, I had a group of African American kids who were very vocally, um, uh, let's just say progressive for the BLM movement because of their experiences so, I think, how the information that students have on it, makes it political, from the viewpoint that they read it; where you have one side that might be saying these are thugs, or people who are committing crimes, and the other side might say these are people standing up for their rights"</i></p> <p><i>"Um, so for instance you're walking down the street and the police stops you and asks you these questions, or open up your pockets, basically stop and frisk which what used to be in New York- how would you react- and a lot of the students based on their ethnicity, you, you can kinda see a trend in answers. Um, where certain kids would just comply because that's kinda what they've been told and other kids would question or they would, even some of them said they would start mouthing off to them, which obviously could create other situations".</i></p> <p><i>"So Jim heard Sam talking about being sent away, and now Jim also thinks he is being sent away, that all children are being sent away, and that Trump is against children and it's almost like one students fear gives a hysteria"</i></p> <p><i>"If I said no to a black student, that's not racist. If I said no to only black students, that's not racist. If I say no equally, to anyone who wants that same privilege, that's not racist. It's hard for some of my kids to think that as soon as they don't get something they want, that must</i></p> |

## Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | <p><i>mean I'm racist, so we have to make sure we clarify the difference of what exactly racist is, and that it's not necessarily a difference of an opinion"</i></p> <p><i>"At home the families are all going to have a certain viewpoint. Whether it's for or against and that is going to be biased. I think that a teacher's job is to try and get the students to understand the whole picture, not just to share a bias"</i></p> <p><i>"I feel that, our kids, it depends on their home life and if they have to process something they come to school, and they don't have, our expectation is for them to learn regardless of what happens in the world and regardless of what is happening in their world"</i></p> <p><i>"Um, but I personally think that a lot of this is, is a, is issues that needs to be addressed within the family, and and by the parents. Now obviously, not all students have parents that want to engage in that civic discourse, so, so some of it needs to be done in the classroom"</i></p> <p><i>"Um, they got different struggles now, they got drugs in the household, we got homeosexuality in the household....not saying that's bad, just you know, we didn't, it wasn't, sexuality really wasn't talked about back then like it is now. It's more open now. You got kids who are being molested by family members, or by mom's boyfriend, it's just so much going on. Moms are in prison now more than fathers, you got more now the father got custody of the kids versus the mother. It's a lot of changes and we don't know what these kids are faced with"</i></p> <p><i>"Another boy I found out his mom was in the hospital and was crying, like, real big tears, drooling, and I'm like what's wrong....and he wouldn't tell me but I eventually found out his mom was in the hospital. You know, some of these boys are the head of the household and we don't even know it, so....and then we have them where they supposed to sit down and learn and they not ready, they not set to learn"</i></p> <p><i>"We don't know what these kids going through when they get home. We wonder why they come to school everyday, but yet they don't want to go home. They feel safe here. You know, so...they don't want to go home, they don't feel safe there. Um, you know, some of them. I've been to a student's house and all they had in their living room was a little TV and a chair. He didn't have a bed"</i></p> |
|--|--|--|

## Research Questions

*Research Question 1: What should teachers do to address Black Lives Matter in their classroom and how should it be handled?*

Participants in the study offered support to the idea that BLM should be addressed in their classroom because they view it as an issue that impacts their students, however, they were uncertain in how it should be addressed. Their uncertainty was rooted in a lack of cultural understanding, white privilege, or how to handle conversations such as these with middle school students, who some viewed as emotionally unable to participate in this topic. Many lacked an underlying comprehension of what the BLM movement is, however, they did believe that their students were aware and that it impacts them in a negative social/emotional way. Participants offered ideas such as tying the topic into the content they were teaching, incorporating current events into their class, and additional social/emotional resources for those who continue to struggle.

