

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

Spring 2024

In-Class Engagement and Trinity College Professors: The Student of Color Experience

Xavier Mercado

xavier.mercado@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mercado, Xavier, "In-Class Engagement and Trinity College Professors: The Student of Color Experience". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2024.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/1071>

In-Class Engagement and Trinity College Professors: The Student of Color Experience

Xavier Mercado

Trinity College, Department of Educational Studies

EDUC-400: Senior Research Seminar

Professor Jones

December 2023

Abstract

Trinity College has provided students with various classroom experiences that have allowed them to excel in further understanding of the world. These courses have given students the chance to not only connect and engage with the material, but they've also been at the forefront for students to use this knowledge to transform the communities around them. However, this is not an experience that is always the same for students of color here at the college. Here at a predominantly-white institution (PWI), students of color live their day-to-day lives often one a few in their classes. They are in spaces that challenge the ways that their identity can be recognized and acknowledged in relation "to which college students of color feel like they belong to the community on their respective campuses" (Hussain and Jones 64). Classrooms aren't just physical spaces, for they are spaces that are engrained in how people can learn within a community of supportive peers and educators; nevertheless, it must be considered just how much students of color can learn and engage in these spaces with professors who don't truly grasp their perspective in connection to their identities. In this paper, I aim to learn more about this to answer the following questions: What are Trinity College students of color's experiences with professors of various racial identities? How do they assert that their experiences are related to their descriptions of in-class engagement? In writing this paper, I interviewed eight Trinity College junior and senior students of color, asking questions geared toward learning more about their individual engagement in their classes and how their identity coincides with how they perceive the racial identities of their Trinity professors. This helped me to come to the argument that students of color at Trinity feel that while some White professors have strongly established inclusive classroom spaces and relationships with students of color, other White professors are negligent of their identity and how they're creating an inclusive classroom space; this causes

differing styles of in-class engagement for students of color. It's also argued that these varying experiences are due to the content being taught and how professors of various racial identities uphold culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP).

Introduction

Being at a PWI, students of color at Trinity are frequently in predicaments that cause them to be few within their classrooms; this isn't simply accounting for their own racial identity, but this is taking into account the fact that they're one of few students of color, if not being the only student of color, within their classroom. Furthermore, it's critical to assess and analyze the role that the professor and their racial identity play in students feeling acceptance, negligence, or both within their classrooms. These thoughts guide how the student of color experience can be viewed within Trinity's classrooms, with these experiences enlightening more perspectives on the impacts of these experiences on varying students of color.

As this paper will further look into, these ideas of diverse and inclusive classes with the combination of culturally aware faculty members will be observed more thoroughly. These ideas will be differently discussed as I analyze my interview with eight Trinity College junior and senior students of color to learn the answers to the following questions further: What are Trinity College students of color's experiences with professors of various racial identities? How do they assert that their experiences are related to their descriptions of in-class engagement? The qualitative research analysis will not only showcase just how much engagement for students of color differs here at Trinity, but the research will also demonstrate the unique experiences that students of color have had with professors of different racial and ethnic identities, centering

around how the pedagogy of these professors also plays a significant role for the experiences of these students.

Background Context

As we've moved past matriculation for the Class of 2027, it's important to recognize that this class, being the biggest in our school's history of over 600 students, is embedded in the idea of creating a diverse environment. However, diversity doesn't equal inclusivity. While diversity serves as a way for people of different identities to be in one space, inclusivity brings people of various backgrounds together through intentional conversations and programming. More specifically, although "diversity refers to differences within a group, inclusion speaks to how those members are treated and how they feel" (Puitty et al. 1101). It must also be taken into account the continuous efforts that Trinity has made to further push for a more diverse campus, with a jump of 23% to 33% students of color from the Class of 2025 to 2027 respectively (Trinity College Official Website). Because of this, it must be considered how students of color are engaging in settings that cause them to be singled out and become classroom outliers.

Positionality

The research conducted is one that I take much interest and passion for. Being of Hispanic descent, my identity here at Trinity has played a significant part in how I engaged with my professors, and peers, and the overall experience of being a Trinity College student. Whether it's been elaborating on my educational experiences in my classes or helping lead and organize various multicultural initiatives, the student of color experience is an experience I've lived ever since coming to Trinity in August 2020. This personal experience, as well as conversations with my peers of color over the past four academic years, reflect how our classes can be an unsettling

place at times. For one, we've wanted to see classrooms become more supportive and inclusive for students of all identities.

