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To cite this article: Stephen John Quaye (2012) White Educators Facilitating Discussions About Racial Realities, *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45:1, 100-119, DOI: [10.1080/10665684.2012.643684](https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.643684)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.643684>



Published online: 10 Feb 2012.



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## White Educators Facilitating Discussions About Racial Realities

Stephen John Quaye

*University of Maryland*

Facilitating democratic discussions about race among students in classroom environments continues to be a problem facing educators. When these discussions occur, they are facilitated mostly by faculty of color. However, given the underrepresentation of faculty of color within higher education institutions and that white students respond differently to these discussions when facilitated by members of their own race, it is critical for white faculty to learn how to facilitate these exchanges among learners. The present study focused on exploring the role of white faculty facilitating discussions about race in their courses. Findings are presented through case examples from two white participants. Implications for research and practice are also discussed.

Racial/ethnic diversity has become a fashionable and long-lasting buzzword within most institutions of higher learning (Astin, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1998); yet, students continue to struggle with appreciating peers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds (Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002; Saddlemire, 1996). Racial/ethnic diversity is becoming increasingly synonymous with focusing on the composition of the student body while largely ignoring what transpires when students who have had minimal interaction with peers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds are expected to embrace racial/ethnic diversity upon entering higher education (Chang, Chang, & Ledesma, 2005).

An alternative conception of diversity is sorely needed—one that shifts from simply structural racial/ethnic diversity (a commendable, but insufficient aim) to learning from interracial differences. As Mayhew, Grunwald, and Dey (2005) found: “In terms of formal and public commitment, an institution’s ability to achieve a positive climate for diversity is indeed reflected by the faculty’s commitment to incorporate diversity-related issues into their academic agenda” (p. 408). Given the critical roles of faculty members in enacting and reinforcing an institution’s avowed commitment to diversity through curriculum and pedagogy, focusing on how they attempt to address one strand of diversity—race—by facilitating racial discussions in their courses is a study worth pursuing. I focus on how participants facilitated racial discussions in this article.

Researchers have shown that when these discussions take place, they are most often facilitated by faculty of color (Bergerson, 2003; Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2010; Wahl, Perez, Deegan, Sanchez, & Applegate, 2000). White faculty are uniquely positioned to engage white

students, in particular, in these discussions given the predominantly white settings in which they are situated. Yet, if they continue not to facilitate these discussions or lack the preparation to facilitate them, there will continue to be challenges to engaging white students in these discussions (Sue et al., 2010).

The purpose of the present study was to explore how white postsecondary educators<sup>1</sup> facilitated discussions about racial issues in their courses. In order to offer students, educators, and researchers insights into approaches participants used to engage primarily white students in classroom-based discussions on race, I examined the perspectives and experiences of faculty who lead these discussions. This study focuses only on white educators working with mostly white students to demonstrate the unique ways in which this shared racial identity benefits white learners in these discussions. By focusing on white educators, current and future white educators can learn how to structure purposeful engagement activities that enable these exchanges to happen among white students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature presented here is divided into two major sections. First, I concentrate on literature about differences among dialogue, debate, and discussion to highlight the kind of approach (i.e., discussion) utilized by participants and to draw some connections and implications to a specific kind of dialogue: intergroup dialogue. Next, I highlight studies that examine faculty preparedness and readiness to engage racial issues in the classroom and focus, specifically, on white faculty.

### Dialogue

Bohm (1996) noted that the goal of dialogue is to come to new understanding through questioning the fundamental assumptions upon which one's opinions rested. Dialogue, Bohm argues, is concerned with examining the whole as opposed to fragmentation: "Dialogue is really aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively" (p. 10). Given the different backgrounds of those engaged in dialogue, there is a tendency to defend one's opinions; however, dialogue focuses instead on suspending one's assumptions in order to free up the empty space that Bohm concludes is necessary where "anything may come in" (p. 19). In this empty space, there is a tendency to come together rather than focus on winning an argument.

### Debate

Whereas dialogue is premised on being with others, debate is characterized by divisiveness. Debate is often framed as a situation where one party wins the argument and the other party loses. Hyde and Bineham (2000) clarify the distinction between "debate" and "dialogue." They note that many people are socialized to argue and try to win people over to their side and that this arguing mentality is emblematic of politics within society. Debate is a form of discourse that is characterized by evidence and persuasion to convince others of the rightness of one's opinion.

Whoever sounds the most plausible and persuasive usually wins the debate. In contrast, dialogue is characterized by seeking commonality and common ground (Hyde & Bineham, 2000) or critical reflection and inquiry (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Freire, 1970; Nagda & Maxwell, 2011). Debate also presumes that there are two opposing, preexisting ideas, one of which is more right than the other (Hyde & Bineham, 2000). Dialogue is “a way of being with another person” (p. 212) that is premised on relationship-building and the development of mutual understanding. Although Hyde and Bineham distinguish between debate and dialogue, they also note that dialogues can have debates or arguments within them but that these debates look different in that they provide alternative perspectives to consider in the hope that participants come to a stronger understanding. People may support their views with evidence and reasoning, as seen in debates, but the evidence adds further substance to the dialogue.