*Research Question 2: What supports do teachers need to address Black Lives Matter in their classroom?*

Through interview analysis, teachers identified several areas in which they need support in order to move forward in addressing the BLM in their classrooms which included: district wide workshops/professional development, opportunities to talk freely and without judgement in an effort to understand BLM/power & privilege/systems of oppression, speakers from/on behalf of the community, and additional health resources for students and their family. Participants

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students shared a concern of speaking on a topic without truly understanding it and identified they would benefit from hearing an expert speak not only on this topic, but also model potential activities or conversations to implement within their classroom.

At the start of the interview process, the researcher asked all participants their reasons for entering the teaching profession. This question was intended to start the flow of conversation and provide background knowledge about the participants ideals and educational philosophy. All teachers answered similarly that they entered the teaching profession with the goal of changing lives and making an impact. Both administrators entered the role looking to expand their ability to impact not only students but teachers as well.

The responses suggest that teachers and administrators support the education of the whole student- academic, social, emotional- and agreed student fears and anxieties as a result of current events within the United States *should* be addressed. They widely stated that they have minimal understanding of the BLM movement and did not feel prepared to intervene or address it at this time due to the 'unknown'. Many shared a lack of understanding between themselves, their students and the community at large. Despite these concerns, all of the participants agreed that these topics should be addressed and that it is a responsibility of the school to do so in order to educate the *whole* child and support them as they move through life. However, there was a significant amount of apprehension in doing so, whether this was from a lack of confidence in handling racial topics or as a result of inadequate support or direction from the administration/school/district.

Through the coding process, these categories became abundantly clear. Each category presented a specific point of view or concern of staff members. They also highlighted staff

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students strengths and their feelings of a lack of support in addressing Black Lives Matter in their classroom for a variety of reasons.

Additionally, these interviews allowed the researchers to hear from a variety of staff perspectives within the school at different organizational levels which allowed the researcher to understand how individuals feel within their positions and their abilities/limitations in that position as well as their ideas as to how they would handle these conversations serving in a different role. Each participant had different ideas as how to individuals (teachers, staff, families, students), the school, and the district should move forward to approach these topics which are viewed by some as controversial and politically fueled.

Four of the seven participants were relatively unaware of the Black Lives Matter movement and what it stood for. All seven participants spoke of their worry of what students may bring into a discussion if it were to occur. When probed for additional information about what they know of BLM, five of the seven gave information that was inaccurate, and all seven participants shared that most of their information is from social media. They even admitted that at times they were not sure in some cases of the factual basis of their information. Many stated that media was extremely biased, but were unable to provide an alternative to finding other information to factually explain the issues at hand and how it impacts students. There seemed to be an inherent belief that bias was at all times negative, whereas the researcher views bias as something everyone has and should be aware of in order to understand how not only they, but others can use it to broaden their understanding of the world opposed to only their own experiences.

For example, one participant stated “So when something impacts you very directly, it’s

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
hard to be um, unbiased on the situation.” The participant clearly outlined an understanding that based on experiences, it is extremely hard to be unbiased when something impacts you directly. However, there seemed to be little acknowledgement of the fact that these students are showing up to school everyday while living in a world where they are constantly told their lives don't matter, and the idea that they do is considered controversial. Teachers should expect their students, specifically their Black students to be biased on what BLM stands for and its importance as it impacts them directly. The constant imagery of unarmed Black men and women being killed by uniformed police is a direct impact on their livelihood.

Furthermore, though all individuals agreed they entered education to better the lives of their students, there seems to be a specific line in which they will not cross even though it would drastically improve the lives of their students if there were more support. According to one participant:

“I think it would really have to be a situation that hit close to home that would have to relate to me personally. Um, because I feel like a lot of those movements and the people involved have had issues with the police or have had relatives involved or connections that, that have had their rights violated by the police and that personally, as, as a white male that's, that doesn't usually occur especially where I live in the suburbs.”