Literature Review

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

CRP is a concept that has become increasingly discussed and analyzed throughout time; it has been utilized as a framework for how educators can utilize it to create a more equitable classroom space. First coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings, CRP serves to “address student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings 469). By creating classrooms rooted in the values and themes of CRP, students of color can learn in a space that embraces their own racial and cultural identities, which will help them to think critically about various topics of learning. CRP functions to ensure that teachers are “non-judgmental and inclusive of the cultural backgrounds of their students in order to be effective facilitators of learning in the classroom” (Brown-Jeffy and Cooper 66). Through this, teachers have the intentionality to make their classroom environment welcoming to students who have various backgrounds and experiences with certain ideas and concepts. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper use their piece to serve as a way for people to further conceptualize what CRP is used for and how it should be used. This leads to them breaking down CRP into five different principles: identity and achievement, equity and excellence, developmental appropriateness, teaching whole child, and student teacher relationships. While each of these frameworks is differentiated, they serve the purpose of idealizing CRP as a whole; Brown-Jeffy and Cooper emphasize this further by stating that CRP takes into account that “the complexities of the social construction of race in the United States must also be explored because people in American society are often viewed in

terms of racial characteristics” (Brown-Jeffy and Cooper 79). CRP recognizes the aspect of various perspectives of their own lives being a vast component of the experience for many people in the United States, which often lingers into the dynamics of classroom space. With the utilization of CRP, Trinity professors could combat their mostly homogenous classrooms to create experiences for students of color to further their understanding of how various topics could be applicable and relevant to their own views of the world (Brown-Jeffy and Cooper 68).

When considering the effectiveness and criticalness of CRP in PWI spaces, one must recognize that CRP serves to guide faculty members to engage with their students in a manner that allows them the chance to crucially consider how they’re teaching concepts that take into account the various cultures of students within a space. As emphasized by Hinton and Seo, “Instead of ignoring the culture of minority students, faculty must first understand their culture and then incorporate this cultural information into their lessons” (Hinton and Seo 134). Hinton and Seo point this out as a key way to build up the retention and engagement of students of color within PWI classrooms, for they’re able to dive into concepts that may have some relation to their own life experiences. Hinton and Seo call for this attentiveness to occur for faculty, for it’ll establish CRP as a guide for them to work towards having a positive impact on the academic experience of students of color. This further connects to the ways that CRP works to make sure that all types of learning are embraced; this is further implored by Hinton and Seo, who state that “The best way to accommodate different methods of learning employed by a diverse student body is to employ many different teaching modalities when communicating course material” (Hinton and Seo 138). CRP isn’t just focused on the “what” and “why” of various lessons: it’s also focused on the “how”. Considering that all students learn differently, classes must provide equitable experiences that allow everyone to learn and indulge in various concepts. With CRP,

this is a focal point that serves faculty members as a pathway for them to help students dive deeper into the “what” and “why” given the multitude of ways that ideas and frameworks are being taught and analyzed. This study will further look into the ways that White faculty members at Trinity would be able to utilize the frameworks of CRP to create spaces in their classes that’ll encourage all voices and perspectives to be welcomed, considering how they have engaged students of color with various learning styles.

College In-Class Engagement

When discussing the ideas of in-class engagement at the college level, it’s important to have a basis of what student engagement is to begin with. As explained by Kuh, student engagement is defined as the “educational practices that are strongly associated with high levels of learning and personal development” (Kuh 12). Student engagement provides educators with a clear idea of how well students understand and conceptualize the information provided to them, thus allowing the educator a greater sense of how they can best support their students. However, one must not the shape that this engagement takes for various students; in other words, engagement is a concept that works differently for students. Student engagement typically serves in three dimensions, which are all used by students for how they must embrace and internalize what’s being taught in the class: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Students demonstrating behavioral engagement show “involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities... [which] is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out” (Frederick et al. 60). This differs from students showcasing emotional engagement, which is described as when students demonstrate “ positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and are presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work” (Frederick et al. 60). Furthermore, these ideas differ from students exhibiting

cognitive engagement, which is when students are “incorporat[ing] thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills” (Frederick et al. 60). By understanding student engagement through these three lenses, the idea of understanding how different students delve within their own styles of engagement paints a clearer picture for how educators can understand this to determine how individual students succeed. By providing a space for these engagements to take place, students are able to become more comfortable with being in a classroom space that allows this engagement to happen without judgment.

Further looking into student engagement allows a deeper dive into what this means for undergraduate students. Looking more into what student engagement means for undergraduate students, Wu explains how this engagement is “key to various desirable outcomes, such as college retention, academic achievement, college completion, and occupational earnings” (Wu 102). For undergraduate students, their engagement is engraved in their successes in college as a whole, both in the class and for potential work post-graduation. Work is approached and engaged by thinking of one’s future, but this viewpoint is not the same for every undergraduate student. For many undergraduates, many factors go into how they engage in their classes, including social class. Social class has shown to be an idea of how many students understand what it means for them to undertake the material. As explored by Yen’s study, middle-class students understood engagement as working with the professor and utilizing their resources to improve further the ways that they understand the information in the class; on the other hand, first-generation students viewed engaging in the material as a task that they had to do on their own. Furthermore, first-generation students “did not expect professors to ‘hold their hands’ and believed that their best strategy for success was relying on themselves” (Yen 845-846). First-generation students

come to college with hardly any idea of college culture, especially in academics. With this, students are prone to feel pressured to handle everything on their own and think that they must go through college doing everything on their own. While some of this is due to the desire to complete work independently, it must also be considered that this is also since they are unaware of how to go out and seek support and resources from their professors (Yen 851). This further shows just how every student's background accounts for how they can understand their own engagement; it also shows how this relates to the ways that engagement pans out variously at Trinity. Taking this into account makes certain that the variety in students' educational experiences reflects on how they're being supported by professors.