## Discussion

Similar to debate but different from dialogue, Ellinor and Gerard (1998) contend that discussion connotes fragmentation and “breaking the whole down into many parts” (p. 20). Those engaged in discussion strive to justify and defend their opinions by placing emphasis on examining ideas and analyzing the arguments that undergird those ideas. Because the goal of discussion is closure, participants endeavor to develop one meaning on an issue. Brookfield and Preskill’s (2005) understanding of discussion is embedded in a dialogic and democratic framework. They assert that democratic discussion is a

process of giving and taking, speaking and listening, describing and witnessing—all of which help expand horizons and foster mutual understanding . . . [Democratic discussion] is premised on the idea that only through collaboration and cooperation with others can we be exposed to new points of view. (pp. 3–4)

Democratic discussion is a way to work with others to come to newfound understanding about an issue. The discussion is democratic because it involves multiple speakers with varying vantage points and from different backgrounds. Some of the benefits Brookfield and Preskill have found from democratic discussion involve recognizing one’s assumptions, appreciating differences, learning collaboratively, and developing a tolerance for ambiguity. Even though Brookfield and Preskill’s book is about democratic discussion, they claimed they are “blending or synthesizing the descriptions of discussion, dialogue, and conversation” (p. 6). Therefore, drawing sharp distinctions between these terms is not the purpose of this section; rather, I highlight these terms to clarify how I am situating this article. In the next section, I highlight intergroup dialogue as a further example of the dialogic framework discussed above.

## Intergroup Dialogue

Another approach for helping students talk about difficult topics is intergroup dialogue. Nagda and Maxwell (2011) contend that intergroup dialogues have a critical-dialogic framework that focuses on storytelling and sharing one’s experiential knowledge (dialogic) and understanding systems of power, privilege, and inequities that marginalize some while advantaging others (critical).

These dialogues bring two groups that have a history of conflict together to explore the sources of conflict and engage across group differences. For example, during a people of color/white people dialogue, participants might speak from their personal experiences as members of various racial groups (dialogic) to explore how race affects people differently based on how they identify (critical) and develop ways to challenge racism in their various communities. The critical-dialogic practice of intergroup dialogues connects with Brookfield and Preskill's (2005) democratic discussion since intergroup dialogue participants have varying social identities and speak from these identities during dialogues. In democratic discussion, participants also work collectively to develop understanding about an issue; this collaboration is consistent with the alliance building communication process of intergroup dialogues that is premised on "collaborat[ing] on action to work against injustices and bring about change" (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011, p. 6). Thus, the framework that guides intergroup dialogue overlaps with democratic discussion in that both are concerned with exploring multiple perspectives in the context of one's membership in various privileged and marginalized groups.

Having laid the groundwork for discussion, debate, and dialogue, in this article, I concentrate on the definition of democratic discussion advanced by Brookfield and Preskill (2005), which describes the discussions facilitated by the participants in my study. However, at times, I also blend democratic discussion with dialogue given that participants used both "discussion" and "dialogue" when speaking with me about their practices. The discussions specified in this article are different from structured intergroup dialogues with two co-facilitators of different social identities in that participants in my study facilitated these discussions without the assistance of a co-facilitator and the discussions were not explicitly organized with the intention of balancing the social identities represented. Despite these differences, I draw implications from intergroup dialogues in the Discussion section since these dialogues inform the participants' facilitation approaches.

### Faculty Skills and Preparedness in Facilitating Racial Exchanges

Stassen's (1995) study of white faculty members' responses to integrating racial/ethnic diversity within their courses revealed some paradoxes among faculty. Although those with more formal education tended to hold views consistent with a respect for racial/ethnic differences and a propensity to provide avenues for racial dialogues to occur (Schuman & Bobo, 1988; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985), white faculty were the most resistant campus employees to implementing specific measures to improve the climate for students of color (Stassen, 1995). Stassen suggests that part of the reason for this hesitancy and resistance to fostering racially inclusive classroom environments is due to the context for race within postsecondary institutions. When white faculty view addressing racial diversity in the classroom as conflicting with educational quality, they refuse to alter their pedagogy and curricula to be more reflective of racial inclusiveness. This finding is similar to those of Bennett (2001) and Weissman, Bulakowski, and Jumisko (1998) who note that most white faculty fail to revise their courses to address racial diversity and perpetuate the status quo in using readings that do not pertain to the experiences of students of color.

Sue et al. (2010) and Schmidt (2005) provide two particularly illustrative studies of how white faculty engage white students in racial discussions. In a study about white faculty reacting to difficult dialogues about race, Sue et al. found that the participants in their study lacked the

training and education to engage race effectively in the classroom. Participants discussed their lack of prior socialization to address race and their lack of knowledge about how to best engage students in these dialogues. They also reported the emotions that were central in these dialogues and how they had underestimated the amount of emotional energy that was needed during these dialogues.

Schmidt (2005) identifies seven concepts that faculty could utilize to respond to racial realities in classrooms. Most relevant to the present study is an examination of white privilege, in which faculty support white students in understanding how white people benefit from racism whether or not they consider themselves racist. A common challenge white educators encounter in addressing race is how to help students examine the structural and systemic factors that influence racism within institutions. White students readily understood that individual people could be racist through the telling of racist jokes or the use of racial epithets; however, they had trouble seeing and understanding the larger system of white supremacy embedded in the practices, norms, and values of postsecondary institutions. Similarly, most white faculty could identify when a student voiced a racist comment during a discussion but were unable to structure meaningful dialogues that moved beyond the individual toward systemic racism (Feagin, 2001).

One means for helping white students examine white privilege is promoting their white racial identity development. Helms (2008) describes the process of white racial identity as white students move from various schemas. In the Contact schema, white students are unaware of their race. The Disintegration schema is marked by disorientation that prompts one to think differently about her or his race. During Reintegration, the person “[mitigates] the anxiety that occurs when one’s Disintegration status is dominant” (Helms & Cook, 2005, p. 250). Following this period, the white student embodies the Pseudo-Integration schema when she or he wants to associate with non-racist white people and reject “bad” white people; the Immersion schema is characterized by a desire to reframe one’s whiteness and develop alternative images of what being white means. Immersion is followed by the Emersion schema, where the student searches for a community of non-racist white people to figure out how to live a positive white identity. Finally, in the Autonomy schema, white students demonstrate a flexible and critical white identity that is based on an internalized understanding of one’s whiteness.