This statement, exemplifies one of the key issues regarding the fight against racism and the radical idea that Black Lives Matter. The need for the BLM movement exists because of belief systems similar to the participant- he does not view BLM as having a direct impact on his lifestyle, family, or job, and because of this rationale, he is able to justify in his mind that that BLM is not a cause to involve himself in. However, racism in the United States cannot make progress without reflection and ownership from white people as well as a commitment to invest time and effort into active resistance.

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

Even in this particular example, working within an urban district where the vast majority of the students within the school are minorities, the participant does not view students as a legitimate cause related to him personally therefore not warranting his involvement. There have numerous studies to support that students learn best from those who care for them and their livelihood. By adopting an attitude like the participant, educators are continually damaging the potential to establish an authentic, trusting relationship with their students. “In order to effectively revise instructional strategies, teachers must be willing to create ‘open’ education, where marginalized voices assume a significant role in the dialogue on how to create better educational opportunities for all students” (Howard, 2001, p. 146). Although this may be viewed as a social/emotional issue, if the mental health of students is improved when they know their teachers/school/district supports them, there will be academic improvements.

The participant acknowledges that as a white male he does not have the same experience, which is a recognition of the very reason Black Lives Matter movement exists. The fight against racism cannot continue without the support and involvement of white people. White people cannot continue to acknowledge but yet ignore because they do not have to deal with the consequences. The acceptance of the status quo, especially by those in education is concerning because of the ways this may manifest subconsciously through their teaching style, which can impact hundreds of potential students who will then too grow to understand that although their white teachers acknowledge the existence of racism, they have not taken action to combat it. It is evident that in order to improve the teaching style of potential educators, such as this participant, educators should be exposed to the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, or BLM Movement, when they had white people by their side. As stated by a participant, most people respond better

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students to those who look like themselves. It is clear that Black and Brown people are far from racial equality despite centuries of fighting, which calls for the action of whites. It can be argued that white people may be more attentive when racism is explained to them by a fellow white person. Although this in itself is an example of the incredibly complex racial system in the United States, it is a notion that can be shared to further motivate whites to join the anti-racism fight.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the interviews which were transcribed, segmented, and coded to develop categories. These results were presented in Table 1, followed by a data analysis. All participants spoke of their belief of educating the *whole* child, but struggled with translating the idea into practice, specifically when confronted with the conflict between marginalized communities and the police. The study highlighted the lack of cultural awareness and understanding- both their own and others in terms of privilege/power and racism. Based on the qualitative data, the research questions were answered. Embedded in the next chapter is the discussion of the findings, limitations, implications, and future research.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

#### **Discussion of Results**

The results outlined the idea that middle school is too young to be addressing these concerns, although there is evidence to the contrary. Based on examples from a study done in Missouri following the shooting of Mike Brown, it is clear that content and conversations that are appropriately modeled based on student development are successful in broaching these subjects in an age-appropriate manner. Through this approach the school district “gave students a voice and felt their schools and the community cared for them” and reiterated their [the school district’s] commitment to “seek to overcome the social, cultural, and educational barriers that members of our diverse population may experience” (Stiles et al., 2015, p. 34 ). This was done through actions such as community panelists speaking district wide and letters were sent home to all parents explaining their approach to support students through this traumatic event. The district allowed students to protest and elementary, middle, and high school students all took part in activities designed in a way that was aligned to development levels such as- drawing cards, open discussions, and forming a student action group.

Although the participants believed that middle school students are too impressionable, it actually serves as a perfect time to begin addressing the way race infiltrates all areas of life and to support students as they begin to become more aware of their surroundings within their community and the world. According to Graham et al. “As neuroscience continues to reveal, this [13-14 years old] is a time of remarkable brain growth...this would be a perfect age to demystify

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
the concept of race to a group of youngsters as background to understanding the current turbulent climate of race relations and the emergence of the the Black Lives Matter movement.” (2016, p. 19 ). Although teachers may state they are unsure and doubt the capability of students to hold these conversations, it may rather be that they are not comfortable themselves. Since majority of teachers are distanced from these daily realities, they may be unconfident in their knowledge or ability to ‘control’ a situation when they are not able to identify with the stress and fear students bring to school each day.