In-Class Engagement for Students of Color

When understanding the idea of in-class engagement at the college level, it's critical to have an understanding of how engagement functions for students of color specifically. The experiences for in-class engagement are wide-ranging for students of color, which helps to further understand the importance for students of color to be in learning spaces that are rather beneficial than hurtful to their education. Eliason and Turalba discuss this further through their study, as they were able to provide further insight as to how students of color engage in various capacities. Through their research, the authors found that students of color typically had hesitancy to share their thoughts and ideas on a topic; this was due to students feeling that they would be "judged or embarrassed by saying the wrong thing, of feeling 'stupid,' not having enough knowledge to speak about a topic, were embarrassed by having an accent, afraid they would not be understood, or that their opinion was not important" (Eliason and Turalba 1267). Students of color must be able to learn in spaces that provide them the chance to learn concepts in ways that are most correlated to their backgrounds and identities; without this, these students

become held back and hesitant to learn authentically. Eliason and Turalba's research demonstrates just how much students of color consider who they are as individuals, which takes shape in how they're able to feel various levels of courage to share their ideas. The authors also discussed how this individuality becomes tested, as participants shared the frequency in which they feel that they must speak on behalf of their community, with over half of the participants saying to have done so within their classes. The instances of tokenism have the potential to "isolate students even further from their peers and instructors and promote feelings of inadequacy in representing their group, thereby inhibiting future class participation" (Eliason and Turalba 1274). To truly build classroom spaces that are embedded in accepting students of all backgrounds and perspectives, one must understand that individualism is a key piece to community building. Allowing this to thrive offers a greater understanding of people's lives in relation to their identity in a manner that prevents any misconceptions. Eliason and Turalba's study showcases these ideas vastly, emphasizing just how important the role of community and identity is within a classroom space.

To understand how in-class engagement takes form for students of color, inclusivity must be recognized and emphasized. Good and other authors discuss this further, with their study focusing on how the usage of multicultural philosophy by White professors in STEM classes leads to even greater engagement within the classroom for students of color. They explain how the utilization of multicultural language can be a sign of inclusivity being built for students of color, as their research showed "higher quiz performance and less perceived instructor bias in the [multicultural philosophy] compared to the [colorblind philosophy]" (Good et al. 6). By using a multicultural philosophy, White professors were able to help their students of color achieve a vast amount of academic success. This success was not viewed as the professor creating a bias

within the classroom space, rather it was the professor working to create a learning community that uplifted marginalized students. This was in opposition to White professors with a colorblind philosophy, as this typically led to students of color feeling excluded. Furthermore, these ideals take into account just how much STEM classes build a greater amount of exclusion. As explained by Good and the authors, STEM faculty are less likely to discuss multiculturalism within their courses due to the concepts not “naturally” coming up in alignment with the curriculum; because of this, students of color “entering college and taking their first introductory-level STEM courses likely receive either no mention of diversity or a [colorblind] approach from their faculty, potentially resulting in greater perceived bias and lower performance” (Good et al. 6). For students of color that may be interested in STEM, they must be able to learn such difficult concepts in spaces that embrace them. The same can be said for any type of course that may pique the interest of a student, and this must be recognized as a benefit to the academic success of students of color. The study points out just how much there’s a lack of CRP within STEM courses, with professors not knowing how to integrate the pillars organically; understanding these concepts further will only allow students of color to achieve a greater amount of prosperity within their courses and feeling a sense of belonging within the classes.

Cross-Race Mentoring

At Trinity, mentorship has served as a pillar for students to grow and advance themselves, whether that’s in academics or professional work. Though this institution plays in favor of White students, as they dominate the campus space, mentorship amongst races continues to serve as a factor for the community being built and created at Trinity. As discussed by Reddick and Pritchett, cross-race mentoring initially starts with a mentor being accessible while also being the one to reach out to a student; their research found that White professors, mentoring Black