The literature on white racial identity is important because at the center of this literature lies two questions that Helms (2008) does not adequately answer: What does a positive white racial identity look like and how does one promote this identity? Given the literature on white faculty members’ lack of preparedness to facilitate racial dialogues, they will conceivably have trouble knowing how to promote this positive white identity among white students and the developmental readiness that is necessary among white learners to engage in these dialogues and reflect on their whiteness (Helms & Cook, 2005).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND FOCUS

The following research question guided the present study: How do educators engage students in constructive discussions about racial realities<sup>2</sup> in postsecondary classroom settings? In this article, I focus exclusively on two white participants, Corrine and Dalton (pseudonyms), as case studies. Corrine and Dalton were particularly aware of their white racial identities in their facilitation efforts and represent exemplars that are consistent with the psychological case study design

described below. Their stories also represent consistent patterns seen in the other cases. Thus, I present their cases to give readers an understanding of how white educators can facilitate racial discussions through paying attention to the nuances in their strategies. Facilitating discussions about race and racism in classroom settings is a rarity among faculty; however, as noted earlier, these discussions are mostly often facilitated by faculty of color (Bennett, 2001; Stassen, 1995; Weissman et al., 1998). I hope that the insights from these two cases will provide knowledge for other white educators who want to facilitate racial discussions in their own courses.

## METHODOLOGY

This article is based on findings from a qualitative study of postsecondary educators who engaged in the exploration of race and racism with students in the classroom. My research was guided by psychological case study, wherein I treated each educator as an individual case (Crotty, 2003; Merriam, 1988, 2002; Stake, 2005). Case studies strive for holistic interpretations of a phenomenon (in the present study, the facilitation of racially-based discussions) through intensive examination and are grounded in the data collected and analyzed (Merriam, 1988). Each case could be seen on its own as one example of how to facilitate discussions about racial realities in a classroom setting, or multiple cases could provide varying insights about the pedagogical process and similar approaches that were noted among different participants (Stake, 1995, 2005).

### Site

The primary site for data collection was the 2007 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE) in San Francisco, California. NCORE was created by members of the Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Members wanted to study racism within higher education and create avenues for participants to address the underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority persons in postsecondary institutions and improve race relations. At NCORE, participants present on a range of topics, including curricular and pedagogical approaches for racial development, policy implications concerning race, theoretical perspectives on race and ethnicity, and the promotion of racial/ethnic inclusion among students, administrators, staff, and faculty. NCORE attracts nearly 2,000 participants annually (National Conference on Race & Ethnicity in American Higher Education, 2007). I selected NCORE as the site for my study due to its comprehensive focus on and examination of race in higher education.

### Recruitment of Participants

To select participants, I performed a comprehensive analysis of the Program and Resource Guide (i.e., the program booklet) from the 2004 to 2007 NCORE meetings. In accordance with case study methodology, I purposefully sampled participants who had presented workshops directly related to my study—providing intentional, sustained spaces for racial exchanges to occur within classroom contexts (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988, 1998; Patton, 2002). A direct quotation

from a session abstract printed in the 2004 Guide, “Teaching about the Psychology of Race and Racism: Lessons Learned,” crystallizes the selection of participants for the study.

This session should particularly benefit those who teach emotionally-charged classes on race and racism, those who want to learn how to teach such classes and facilitate difficult discussions on race, and those who want to learn how to effectively utilize the racial and ethnic demographics of the classroom to enhance the learning of all students. (Cokley, 2004, p. 74)

The aforementioned abstract details issues with which my study dealt—difficult discussions on race, the role of faculty members in facilitating these discussions, and student responses and resistance to engaging racial realities in postsecondary classrooms.

Based on my comprehensive analysis, I contacted 153 participants via e-mail, described my study, explained that I had chosen them based on a workshop they presented at a previous NCORE, and requested an interview with them should they be attending the 2007 conference. Forty-nine people responded to my request. Of this number, 25 attended NCORE in 2007 and were interested in being interviewed; 24 were unable to attend the conference but were still interested in participating. Because I wanted to conduct the majority of interviews face-to-face, I selected participants to interview from the 25 who attended the conference. Given time constraints at the conference and availability of participants, the total sample for the study included 22 participants, 17 of whom I interviewed face-to-face at the conference and the remaining 5 via telephone.

Given the literature reviewed concerning the lack of involvement in facilitating racial dialogues by white persons and the critical roles of white faculty in engaging learners about racial issues (e.g., Bergerson, 2003; Tatum, 1997; Wahl et al., 2000; Warren & Hytten, 2004), I wanted to ensure that white educators participated in the study. Most of the participants were faculty and worked within predominantly white institutions. All taught courses in the social sciences, education, humanities, or arts.

### Data Collection Procedures

I conducted individual semi-structured interviews that lasted between 75 and 120 minutes (Bernard, 1998, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 2000). Since the goal of my research was to understand the facilitation approaches of educators during racial discussions, I asked participants to discuss their teaching philosophies, the meanings they made of racial realities, the organization of their courses around issues of race and racism, how they plan and structure discussions about racial issues, and the advantages and challenges of engaging race in the classroom. The interviews were an opportunity for educators to reflect on their facilitation strategies and detail the distinguishing features of their approaches for helping students personalize and discuss racial issues.

### Data Analysis Procedures

Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. I then coded and analyzed each transcript using the NVivo<sup>®</sup> Software Package for Qualitative Research. I explored similarities and differences between participants’ philosophies and approaches for organizing these discussions,



as well as the meanings they made of their facilitation efforts. As I coded data, I revisited the interviews to clarify my interpretations and make further sense of the data.

I also used convergent and divergent thematic analyses to analyze the collected data. Akin to coding, when researchers use convergent analysis, they look for repeated patterns in the data—ideas or experiences shared by multiple participants. When convergence occurred, it meant this particular experience was important to most participants (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). However, exclusively upholding convergence often obscures the different experiences of others. Therefore, conducting divergent analysis also was an important consideration in this study (Patton, 2002). With divergence, I examined data from participants that differed from the common themes. Dissimilar experiences were important because they illuminated issues not cited by others and added depth to and an alternative understanding of the case (Yin, 2003). Finally, I looked across the individual cases through cross-case analysis to explore the patterns and themes from various participants (Stake, 1995).