However, there has been data showing that these conversations within schools is beneficial to students and teachers. Although this would require a significant amount of work to be implemented- such as education of staff, discussion tools, knowledge of BLM and impact of racism- the participants in Stagers-Hakim’s study all reiterated that although the focus of the conversation was heavy at times, it was cathartic to talk about either community violence and or the national police killings (2016).

With the appropriate resources aligned to support teachers and students these conversations can have increased mental health benefits which will ultimately impact academic success. In order to hold these discussions, teachers need to have an open mind and be willing to participate themselves, actively as both a listener and participant to share their own experiences, otherwise these discussions may lead to an unintended exercise of power: “Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive” (Moore, 2016, p. 73), which would be detrimental to the goal of increasing the trust and improving relationships between teacher and student.

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

Unfortunately, the fear and anxieties that students hold have been shown to increase the likelihood of a variety of detrimental side effects that influence not only mental health, but also exacerbate or result in physical illness. Furthermore, the impacts can be readily seen within schools as acknowledged by the participants in this study.

“I would also like to see acceptance classes and/or classes where kids, not necessarily academic classes, but preparing students emotionally, um, I mean would be in my perfect world they would take some sort of class to handle their emotions or an outlet in order for them to communicate frustrations.”

Many students are showing increased elevation of social/emotional disturbances which may be aligned to the increase of traumatic events such as racial stress. “African American children continue to face growing emotional and psychological concerns...and demonstrated more minor to several emotional and behavioral difficulties than Hispanic or White children”

(Staggers-Hakim, 2016, p. 392 ). Even more disturbing is the evidence stating that those who overcome the barrage of stressors and trauma connected to racism are an anomaly that require extensive coping skills, behaviors, and resources that individuals of color draw on to ameliorate racism’s stressors and to obtain personal successes (Malott & Schaeffle, 2015).

As the nation tries to moving forward, there is no exception to the fact that “Failure to hold police accountable sends the message to police that they are untouchable and to children and other vulnerable groups that they are unprotected from reckless actions and abuse of police officers and other authority figures” (Staggers-Hakim, R. p 398 2016). Although schools may not be able to hold the police accountable, they can certainly take a stand and acknowledge the injustice and violence in an effort to stand for communities that are frequently silenced.

In an example of the double standard when it comes to accepting violence, a participant

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
spoke of their lack of support or knowledge of the BLM movement because of the violence that has occurred, citing the example of:

“So like, for instance what happened in Baltimore with their BLM movement, where it got violent, it completely different from where BLM movement in Milwaukee where it wasn't violent, or Minneapolis, where they walked onto a freeway and essentially shut the freeway down.”

This illustrates the deep seeded idea that when authority uses violence, it is fair and deserved- even though the inflictor may cite irrelevant details of the victim's past behaviors to justify force used and as a result- “many martyrs who have become the face of the #BlackLivesMatter movement are only presented as criminals and so-called ‘thugs’ who are products of inner-city neighborhoods” (Moore, 2016, p. 72)- whereas violence as a method of protest is *never* appropriate and is then used to further support the media's painting of an entire marginalized community as lawless.

The majority of White people may accept the violent murder of unarmed Black men, and may even acknowledge it as being aligned to racism, but will at the same time withdraw their support for the cause when violence, or a riot, occurs. As Dr. Martin Luther King stated “I contend that the cry of ‘black power’ is, at bottom, a reaction to the reluctance of white power to make the kind of changes necessary to make justice a reality for the Negro. I think that we've got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard. And, what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the economic plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years” (60 Minute Staff, 2013). This interview took place in 1966, and Dr. King's voice and reason still rings true as Blacks remain unheard and ignored in 2017, even through the continual, public murders of their children.