students at PWIs, establish and ensure “of the sociocultural context around Black students in a PWI, aware of the need to address the whole student, and finally aware of the mutually beneficial opportunity to learn and grow with their mentee” (Reddick and Pritchett 64). When these two steps occur, it allows for a White professor to build on their intentionality of engaging a student of color within their space, for their actively working towards eliminating the chances for the student to feel disengaged within the class. Reddick and Pritchett emphasize this further, explaining how cross-race mentoring develops in three different ways for a professor: the professor having a greater sense of awareness of the challenges facing students of color in a PWI climate, an idea of how to engage students, and recognizing that relationship-building must be reciprocation on both the professor and student’s ends (Reddick and Pritchett 64). Through these ideals, the ability for professors and students of color to have better perspectives of one another will allow them to further their ability to work alongside one another, further establishing a classroom space of openness. Mentoring is an idea that takes shape in different forms; it’s not just something that students can seek to advance their academic thoughts, but it’s also a way for them to advance their overall thoughts about their place in the world and how they can feel supported. White faculty must understand how important it is for students of color to “[have] a guide invested in their progress and make the veiled pathways in academic settings more clear...[keeping in mind the] hypercompetitive, predominantly White institutional setting [that] might be particularly isolating for these students” (Reddick and Pritchett 72).

Cross-race mentoring becomes more effective when a White professor becomes more cognizant of the circumstances that face students of color at PWIs, which is typically them being a space that makes them become one of few in a class (Reddick and Pritchett 65). By actively taking steps to ensure that these students are progressing through their college careers, White

professors can have a grasp of how they can make an impact to help the engagement of students of color in predominantly white spaces. Cross-race mentoring, as explained by Stanley and Lincoln, requires “work on both sides - including deep reflection on the meaning(s) of white privilege; the assumption of white seniority and "voice"; and departmental and college mores, traditions, and values” (Stanley and Lincoln 48). Cross-race mentoring serves as a valuable tool to eliminate the presence of white supremacy within predominately white spaces, thus ensuring that students of color are in a space that doesn't work against them. In addition, this works to eliminate the invisibility of students of color within these spaces; by embracing cross-race mentoring, students of color can feel seen and cared for. Trinity has historically been a place in favor of Whiteness absorbing the space, which has inherently led to students of color considering how they can find their place here. By ensuring that White professors are indulging in cross-race mentoring, students of color could feel that they're in a place with people who value their identity and background, even of various races and cultures.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Trinity is an institution rooted in academic success, pushing students to fully embrace the knowledge presented within their various courses. However, these courses are rooted in the factors of dehumanization regarding students of color having the comfort and safety net to openly express themselves. It becomes even more essential for students of color to be provided spaces in their classes while being encouraged to tap into their own creativity; doing this strengthens the implementation of the pedagogy of the oppressed to thrive. As first mentioned by Freire, the pedagogy of the oppressed works to “be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (Freire 48). By structuring a curriculum embedded within this pedagogy, dehumanization is fought against;

educators, no longer serving as the oppressors, allow for students to be free in thought and voice through various engagements of dialogue. This further allows students to find and hold onto their voice in their classroom space. Nevertheless, the pedagogy of the oppressed can't simply be integrated into one's teaching practices, for it must be developed through two stages. Freire explains how the first stage entails the oppressor to further understand oppression and commit themselves to transform practices of pedagogy, as the second stage leads to the oppressor letting loose of pedagogy and providing it to the oppressed; both stages are done to confront the culture of domination for the voice against the oppressor and giving power to the oppressed (Freire 54). Through this work, the pedagogy of the oppressed is established in an organic manner that provides a pathway for educators to take into account how their pedagogy functions to eliminate the possibility of oppression succeeding in a class. This framework, furthermore, pushes for liberation to take stride in oppressed voices to guide these academic spaces.

The absence of pedagogy of the oppressed causes students to lose their voices, thus losing their identity within their classes. This stems from the banking concept, as analyzed by Freire, to take control. Through this concept, students are simply seen as recipients of knowledge from the teacher, being expected to absorb concepts and ideas that the teacher discusses. Because of this, education then has the capability to “minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed” (Freire 73). The banking concept leads to the elimination of creative power for students; rather, they are expected to serve as banks, taking in cash deposits of nothing and just getting used to the system. The harms of this practice become significant, as students aren't given the opportunity to critically consider the ways that various concepts are associated with reality; further, this practice prohibits critical consciousness from

being encouraged. In opposition, the integration of problem-posing education functions to fight against the evils of the banking concept. Freire explains how this practice of education directly goes against what the banking concept promotes, as dialogue makes sure that “the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers” (Freire 80). With problem-posing education, dialogue becomes a focal point for how in-class oppression is omitted. The power dynamics of traditional education are challenged, for students and teachers are able to come together to utilize their creative freedoms and power to think critically about topics. At Trinity, the idea of liberal arts is vastly stressed to students, as Trinity wants their student body to dive into the academic fields that provide them the most interest and delve into a great amount of creative freedom; the institution stressed the fact that their academics “combines intimate learning environments, broad perspectives, and bold exploration to help you develop into exactly what you want to be” (“Academics”). Thus, our predominantly-white classes must provide students of color with the space to think boldly within their courses in connection to the work they want to do, as opposed to them being in a space that washes away their mind thought-provoking fireball.