### Trustworthiness Procedures

I provided participants with an opportunity to offer feedback during the study. This important approach—member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995)—permitted the revision of my interpretations based on participants' reactions. After each interview was transcribed and I developed my initial interpretations, I asked participants to comment on the adequacy of my descriptions. Peer debriefing was another means to acquire feedback on the developing findings. I asked people both familiar and unfamiliar with the study to comment on the data analysis procedures and findings in order to clarify ambiguous descriptions and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). I also kept a reflective journal to disclose my interpretations, challenges, emotions, revelations, and biases about participants and their narratives. Finally, asking two people to review and offer feedback on the development and execution of the study led to investigator triangulation, where multiple researchers comment on the procedures of a study (Patton, 2002).

### Limitations

Despite the steps taken to conduct a trustworthy study, there are several limitations to my methodological decisions. First, selection bias resulted by only selecting participants who attended NCORE. There were likely many other educators who facilitate discussions about racial realities but did not attend or present workshops at NCORE. Next, the non-contextual nature of the study was a shortcoming. Because I interviewed participants via telephone and face-to-face at NCORE, I did not examine how their institutional contexts might have influenced their abilities to facilitate these discussions. Third, I am solely relying on self-reports and participants' understandings of their facilitation. Although the purpose of this study was to understand how educators facilitate the discussion of racial issues in their own words, people sometimes struggle to describe their approaches when they are immersed in their practices. Therefore, an observational component would have offered another perspective to supplement the data from participants. Finally, given my social identity as an African American man and that Corrine is a white woman and Dalton

is a white man, I sometimes wondered how these racial and gendered differences might have influenced their willingness to share their stories with me and my ability to analyze the data through my lens. Although I found participants reflective and forthcoming, researchers with other social identities conceivably would have yielded different data.

## FINDINGS

I present the findings from two white participants, Corrine and Dalton, to illustrate how they facilitated racial discussions. Although Corrine and Dalton had students of color in their courses, during our interview, they most frequently mentioned how they facilitated racial discussions with white students in their courses, as they believed white students most needed support in discussing and understanding racial issues. After presenting their cases, I connect their experiences to previous research, highlight salient findings, and draw implications for practice.

### The Case of Corrine

Corrine, a white woman, has taught for almost 25 years. The courses she teaches in her current position as Professor at a small, private liberal arts institution generally explore issues of conflict between groups, sexism against women, and violence against women of color. She noted that her goal is to engage students in dialogues about these topics. In addition, she stated:

My idea is to help students who have completed beginning theory courses to spend some time in the community immediately surrounding the university and use people's experiences to challenge the theories they've been taught. So the neighborhood that we're located in is definitely working class, kind of lower middle class, at least as many families of color as white families. I hope that this class will allow students to start to really think about the messages that they've gotten both from the text that they've studied but also from their families and popular culture. The texts will look at questions of race, for sure, questions of class, gender, [and] sexuality.

An important goal of Corrine's classroom facilitation was to find ways to help students concretize the racial issues about which they read and discussed. Therefore, she sought ways to help them make sense of these issues within the community where the University was situated. This helped students make sense of the theoretical concepts in actual, practical, experiences while working within the community.

In order to help students connect classroom discussions to their campus community, Corrine often uses case studies about real incidents that occurred on campus. In her courses, she noted the following:

I also use case studies a lot in the conflict studies and the women's studies courses. I write versions of things that happen, either on campus or in the community or that are in the newspaper and ask the students to apply the theories that they have learned to these case studies. [I] teach them the theoretical tools are useful in everyday life. There is a case study that I have used a couple of times. It was about the experience of a couple of African American women who were basketball players on our campus. The women's locker room is accessible only to other women on campus, faculty, staff, students, administrators. Everybody came back from practice to their lockers and there were

racial epithets and symbols written on the lockers that the two black women had their stuff in. The case study lays this out. It also lays out the text of a message that, I can't remember if it was the President of the University or the Dean of the College, sent to the whole campus explaining it. Then, that's juxtaposed next to the statement that's on all our literature about what a welcoming and diverse community we are. I sit them [students] at a classroom table, five students sitting at a table. They've never seen the case study before. But they have notes on the different theories that they've used. They pick up the case study and they read it. They have five minutes to read and talk to each other. So this course is also designed to help them develop oral communication skills. So it's not enough to know the theories and to apply them well to the case study, but they also have to do that in a way that involves everyone in the conversation and comes up with the best set of responses. So, they read for five minutes and then they have 15 minutes to use their theories to make sense of what's happening in this case study. In women's studies what they learn is most feminist theory ignores race. That's [using case studies is] maybe one of the better ways for them to learn that [about race]. They get so frustrated, the students, and then they're dying for something more. I use case studies, and I give them a lot of practice in class by also using that method of testing them. It's like a dinner table conversation. I think it feels more authentic.

Several strategies for helping students make sense of discussions are seen in Corrine's example above. She utilized a case study centered on a real racial incident that occurred at her institution to help students concretize the theoretical readings on race with a real-life, practical example. Corrine noted that these case studies helped counter the resistance of white learners in thinking that racism was over; the example from the case enabled them to see that racism still exists despite university language that values a "welcoming and diverse community." Earlier in her interview, Corrine shared that she needed to help students see the impact of race and racism given the mostly white students in her courses, as well as her own white identity. Her quotation above exemplifies her efforts to help white students see racism within their own community.

Recognizing that mostly white learners were in her courses, Corrine assigned relevant readings to engage them in racial dialogues.