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

It was clear from this particular qualitative study that educators are aware of the potential correlations students may see between the police as an authority and the role that white educators play in punishing behavior that is deemed inappropriate. As shown in a study by Raible & Irizarry, “It is clear that teachers play a significant role, for better or worse, in the sorting and labeling of young people once they enter school” (2010, p. 1197). Further, there is clear evidence that Black students, both male and female, are punished more often and more severely than their white counterparts- known as the school to prison pipeline, for which there are “three detrimental aspects that...contribute directly to school-to-prison pipeline: the lack of student diversity in U.S teacher education programs, the over emphasis on classroom management and control..., and the superficial treatment of the issues of diversity within American teacher education” (Raible & Irizarry, 2010, p. 1199). Until all three of these aspects are individually addressed, the educational communities will experience similar outcomes.

However, it is the task of white educators to ensure that the community trusts them through their words, and actions. For example, teachers supporting BLM or allowing students to express their concerns and fears in a safe environment would be an ideal starting point. Over the course of last several decades, communities of color have learned to distrust White educators, which calls for an extensive overhaul of teacher preparation programs. In addition, there is a significant responsibility on individual educators to repair prior damage, recognize the importance of a strong relationship, and begin to develop a long-term partnership between communities of color (Sleeter, 2017).

On a positive note, the results showed that all participants acknowledged a need for help, whether it was through district or community initiatives. Many participants stated that they need

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

additional support and education through avenues such as professional development, workshops, or additional courses. Similar to the findings of a study evaluating teacher certification programs syllabus, Sleeter found that “...More than half [syllabi] stress celebration of difference rather than systematic inequalities; only 29% of the syllabi explored issues of oppression, racism, and systematic power relationships” (2017, p. 4). Interviewees also stated the general feeling unpreparedness following completion of their certification programs, reiterating the fact that one multi-cultural course is incredibly inadequate in giving teachers the tools needed to work successfully in an urban district.

Before this study was done, the researcher was not able to find any articles that implicitly discussed teachers' perceptions of how to address BLM movement with their students. Moreover, it was difficult to find articles that explicitly focused on BLM, much less the impact the movement may have on adults and children within a school setting.

This study was significant because it identified, through interviews with participants currently working in schools, major hurdles that are faced by both educators and their students. It is evident that there is work to be done, however, this study was able to determine for this particular school, the areas in which teachers felt confident and the areas in which they noted an intense need for intervention. The results of this qualitative study can be applied to other similar districts as the sampling was typical in terms of the demographics of the participants as well as the students they are serving. This study was able to identify clear implications moving forward and the approaches that may be used to begin to correct and support school staff, families, students and the community at large.

**Implications**

The results suggest that action is required from teacher preparatory programs, school districts, and teachers to adequately respond to the social/emotional needs of the students they service. The results are especially important for school districts and teacher preparatory programs because all participants in the study expressed the view that they currently feel unequipped and lacking appropriate preparation to address these concerns.

Teacher preparatory programs have a responsibility to reflect on the current course offerings and requirements of their program to ensure that they address diversity, social justice, and the education of the whole student including social/emotional support. Instead of providing one multi-cultural course that may not be effective- “Several studies have indicated that preservice teachers who have been exposed to multicultural education courses were no more inclined to reject stereotypes and other preconceived notions...” (Ukpokodu, 2004, p. 20), it is crucial that multiple field experiences where the future educator would be completely integrated into the community they serve should be mandatory. In order to be exemplary teachers of *all* students, “Field experiences can provide the opportunity to plant seeds of awareness that may continue to grow and develop...and pull the weeds of ignorance and misconception that all of us have about groups of which we are non-members” (Ukpokodu, 2004, p. 27). If a teacher is hesitant to a field immersion experience, it is crucial to explain the importance that they understand where the student is coming from, and also provides an opportunity for the students to develop an accurate depiction of the teacher, rather than rely on any preconceived notions they may also hold.