Methods

Methodology

As I sought to answer my research question, I decided to conduct a qualitative study through interviews with eighth juniors and seniors at Trinity. The decision to conduct a qualitative study rather than a quantitative study was to further obtain data that would vastly contribute to the common themes and ideas for the student of color experience as it relates to many students of color at Trinity, further “[providing] information about the ‘human’ side of an

issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals” (Mack et al. 1). The following study highlights the criticalness of understanding the personal experiences that students of color have had in their classes, further reiterating the idea of Trinity classes providing individualistic experiences for students of color. This further highlights the importance of conducting a study that’ll provide an understanding of the ways that engagement is an independent idea that functions in different manners and capacities for people.

Trinity College is an institution of high prestige, and its courses are filled with much academic rigor and vast real-life applications. However, this study questions how these desired outcomes for students of color are impacted by being within predominantly-white spaces with professors who may not be cognizant of how these circumstances can create various levels of in-class engagement. These pieces for in-class engagement work hand-in-hand with the role of racial identity having a vast role, for this could contribute to factors for students of color to consider how they can take into account their professor’s racial identity with a set topic being taught. As considered by Marin, “When teachers’ limits and students’ potential contributions [are] recognized, the classroom moves toward becoming a learning-centered environment in which teachers become learners and students become teachers” (Marin 63). With this idea emphasized, the key to in-class engagement for students of color becomes more vivid. In spaces in which these students are one of the few, the pedagogy and inclusivity of a professor could either make or break a class; depending on the style of teaching, it’s very plausible for a student of color to become disengaged from their work and just go with the motions. Thus, the methods of this study are aimed to explore these ideas further through the set interviews.

Participants

The study was intended for junior and senior students of color to be interviewed, which was emphasized throughout my recruitment. To further stress this qualification to those interested, I based my definition of being a person of color on Merriam-Webster's, which states that being a person of color means being "other than white or who is of mixed race" (Merriam-Webster 2023). For this study to be truly reflective of the student of color experience at Trinity, my findings had to come from students of color who live in these varying circumstances and occurrences. Additionally, juniors and seniors were aimed toward this study to take into consideration a more in-depth understanding of how their specific in-class engagement could potentially be in correlation to their declared major and overall academic pathway, as this study is taking place in a time in which Trinity sophomores aren't encouraged to declare a major quite yet.

Participants varied in majors, as there were no specifications for students to be majoring in either humanities or STEM subjects. Amongst participants, six identified as declaring a major within humanities with only two participants declaring for majors within the STEM field. Additionally, the data includes interviews with four junior students of color and four senior students of color.

Limitations

Among all individuals who were interviewed, only one person was in the MAC 2022-2023 group chat. This served as an immediate limitation to me, as there had been no new GroupMe chat for MAC 2023-2024, which I was under the assumption was going to happen. Within the last school year's chat, 11 of the 60 enrolled members were graduates of the Class of 2023; to add, 12 members are no longer affiliated with a MAC organization. Because of this, I had to consider other ways to advertise my study to get my target number of interviews.

For one alternative, I advertised the study on my Instagram story with the link to the form being in my Instagram page description section. This was due to me following other students of color on Trinity's campus, with a majority of them having no true relationship with me other than being a fellow student of color at Trinity. Additionally, I reached out to various MAC organizations on the campus via their Instagram page. This was done due to my having a brief idea of the consistency I've seen from these organizations and how active they are on their pages. Having done those things, I was able to get five people to sign up for an interview with me; however, I recruited three people I've worked closely with to reach the benchmark. I chose individuals based on their majors and gender, as I aimed to have this study vary in different experiences in different classes. Nevertheless, the data will refrain from any bias, and the themes identified will solely be used to analyze and discuss my findings from various conversations and topics that will either be similar or different.

When originally advertising this study, it was my goal to have interviewees of both humanities and STEM majors, as I wanted to account for both experiences throughout my research. Nevertheless, the majority of my participants didn't affiliate with being a STEM major; specifically, only two out of the eight total participants identified themselves as a STEM major. Because of this most of what will be discussed takes into account the perspective of students of color within the humanities field. The greater perspective of this topic of study, along with more interviews with STEM majors, would be a goal of mine if I had the chance to extend my time on this research.

I would have also liked to have geared more interview questions on the ideas of imposter syndrome for students of color. In my informal interactions with students of color over the years, this has been a consistent topic brought up, having the feeling that they must hide their true

identity and culture in spaces engraved with whiteness. Because of this, I wanted to highlight this throughout my research, yet my research questions didn't thoroughly reflect this objective of mine. If I was able to get more time to research how my interviews reflect the connection between in-class engagement for students of color along the ideas of imposter syndrome, I would love to achieve this.