There's a book that was published in 1960 called *Black Like Me* [Griffin, 1960]. The guy who wrote it was a white guy who went through a chemical process of changing his skin color because he wanted to document, "Was it [differential treatment by race] really as bad as people said it was?" Students are absolutely horrified at what they read. It's about how this man whose experience as a white man but appears to be dark-skinned, what he sees when he looks in the mirror, how he experiences being treated by others who have no idea that he has experience as a white man. You're so inside his experience. It just turns everything that they have in their heads upside down.

Because Corrine wanted white students to see the influence of racial differences, she asked them to read a book that would help them personalize racial issues. Given Griffin's experiences and racial identity, white students especially related to what he wrote. Corrine stated that white learners often had trouble believing that people of color were treated differently simply because of their racial identities. This book was grounded in white students' experiences and written by an author who was also white; therefore, white students believed the implications of the text.

When Corrine picked readings that were situated in white students' experiences, she saw that they were willing to take more responsibility for their learning by sharing their out-of-class knowledge with other class members. In Corrine's courses, many students, for the first time, had the opportunity to read about and discuss racial issues in ways that mattered to them. Doing so

stimulated their interest in seeking out other literature relevant to their circumstances. She also mentioned how videos offered learners different experiences to consider.

In the [conflict course], documentary footage is incredibly powerful—*Eyes on the Prize* [Hampton, 1987] or any of the others. The text materials, the documentaries, and then the discussions that come out of that are so challenging. They are so immediate and deep. A lot of times they are filled with screaming and crying because white students are sometimes very defensive. “This stuff is history.” They can say that until a student of color in the room says, “That’s my experience.”

As noted above, the combination of media resources made it more difficult for white students to reject the truthfulness of the experiences of students of color. As white students saw, heard, and discussed multiple examples of racism in the past and in contemporary society, they began to appreciate that others had experiences different from their own, and that those experiences provided opportunities for learning. Corrine stated that when students of color addressed how the issues in the documentaries dovetailed with experiences in their own lives, white students lessened their defense mechanisms and started to appreciate the applicability of the videos to their own lives.

Even when Corrine utilized videos, readings, and case studies to engage learners, she was constantly aware of her white identity and how that influenced her ability to facilitate these discussions. When discussing the difficulties of facilitating these discussions, she said:

One of the things that I worry about constantly is deepening the wounds that students of color have or deepening the conviction that white students have that they don’t want to do it. I worry about making it worse instead of better. I worry about the injury that I might do. I also think there’s another kind of injury though that is only visible to me because students are willing to talk about it. And that is the kind that happens by default when people don’t teach in ways that gives students a chance to do this work. One of the places, at least on our campus, I’m guessing this happens at other places, where students are likely to have these conversations, whether it’s about race, gender, class, sexuality, or how all those things intersect, is in co-curricular programs—residential life, multicultural student affairs, leadership programs. It’s not in the classroom, which is criminal. I think it’s unbelievably problematic for higher education. It’s one of the things that makes me most hopeless about the academy and my colleagues.

During this segment of my interview with Corrine, she began to weep when talking about the potential injury to students by white faculty who do not facilitate these discussions in productive ways. As seen in the quotation above, Corrine was quite concerned with doing harm to students of color as a result of these discussions and reinforcing in the minds of white students that they do not have to engage in these discussions. She also alluded to these discussions happening in co-curricular settings but usually not in the classroom. Given her identity as a white woman, she saw the importance of giving students time to do the kind of work necessary to engage in these difficult discussions. She was never sure whether or not she was causing harm, but she endeavored to engage students in these discussions despite her discomfort and worry.

During my interview with Corrine, we talked at length about strategies she employed to facilitate racial discussions in her courses. She repeatedly mentioned the importance of finding a way to include students’ emotions during these discussions paired with her own emotions as a white woman facilitating discussions on racial issues.

I have to know who the people are. It matters. I'm not a person for whom it doesn't matter who is in the room. So I guess part of what you would see is my trying to figure out what the students have for assumptions and what their points of ignorance are and what their surprises are. Then, I'm using that to build on their curiosity. I always want to hear connections . . . between what they see in the text that's historical and what's happening now. So, race relations in this country right now, why are they the way they are? It's so easy to talk about when you look at that history. I think you would see, at least in some of the classes that I teach, a lot of first-person narratives, students telling pieces of their own story or reading memoirs and discussing. I try to have a lot of deeply engaging stories so it's not just definitions and theories but always connections so that they can get the personal implications. Colleagues have said to me that this or that was risky. There's a lot of emotion in my classrooms. People want to keep it out. It has to be there. I just don't see how you can do this work without emotion.

Embracing emotion as a necessary aspect of engaging white students in racial discussions, Corrine was convinced that using first-person narratives helped students understand the historical significance of race and also to see how racism still occurred in present day society. Although her colleagues saw her classroom strategies as risky, she continued her facilitation approach because it enabled her to gain a more thorough understanding of the students in her class and use this understanding to find activities that enabled students to concretize the readings.

### The Case of Dalton

Dalton, a white man with 13 years of teaching experience, works at a large, research-intensive institution in the Midwest. He teaches Philosophy courses primarily in social theory and race and racism. We started our conversation with a discussion of his students' expectations when they entered his Philosophy course on race and racism.

On the first day of my class, I'll talk to students about, "Who did you expect to walk in here?" People who didn't know who I was, more often than not, they were assuming that I was going to be a person of color.

Dalton evinced a consciousness of his identity as a white educator, how that influenced his ability to teach about race, and the assumptions students had of who they expected to facilitate the discussion of racial realities. He challenged learners' beliefs by showing that white people, too, could and should be involved in racial dialogues.

He acknowledged the privileges he was granted and how being a white man made it easier to engage students in racial discussions, given the authority and respect that students accorded him.