If teachers do not feel confident in supporting the social/emotional health needs of their

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students students, the amount of academic learning and content that will be retained will decrease significantly. It is clear through various studies, including this qualitative study, that students are suffering from the trauma inflicted on their communities and it is negatively impacting their education. Programs for teacher candidates should require that all teacher candidates must participate in workshops that address privilege/power of the majority in this country. If teacher candidates are not able to participate in these discussions their ability to facilitate an effective discussion in their own classroom will be non-existent.

School districts have a different set of responsibilities, although some similar actions should occur. For example, with the knowledge that few teacher candidates feel equipped to handle these conversations/situations in their classroom, workshops by experts should be offered so teachers have a model to follow when facilitating conversation about any controversial subject. "...Reform efforts will have only a minimal impact if the majority of teachers and administrators attempting to implement these programs remain culturally disconnected from the communities they serve" (Irizarry & Raible, 2011, p. 188).

Additionally, resources should be allocated to increase the funding and support for all students, which has been done successfully at other school districts, such as though geographically near Ferguson. However, it is the responsibility of all schools to provide adequate mental health supports to their students. "Mental health is essential to student success...unfortunately, by-and-large therapy is frowned upon in the Black community and many Black [students] oftentimes suffer in silence. Schools should provide access to mental health professionals to students, and if requested, their families" (Watson, 2016, p. 247). Lastly, if there is a crisis or traumatic event within the community, the school district should release a statement

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students to the community that reiterates their support through protocols such as increased counseling services, open forums, and student groups.

Currently, schools are facing a unique challenge that is intricately woven into the discussion of race and class in this country. As many cry for additional police to be placed into school as a way to reinforce safety, it is done without an analysis of available research that evaluates the impact of a police presence within a learning environment and the heightened likelihood of further damaging relationships between police and students of color. Though districts may feel that this is an opportunity to form a trusting relationship between police and students of color, the main focus of the school is ensure each student receives a free, appropriate, public education. Moving forward, schools must consider if adding a police presence will improve the educational setting or add more fear and anxiety to a place that should always be welcoming and safe where all students are treated with the respect they deserve. It must be considered if adding police is truly 'appropriate'.

Although teachers may feel they cannot currently handle the facilitation of racial or controversial conversations and that has a direct tie to both the district and preparation program, there is a level of responsibility that all staff have in ensuring they are able to relate to their students. Teachers must be reflective of their own practice and worldview in order to ensure they are looking at crisis situations through a lens other than their own. It is not a hidden secret that most teachers do not look like their students and personal experiences vary significantly. Though a reflective look at one's practices may cause stress, teachers must work through these feelings of being "uncomfortable" in order to best serve their students. Though a slow journey, the payoff will reap benefits for all involved- the individual, their students, and the community. If they do

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

not, not only will their students suffer but they will also be experiencing the world in a filtered view and missing out on the incredible strengths that diversity and differences provide. As one of the interview participants stated:

“So again I think that it’s hard as a middle class white person to stop and take a look at yourself, and, and, are you going to cross the street or are you going to, why does your heart race when certain people come you know in your general direction or you know why are we more comfortable than one than the other. I think that it’s not necessarily saying that you’re a bad person but looking at why you do feel that way, and why is it okay to act on that. Why is that okay, you know there’s all these justifications for why this young man was shot, or this older gentleman was shot, but at the end of the day it’s looking at there is a reason that fear is in you to make you feel like you had to fight. And so I think it’s trying to dig into that and the resistance is because it is hard to look at yourself and it is hard to kind of tear that apart and see like your real feelings, like, or not even feelings, reactions... it’s like a reaction to something else happening”

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are based on the researcher’s own bias’ and ideas through the selection of participants based on their knowledge and experience in selecting a diverse group that is also reflective of the demographics of teachers. The sample used was also one of convenience, utilizing the school where the researcher worked.