Data Collection

Outreach was conducted through the GroupMe chat of the 2022-2023 Multicultural Affairs Council (MAC), which serves as a center point for the various multicultural organization leaders amongst Trinity's campus to be in contact and communicate with one another in regards to various events and initiatives that are occurring both on-and-off campus; I also recruited to individual MAC organizations for them to advertise to anyone in their organization that would be interested and meets the qualifications. Within this group chat, I inserted a blurb with a brief overview of the study that included the informational flyer (Appendix A), which had brief information about qualifications to be part of the study with a brief note of compensation, and a link to the Google Form for interested and qualified participants to fill out.

Once the form was completed, I would email the individual and coordinate a time and location to meet with them. Once an interviewee and I would meet, I would provide them with an overview of the study via my consent form (Appendix B) that was approved by the Trinity College Institutional Review Board (IRB), which they would need to sign and date. Once I received verbal permission to record, the interview officially started. These interviews entailed the students diving into conversations about their experiences at Trinity with professors of varying racial identities and other topics diving into the overarching pieces of their in-class engagement. A total of 14 questions were asked (Appendix C), which was an accumulation of

both general questions to get a ground-level understanding and subquestions that were geared to get a more in-depth framework for different general thoughts. Although it was anticipated that the interviews would take between 45 minutes to an hour, the average time frame for the interviews was 27 minutes.

Data Analysis

I utilized Rev to transcribe my audio files and create the documents to begin the process of coding. Coding, in the context of this study, served as a method for me to find any commonalities and differences in things that were brought up and alluded to throughout the interview (Appendix D). As I went through the various transcripts, I searched for each of the following codes. I didn't need to have every type of code found within each transcript. I saw this as another way that each student I interviewed had a different academic experience throughout their time at Trinity. Once each participant's transcript was coded individually, I took note of common themes and ideas that were discussed amongst all the participants. Specifically, I noted each participant's similar experiences with one another that they discussed with their peers and how they could be connected to an overarching idea of the student of color experience. On the other hand, I also noted key differences amongst various codes, including how they alluded to one code or how their interview never mentioned one or a few of the codes; those highlighted in a light-green color are codes that most went into me coming to my findings. These pieces of analysis furthered my ability to make connections to my literature review to find ways that these conversations brought forth important understandings of my research questions.

Findings

Given my findings through my various interviews with the eighth junior and senior students of color, I was able to formulate the following thesis for my research questions: although Trinity College students of color highlighted their professors of color as being more transparent and authentic with their engagement styles as opposed to White professors, they don't center this as key for their individual in-class engagement; instead, they emphasize that the different engagement styles used by professors of various racial identities, in relation to what they're teaching, lead them to different in-class engagements.

Students of Color and Diverse In-Class Learning Experiences

One's racial identity arises in different capacities within a classroom, and this was an idea emphasized by participants to show various learning experiences. My interviews showed that although the racial identities of some students of color often contributed to their in-class experiences positively, other students of color feel that their racial identities contributed to negative in-class experiences, further highlighting how Trinity College students of color have in-class engagements that vary given professors of different racial identities. Some participants dove into the ways that their racial identity was brought up, which greatly aided their learning; oppositely, other participants made light of the ways that their racial identity was detrimental to various topics that were being discussed. Both ideas take into account being taught by professors of various racial identities.

Sarah Morris, a senior at Trinity, discussed how her Filipino heritage has played a significant role in the classes that she's taken at Trinity. Morris explained how she has always tried to find a way to incorporate her own cultural experiences into topics discussed in class, which often has led to her focusing on these experiences within various assignments. These connections have allowed Morris to think more critically about different topics, to which she

expressed how "I've chosen these topics because my professors allowed me that initiative and that freedom to do that, but also I felt like I wanted to represent that here at Trinity rather than just kind of homogenizing my identity into just being Asian American." Morris emphasized her desire to have the in-class experience of correlating ideas of discussion to her life experiences, which has been a significant piece of her engagement. Through this, Morris recognized the role of her professors, specifically those who are White, in these moments, as they have been a key reason why she's been able to share these experiences so easily and willingly. Brian Mitchell, a junior of Mexican descent, also highlighted how his racial identity has been helpful in the ways that he can engage in his classes. Mitchell explained how he's been able to engage with his classes further due to him making connections to what's discussed in his own identity, specifically in his American Studies courses. He discussed how these courses are "very much talking about invisible histories that people don't talk about, which I think has helped me feel like my racial differences actually give me insight rather than give me [the] difference." Mitchell talked about the ways that his Mexican identity has been a topic that's felt overlooked in his life, especially given that he grew up attending predominantly-white schools. However, these courses have given Mitchell further insight into how to make higher connections within the context of being at a PWI, further understanding how his perspectives are key to understanding the idea of invisible histories. Morris and Mitchell both expressed how they've been able to feel brave in their classroom spaces to share their own experiences, thus allowing them to engage in the courses further. Furthermore, these experiences showcase how establishing a classroom space that emphasizes individual perspectives allows students of various backgrounds to open their eyes to a lived experience that they work to intentionally grasp.