I'm at a predominantly white institution, so as a white guy talking about race, I am able to be effective at reaching white students. I'm accorded by the students a certain degree of respect and legitimacy that my white, female colleagues or my black, female colleagues and Latino, male colleagues don't receive. In my class, I talk about what it means for me, as a white guy, to be teaching this, how they perceive that, what their assumptions were coming in, and how they might treat me in the class—what the data show in terms of the reception of faculty who are white or not white.

Given that most of the students who enrolled in Dalton's courses were white, he noticed that he was able to use his race to develop rapport with students in ways that his colleagues of color could not. Students, particularly white students, deemed him legitimate and were able to identify with

his racial background. However, rather than simply accepting his privileged race, Dalton asked learners to question the assumptions he held as a white educator and how the course would be different if a person of a different race was the instructor.

Akin to Corrine, Dalton also sought ways to help students make sense of racial concepts and theories beyond the readings and classroom discussions. He recognized the limits of his identity as a white man and wanted students to grapple with racial differences in concrete ways. He utilized service-learning as an effort to achieve this goal. However, he struggled with seeing the outcomes of service-learning in his Philosophy course focused on race and racism.

They'll [students] have a range of options to go into the community to work with students of color at a local school, helping them with reading or just doing some after-school programming with students of color. And usually the students have really good experiences doing that, and they usually really enjoy it. Not always, but usually. But I still worry that it still has this, even though I try to talk about this in the classroom, get them to reflect on it, give them some reflection assignments, I still worry that the white students go into a community of color, for example, and see themselves as helping these poor kids of color or something, and I don't want them to have that helping attitude. What I want the service-learning to achieve is to give the students a different perspective, to challenge their whiteness, their white viewpoint out in the world. I'm just not sure that the way I've done it effectively does that. I'm sure if I set it up differently, it would work better, but I just don't know how to avoid reinforcing certain stereotypes. And so I think the service-learning, you know, I'm a big fan of it, but on the other hand, I'm just not sure how it can be done well. But I do think it's important to get students out of the classroom and if I could just find the right kind of environment, the right kind of project to get them to work on, it could be much more effective than it has been.

Dalton worried about the white students in his courses developing a "helping attitude" toward those who were different from them (i.e., poor people of color), as they engaged in service-learning. As a white man facilitating dialogues with mostly white students, he knew he needed to find a way to help white students explore differences in a tangible way; however, service learning did not seem to produce the outcomes he wanted. Although Corrine saw students' engagement with case studies about racial incidents that happened on campus as critical to their understanding of racial disparities, Dalton wondered if students' engagement in the community actually worsened race relations and reinforced their stereotypes about different racial groups. He struggled to find a way for students to tangibly make sense of the racial issues discussed in the classroom.

After we discussed the complexities of service-learning, I asked Dalton to return to a previous comment he made about de-centering himself while facilitating racial discussions. Although he observed that white students respected him differently than they did his colleagues of color, Dalton tried to lessen his authority in the classroom to encourage white students to discuss racial issues. He said:

Even though I de-center myself, I still have a degree of authority, of course, in my classroom that I will use to challenge students, occasionally, to think more deeply about their beliefs. It's very difficult to manage [my authority] in the classroom, and a line that I step over quite often. When you're trying to challenge white students to think a little bit more carefully about what they're saying or to be able to give reasons to justify what they're saying, just asking them for those reasons, they sometimes feel attacked. I use a lot of group work because while I have a degree of control over the discussion when we're all together, which is very useful and important, it's also very important that they participate and that they develop a certain degree of trust with each other and honesty with each other. Small

groups help to promote that. It doesn't necessarily bring it about but it promotes a certain degree of honesty and a level of participation that I can't get with the whole class.

Recognizing the difficult line between using his authority and de-centering himself, Dalton used different approaches to facilitate discussions about race. He noticed that white students in his courses often felt attacked when probed to use evidence to justify their positions; therefore, he tried challenging students to think about their positions and used small group work to invite participation in these discussions. These small groups, he indicated, were a means to help students develop trust with each other. Further, Dalton indicated that he tried to "minimize lecturing as much as possible, though it's still necessary to set the framework for the discussion" and that he facilitated racial discussions through "a Socratic method by just asking probing questions and follow-up questions [but that] it can be challenging, sometimes, when white students are reluctant to participate." The combination of lecturing to frame relevant topics in the discussion and asking many questions enabled Dalton to engage white students in these discussions despite their hesitance to do so at times.

I was intrigued by Dalton's honest reflection on his whiteness and the complexities of his role as an authority figure, so I probed him further to give an example of how his race enables him to better facilitate these discussions with white students. He commented:

I talk about what the data shows, in terms of how they receive or give legitimacy to what I say in the classroom. I think of my role as a white guy in talking about race and racism—I can be especially effective at reaching those white students in the classroom, students who grew up in a white, suburban background the way I did. And I often mention that to them. "I grew up there; I understand exactly what you have experienced. I've been there." So, often, like I said before, I think of those students as my primary audience because I think that's who I can be particularly effective in reaching. Students of color who don't know me might be pretty skeptical about a white guy talking about race or racism, and I understand exactly why. And I understand that hopefully they'll develop a degree of trust in me, or they'll see that I'm serious and that I really know the issues over the course of the 15 weeks. And so, I understand if they're skeptical and are not very participatory early on until they get to know who I am and what I'm really about. But I really do think that my role is to reach out to those white students because I think it's an unfortunate fact they will be more willing to listen to me, at least initially, than they would be if I weren't white.

Recognizing the benefits he is accorded by white students given his race, Dalton endeavored to connect with white students in his courses by sharing his experiences growing up in a similar environment and his early exposure to race. His ability to share data with which white students could connect, coupled with his willingness to be vulnerable in sharing his story, were key strategies he used in facilitating these discussions. His whiteness served as a way to gain trust with white students who were more willing to listen to him given his racial similarity to them.