### **Conclusion**

This study is significant because it highlighted several specific concerns that teachers have in effectively approaching and handling these sensitive topics. The purpose of this study was to identify teachers’ perceptions of how to address BLM movement with their students, it became evident that teachers do not feel equipped to handle these conversations; although all were in agreement that said conversations are necessary for their students for a multitude of reasons.

### Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

The goal of the study was not to criticize the individual's responses, rather to use them as a tool to demonstrate the struggles facing teachers as a result of inadequate teacher preparation programs. These responses can be used to help all involved parties- teachers, administrators, schools, districts, and teacher preparation programs to recognize the vast gap and disservice that is being done to all those working within an educational space, and most significantly the disservice done to those they serve- students. In order for there to be progress, all parties must first be aware and accept the racial trauma that students bring to school each day and the intricate ways it permeates all areas of life. Once this is done, everyone can work cohesively to support the marginalized communities and therefore increase educational outcomes. Fighting racism is not the responsibility of the victims, rather it is the responsibility of those inflicting it, whether they are currently aware or not.

### **Future Research**

In order to continue research in this field, a recommendation would be to evaluate prior actions that have been taken as a part of the civil rights movement to determine what progress has been made since the inception as well as advances since BLM was started. Furthermore, a qualitative study could be repeated to determine, based on these results, why BLM is considered and treated by some as a "current event" versus a segment of a long standing movement by minorities to gain their fundamental rights. Using a conceptual framework, such as cognitive dissonance to utilize as an identification of the thoughts behind the recognition of BLM and a lack of action would offer the researcher the ability to narrow the focus of this widespread and often misunderstood movement.

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students

Another, perhaps richer approach, would entail an ethnographic qualitative study that includes daily habits and practices in everyday life in the classroom with the participants in order to determine how the interviews/thoughts are actualized through their everyday teaching and actions.

In terms of future research directly relating to the study and its impact on education, researchers should assess teachers/support staff that are confident handling these conversations and evaluate why they feel comfortable in order to support staff that do not feel they are able to address racial/controversial topics. This will allow researchers to identify what strategies are effective in facilitating conversations within the classroom. If there is a better understanding regarding what tools confident teachers have, these strategies can be taught or passed to additional staff to increase the support network within schools.

Additionally, research should be done to assess current teacher preparatory courses to evaluate if they are indeed teaching necessary social and emotional skills as well as field experiences that involve full immersion into the community for teacher candidates. Studies to identify the perceptions of the enrolled teachers regarding their level of aptitude in addressing controversial current events within their classroom should be given on a wide scale basis to identify programs that produce teacher candidates with the necessary skills to become an exemplar teacher in an urban district. These programs can then be evaluated to identify which specific classes, field experiences, and approaches are working to equip teacher- candidates with these skills. Once these areas are identified, they can be used as an exemplar model for other programs benefit and comparison to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, future studies are needed to analyze student's perceptions in their teacher's

Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students ability or responsibility to support or address BLM in the classroom. "...Student perspectives provide insights into important components of the teaching and learning process, otherwise unrevealed, and an important starting point for enabling those who have been silenced or marginalized by the schools to reclaim authorship of their own lives" (Howard, 2001, p. 133). Student voice is one that is often forgotten when in reality it is the most important one to hear.