On the other hand, some students of color haven't had as many engaging learning experiences in relation to their racial identities, leading them to have negative engagement within their classes. Janet Hill talked about this greatly, as she dove into the ways that her Mexican heritage, and things related to that, has been part of various class discussions. Hill explained how throughout her courses, race is a frequent topic that gets brought up. Much of these conversations are geared toward things that have happened in her own life, yet this leads to her becoming disengaged, stating that "when we're talking about issues of race...I feel like I should be talking...because I am one of the few people of color in class, and then when I don't, I feel like I'm almost doing a disservice. But again, it's like, am I responsible for carrying my whole race?" Hill emphasizes how she feels like she's doing something wrong whenever race is a topic of discussion, feeling pressured internally to put her voice and thoughts out into the open. Yet, she's conflicted with being a spokesperson for people of color within her class space. This puts into question how a professor's pedagogy comes into play, for one must consider how a professor is creating a classroom space that encourages students to share their thoughts through their empowerment, rather than their pressures. Diane Wright, a junior at Trinity, also discussed this similar experience of a negative in-class engagement given their racial identity. Wright, a Philosophy major, discussed how many of these classes discuss race through the context of various pieces of literature. However, this makes Wright feel conflicted, stating that "there are points where you want to talk about race with somebody of color until they're understanding the complexities and nuances of it through a lived experience, as opposed to just reading literature about it." Typically being the only Black student in the class, Wright stresses how critical it would be for her to be in these Philosophy courses discussing critical topics of race alongside other Black students, focusing more on dialogue rather than what books say. Through this, it

becomes clear that pedagogy in this class becomes more about dialogue through textual connections rather than dialogue with textual connections; in other words, conversations in the class become centered around what various texts are saying about race rather than these conversations understanding how the texts are connected to race as part of our current society. When one's pedagogy isn't rooted in students having the space, the range in thought and expression becomes limited; furthermore, engagement for students of color declines and prevents them from making higher connections to course content and the world around us.

In-Class Engagement Styles for Students of Color Across Topics

Given being taught by professors with different racial identities, participants emphasized how their in-class engagement is individual, and they find their engagement to take different shapes depending on what topics are taught and how these professors teach them. These types of engagements were categorized as behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (as previously mentioned in p. 7). Interviews showcased participants describing their style of engagement in one of the three manners, relating it to how professors of different racial identities took recognition of these types of engagements. Through these findings, the idea of engagement styles taking shape in various ways becomes stressed while also showing how all types of professors can use this to create more engaging in-class experiences given different kinds of learners.

Amongst the participants, three out of the total eight discussed having a behavioral style of engagement. The students, Thomas Reyes, Kahn Taylor, and Anthony Green, explained how they engage with the material by becoming active participators. For Reyes, this entailed him being "more communicative, more back and forth. I can't really be talked at, so it has to be, I like asking questions, I like to clarify, I like to put my own nuance to it to confirm that I understand." Through behavioral engagement, Reyes puts himself in a position to ask the necessary questions

that will help him understand various topics further, which has especially helped him within his STEM courses. This is correlated to Green's engagement, as he explained how he is keen on "being very proactive in class, asking a bunch of questions, trying to stay as engaged as possible." While Reyes and Green stressed how they make a consistent effort towards participating in their courses to understand various concepts, Taylor, who expressed struggling most times engaging in general, emphasized that he's prone to speak critically when a topic gets brought up that he feels that he can provide critical thoughts on. Engaging in these manners helps all three students to make sure that they're able to put their voices out within the class to help their own learning.

When it came to emotional engagement, three different participants out of the eight total alluded to having this type of engagement. Morris, Wright, and Angela Ross, a senior at Trinity, explained this as their ability to consider how they react to various academic settings, whether positive or negative, to help them think more critically about topics. Morris discussed this taking form in "being able to bring to a discussion in class and...challenging the mainstream topics and ideas that we present in class." For Morris, mainstream topics are recognized as the dominant voice in the space, which is typically White students. Because of this, she becomes more driven to challenge false perceptions that may be discussed in the class by referring to ideas from her own experiences, which typically occurs in her courses within International Studies and Writing and Rhetoric. Additionally, Wright sees this style of engagement happening by considering questions, typically asked by the professor, that consider deeper perspectives on various topics, including "What does everybody think about this passage? What does everyone think about this idea that the writer is presenting?" By reflecting deeply on these types of questions, Wright becomes further engaged in how she can make a variety of critical connections, even if it has to

do with making connections that are a bit more geared towards a deep-rooted conversation. In a similar sense, Ross considers these various reactions to be connected to her experience as an international student, explaining how “if you're talking about democracy in a class, my understanding of what entails a democracy or what is inherently important to a democracy is very different to that of an American student.” Ross considers the ways that she grew up in South Asia as a vast piece to her in-class engagement, as she always reflects on the various ways that she can connect topics through the lens of an international student. All three students showcase how emotional engagement can arise in various capacities, pushing them to think about frameworks through a deeper lens.