## DISCUSSION

Corrine's and Dalton's stories underscore Brookfield and Preskill's (2005) democratic discussion. Both participants strived to support white students in sharing students' views about race, seeing the historical and systemic implications of race, and engaging with their peers about these issues. Corrine wanted students to engage in discussion using case studies as a method, whereas, Dalton

invited white students to engage in discussion by reflecting on his whiteness and asking them to suspend their assumptions about who should facilitate discussions about race. Both participants shared elements of democratic discussion during interviews. Corrine talked about wanting students in her classes to “talk to each other” and to “come up with the best set of responses.” This goal was similar to Brookfield and Preskill’s point about how democratic discussion is about coming to new understandings based on examining different perspectives. Dalton invited white students to participate in “small groups” in order for them to “participate and develop a certain degree of trust with each other.” He also asked questions and lectured to identify important topics for discussion. Corrine and Dalton did not discuss differences between dialogue, debate, and discussion in their interviews, but as seen in the findings, the kinds of discussions about race they facilitated align with Brookfield and Preskill’s democratic discussion in that they asked questions, used small group work, and provided space for students to speak to each other with the ultimate goal of coming to an expanded understanding about racial issues. Corrine and Dalton noticed that these discussions served as a way for white students to think about racial realities, hear different perspectives on this topic, and share their own opinions as well.

Bergerson (2003) and Wahl et al. (2000) have shown that there is a lack of white educators facilitating discussions about race; thus, the data from Corrine and Dalton show the value-added benefits from white educators engaging race in their courses and the unique ways they are able to connect with white learners in their courses. Wahl et al. (2000) suggest that white faculty members should participate in teaching race relations courses to demonstrate to learners that it is also the responsibility of white people to address issues of race. Participants understood that facilitating constructive discussions about racial issues began with understanding themselves—their racial identities, assumptions, biases, strengths, and limitations as educators. Reflecting on their racial identities was a means to encourage white students in their courses to do the same.

As a white researcher, Bergerson (2003) notes that those who participated in social justice education were mostly educators of color. Accordingly, she wrote about her journey of developing consciousness of her whiteness and argued for the importance of white people assuming responsibility for facilitating exchanges about racial realities and using their privileges to help white students personalize issues of race. Given that most of the students who enrolled in the courses of participants were white, it was important for Corrine and Dalton to facilitate these interactions. They found that white learners were more likely to believe in the existence of racism and white privilege and more willing to discuss racial issues with their peers when they saw a white person of authority in these discussions. They shared the ways their racial identities afforded them unearned advantages, authority, respect, and legitimacy, and the importance of white people taking an active role in challenging racial injustices and working with students to do the same. The knowledge Dalton and Corrine shared was essential to responding to Bergerson’s assertion concerning white faculty. When white faculty treated racial realities seriously, they conveyed to learners the importance of race in students’ lives and increased the frequency with which white students discussed racial realities with their peers. When white educators facilitated racial discussions, they removed a portion of the onus from their colleagues of color to be the primary people who cared about and addressed racial realities (hooks, 1994; Tatum, 1997).

Although intergroup dialogue has a specific framework and structure that is different from the kinds of discussions facilitated by Dalton and Corrine, the practical strategies Dalton and Corrine used to facilitate these discussions are supported by research on intergroup dialogue (Zúñiga, 2003; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). A critical goal of this process, consciousness raising,



was reflected in the willingness of both participants to incorporate various approaches (e.g., readings, reflection, and multimedia) to prompt learners to consider issues of race. As Zúñiga et al. (2007) assert: “Members of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups must gain a deeper understanding of each other’s situations and grapple with effects of privilege and subordination on their relationships” (pp. 9–10). When Dalton and Corrine invited white students to reflect on issues of race in their lives through their personal narratives, they demonstrated to learners the importance of placing their own understandings of racial realities at the forefront of their learning. In addition, the use of multiple approaches provided learners with different opportunities to connect with the course content from their own vantage points. An important element of intergroup dialogue is the critical-dialogic framework on which its pedagogy is based (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011). In the literature review, I specified the storytelling and experience-based components of this framework coupled with an attention to systems of power, privilege, and oppression. Corrine and Dalton shared their own stories with students, listened to students’ stories and experiences, and worked to help learners understand systemic racism through readings, case studies, and learning beyond the classroom (e.g., service-learning). Consequently, their facilitation strategies are connected, in many ways, to the critical-dialogic framework of intergroup dialogue.

Dalton and Corrine found that in order to engage white students at varying degrees of understanding about racial realities, they had to rely upon multifaceted practices that addressed learners’ developmental places and readiness to engage race and racism. For instance, as underscored in the literature review, Helms (2008) and Helms and Cook (2005) discuss different schemas that reflect white students’ racial identity development. Corrine and Dalton both examined who the white learners were in their courses and utilized facilitation approaches that aligned with white students’ developmental places. Corrine mentioned needing to know who was in the room during these discussions, and Dalton discussed sharing his own experiences engaging race as a white man to connect with white students in his courses. Although neither participant specifically referred to white racial identity development theories, this research is helpful to provide a context for understanding some of the resistance they faced from white learners (e.g., Corrine—“White students are sometimes very defensive. ‘This stuff is history.’ They can say that until a student of color in the room says, ‘That’s my experience.’”). Both participants needed to acknowledge the developmental places of white students in their courses and use that knowledge to develop strategies for best facilitating these discussions.