### References

- Staff, 60 Minutes (2013, August 25). MLK: A riot is the language of the unheard. Retrieved May 07, 2017, from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mlk-a-riot-is-the-language-of-the-unheard/>
- Davis, D. J. (2015). For Ferguson and Nation: Justice and Education via Anti-Bias Reform. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 39(4), 331-333.
- Graham, C. L., Payne, B., Thomas, S., Fox, D., & Sabinin, P. (2016). Black Lives Matter at BSU: Reflections on the Spring Teach-In and Town Hall Meeting. *Bridgewater Review*, 35(2), 14-21.
- Gregory, A., Bell, J., & Pollock, M. (2014). How educators can eradicate disparities in school discipline: A briefing paper on school-based interventions. *Discipline Disparities: A Research-to-Practice Collaborative*.
- Howard, T. C. (2001). Telling their side of the story: African-American students' perceptions of culturally relevant teaching. *The Urban Review*, 33(2), 131-149.
- Henfield, Malik S., & Washington, Ahmad R. "I want to do the right thing but what is it?": White Teachers' Experiences with African American Students." *The Journal of Negro Education* 81.2 (2012): 148-161.
- Howard, T. C. (2016). Why Black lives (and minds) matter: Race, freedom schools & the quest for educational equity. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(2), 101-113.
- Irizarry, J. G., & Raible, J. (2011). Beginning with El Barrio: Learning from exemplary teachers of Latino students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 10(3), 186-203.

- Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
Jacobs, K., & Struyf, E. (2015). A First Step Toward a Comprehensive Model of  
Integrated Socio-emotional Guidance: Investigating the Effect of Teachers' Task  
Perception and a Supportive Network at School. *Journal Of Educational Research*,  
*108*(2), 95-111.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives preparing teachers to teach African  
American students. *Journal of teacher education*, *51*(3), 206-214.
- Malott, K. M., & Schaeffe, S. (2015). Addressing clients' experiences of racism: a model  
for clinical practice. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *93*(3), 361-369.
- Moore, H. C. (2016). Teaching in Grief: Critical Reflections, Redefining Justice, and a  
Reorientation to Teaching. *Radical Teacher*, *106*. 70-77
- Raible, J., & Irizarry, J. G. (2010). Redirecting the teacher's gaze: Teacher education,  
youth surveillance and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Teaching and teacher education*,  
*26*(5), 1196-1203.
- Shieh, E. (2016). After Eric Garner: Invoking the Black Radical Tradition in Practice and  
in Theory# BlackLivesMatter. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, *15*(2),  
126-145.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2017). Critical Race Theory and the Whiteness of Teacher Education.  
*Urban Education*, *52*(2), 155-169.
- Staggers-Hakim, R. (2016). The nation's unprotected children and the ghost of Mike  
Brown, or the impact of national police killings on the health and social  
development of African American boys. *Journal Of Human Behavior In The  
Social Environment*, *26*(3/4), 390-399.

- Teachers' Perceptions of How to Address the Black Lives Matter Movement with their Students  
Stiles, D. A., Moyer, J. M., Brewer, S., Klaus, L. M., Falconer, J., & Moss, L. (2015).  
Practising Psychology in Challenging Times: Schools and the Ferguson crisis.  
*Educational & Child Psychology*, 32(4), 21-38.
- Troutman, S., & Jiménez, I. (2016). Lessons in Transgression: # BlackGirlsMatter and the  
Feminist Classroom. *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, 15(1), 7-39.
- Ukpokodu, O. N. (2004). The Impact of Shadowing Culturally Different Students on  
Preservice Teachers' Disposition toward Diversity. *Multicultural Education*, 12(2),  
19-28.
- Watson, T. N. (2016). "Talking Back": The Perceptions and Experiences of Black Girls  
Who Attend City High School. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(3), 239-249.
- Watson, T. N., & Rivera-McCutchen, R. L. (2016). # BlackLivesMatter: A Call for  
Transformative Leadership. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 19(2), 3-11.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview Questions**

1. What interested you in becoming a teacher?
2. How do you involve current events into your classroom?
3. How do current events such as police/race relations impact your classroom?
4. What is your knowledge of the Black Lives Matter movement?
5. How do you think the Black Lives Matter movement impacts your students?
6. How should schools address student concerns with current events?
7. What would you (teachers) need to address Black Lives Matter in their classroom?