Emotion was also a central theme discussed by Corrine and Dalton. They both sought ways to help white learners emotionally personalize racial issues in their lives, which they believed would prompt them to deem talking about race more seriously. Sue et al. (2010) found that emotions were an important part of difficult dialogues on race. Emotions that they found were common among white students were anxiety, anger, defensiveness, and sadness. For white professors, common emotions were anxiety, disappointment, and uncertainty. Corrine and Dalton also showed anxiety and uncertainty in not knowing sometimes how best to engage students in these discussions, for example, the struggle of using service-learning in Dalton’s philosophy courses. Acknowledging these emotions was essential in their abilities to facilitate these discussions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The interviews with Corrine and Dalton yielded helpful information for other white educators hoping to facilitate discussions about race with white students. Both participants illustrated the

important role white educators can play in these discussions. Although they both used lectures to help students understand racial concepts and theories, they relied on other facilitation methods as well. Rather than solely lecturing to students about their own perspectives, Corrine and Dalton wanted to enable students to see themselves as knowledgeable. They incorporated materials (e.g., documentaries like *Eyes on the Prize* [Hampton, 1987] and after-school programming) that encouraged white students to place their own experiences at the forefront of the learning process. Thus, a key implication for practice from this study is the importance of white educators partnering with white students during these discussions in ways that enable students to speak from their own vantage points, see themselves as knowers, and situate the dialogues and readings in their own experiences.

Educators interested in engaging white students in these discussions should be cognizant of reflecting on their own white racial identities and examining the developmental places of white learners in order to respond appropriately to resistance among white learners. Using a resource like *Black Like Me* (Griffin, 1960), as Corrine did, or even *White Like Me* (Wise, 2008) might better engage white learners in earlier racial identity schemas of Contact or Disintegration since they can make sense of another white person trying to understand racial issues rather than simply being told that racism is a problem that still exists in society.

Given the strong presence of a range of emotions during these discussions, those interested in facilitating them must normalize emotions and integrate them into the discussion (Sue et al., 2010). Doing so alerts participants, especially those who identify as white, that emotions are an expected and important source to explore during discussions. Engaging in conversations about the source of these emotions can help white learners explore how to work with these emotions and continue discussing racial realities even when doing so is difficult.

An important point to consider is the impact of white educators' approaches on students of color. Notably absent from this paper is how white educators facilitated these dialogues among students of color. The focus of this article is on white educators working with white students for the reasons stated previously. However, with the exception of Dalton's one comment about students of color being "skeptical about a white guy talking about race or racism" and Corrine discussing "deepening the wounds that students of color have," neither participant really addressed how her or his facilitation impacted students of color. An implication from this study is considering how one's white racial identity might impact one's ability to connect with students of color during these discussions. Future researchers should consider the impact of these discussions on students of color, particularly in predominantly white environments where their representation is minimal. White educators should be cognizant of not placing the onus onto students of color for educating their white peers (and educators) about their stories without beneficial outcomes for students of color as well from these discussions. As a means to respond to this challenge of unequal groups, the benefit of intergroup dialogue is the strict attention to balancing representation of social identities in the dialogues.

Although Corrine and Dalton utilized different resources to help students engage race, they had different levels of success with taking students out of the classroom to help them grapple with racial content in more tangible ways. Corrine found that students learned about racial disparities by responding to case studies about incidents that occurred on their campus, while Dalton found no beneficial ways to incorporate service-learning into his courses that did not reinforce white students' stereotypes about people of color. Dalton's struggle was inconsistent with Marullo's (1998) research in which he found that including service-learning on a race relations course

increased students' awareness of racial diversity. However, this awareness of racial diversity might not be sufficient enough to counter the presence of stereotypes. Recognizing their white race and that most of the students in their courses were also white, Dalton and Corrine sought ways to incorporate different voices into their racial discussions through asking students to engage others within their communities. Future researchers should further examine the benefits and difficulties of other immersion-type experiences in helping white students concretize racial issues.

White educators are well-situated to model appropriate and meaningful ways to respond to racial issues in classroom environments. Educators of color can no longer be the majority of persons who facilitate these dialogues in their courses. As Corrine and Dalton noted, white students were more likely to participate in these discussions when white educators demonstrated productive ways for them to do so. At present, there is a lack of exposure to white role models who positively engage racial realities. White educators who are committed to these discussions can plan workshops for their colleagues, engage in peer review of colleagues' syllabi to ascertain the level of racial consciousness embedded in course material and their philosophies, suggest readings, and serve as contacts with whom other faculty can discuss the process of facilitating these discussions.

## CONCLUSION

I conducted this study to illustrate how white educators can facilitate discussions about race with white students in their courses. For this particular article, I devoted attention to two white participants in my study given the predominantly white contexts in which they taught and their abilities to connect with the white learners in their courses in unique ways. As underscored in the findings, these educators capitalized on the privileges they were afforded given their white racial identities and problematized their whiteness in order to encourage white students to reflect on their own identities.

Readers who are interested in beginning the process of addressing racial issues in the classroom might wonder what steps they can take. First and foremost, participants in the present study stressed the importance of developing knowledge about one's whiteness—privileges, power, and the assumptions one holds. Doing so demonstrates to white learners the significance of their own racial identities and reminds them that educators also struggle with making sense of racial issues. The process of facilitating these discussions is a difficult undertaking, but as the narratives from Corrine and Dalton remind readers, they can participate in these discussions by considering the influence of race on their lives, understanding models of white racial identity development, reflecting on their own white identities, and finding ways to include emotions in the classroom that help students personalize issues of race and racism.

## NOTES

1. Throughout this article, when referring to the present study, I use "educators" broadly to refer to tenure-track, tenured, and non-tenure-track faculty members, as well as those who do not hold the title "faculty" but teach college-level courses and work with students out of the classroom (e.g., student affairs educators). However, in discussing previous research, I use the terms used by researchers (most often "faculty").
2. "Racial realities" refers to thinking about how race differentially impacts people.

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**Stephen John Quaye** is an assistant professor in the Student Affairs Program at the University of Maryland. His research concentrates on the influence of race relations on college and university campuses, specifically the gains and outcomes associated with inclusive racial climates, cross-racial interactions, and racially-conscious pedagogical approaches.