With cognitive engagement, this was seen by two different participants out of the eight total. Both Mitchell and Hill discuss how they see their engagement as individual ways of investing in understanding topics and concepts discussed while also finding ways to allow this investment to be more clear. Mitchell, his in-class engagement becomes strengthened through finding opportunities to discuss his thoughts with his professors on a one-on-one basis, stating that he thoroughly enjoys discussing thoughts that he had in class during office hours to get a better grasp on topics mentioned. With this, Mitchell is pushing himself to find ways to invest his time and energy into his learning by taking the initiative to discuss thoughts he has with his professors outside of the class, which will turn into him being able to understand concepts better and help him to continue to think deeply. For Hill, investment in education is directly correlated to active listening. She explained how she is always considering ways that she can make sure that she focuses on what's being discussed in her classes, stating that "having my laptop down, not having my phone out, and [making sure that] my face is my tool here where I'm always having my eyebrows up and showing that I'm listening." By finding little but significant ways to

become an active listener, Hill has been able to utilize these various tools to help devote her mind to whatever is going on in the class. To truly consider how they can best engage with a class and its content, Hill and Mitchell find these strategies to be key, furthering their skills of conceptualization and critical thinking.

Learning Experiences for Students of Color with White Professors

When considering specific learning experiences with White professors, interviews showcased just how much these experiences have been differentiated among students of color. Six of the eight participants mentioned having vastly engaging learning experiences with White professors; yet, six students, a mix of the previous six and some new students, discussed how their learning experiences with White professors had been greatly disengaging. These experiences were based on how students reflected upon the curriculum taught by the professors and how the professors were teaching them, showing the importance of White professors creating lessons that can attract the engagement of students of color.

When students discussed having engaging learning experiences with White professors, they emphasized the idea of how these professors were teaching critical topics while doing so that didn't integrate their whiteness. Ross discussed this experience further, as she talked about a Politics in Africa class she took. In this class, she explained how she felt a bit on the fence when seeing that the class would be taught by a White professor, but this feeling shifted for her. Ross emphasized how she greatly enjoyed the contents of this class, saying "I never thought that his whiteness made a difference to me engaging with the material...because he was working with material on decolonization...on how racism works and how um like it was not US White European centric material. It allowed for a very fun conversation and fun engagement with that class." The professor, though being a White individual teaching a course based on Africa, was

able to teach with the ability to make the course centered on the topic at hand. This vastly stuck out to Ross, for she was able to learn exciting ideas while not deeply stressing how the professor was a White person. Morris discusses this idea as well, explaining how some of her courses are directly applied to life right off our campus; specifically, she stated how most of her professors “tried to do their best to incorporate in relation to Frog Hollow, for example, which was one of the literacy projects we did.” Connecting class concepts to Hartford demonstrated to be essential for learning to happen, especially since this learning would need to be thought about to a greater extent with students’ assignments. These professors can understand how their curriculum can directly apply to occurrences within the city of Hartford, which helps them to incorporate these ideas within the curriculum and how their pedagogy is reflective of these higher connections. This has provided students, such as Ross and Morris, to become further engaged in their classes, having White professors whose pedagogy is based on topics that have conversations about the real world.

These learning experiences, however, haven’t been so engaging to other students. Participants explained in a variety of ways how different White professors have functioned in different capacities, yet they felt that these professors shared a commonality of providing them with greatly disengaging learning experiences. Wright explained this further through the lens of her Philosophy courses, stressing how there have been many instances of discomfort that have been provided to her given the major and field of interest being White-dominated. She elaborated on the Western philosophy ideas that are typically taught at Trinity, emphasizing how “whenever you do get these classes that are digging more into race, or like, sex and things like that, and then it's taught by somebody who is not identifying with those identities, it feels strange.” Through these experiences, the professor’s pedagogy comes at conflict with Wright, as she’s never fully

able to engage in these topics. Given the factor of identity being rooted in conversation, Wright recognizes that she struggling to dive into these conversations with someone who doesn't truly understand the perspectives of those brought up. Taylor explains a similar instance, having been disengaged by comments made by a White professor. He discussed how his Creative Writing professor was consistently pressuring him to write more explicitly about his perspectives as an Afro-Latino, stating that the professor told him to "write down how you feel on the page, and then you, the way you feel has to do with your racial identity, and then he'll go yes, like, you know, this little black boy in Brooklyn, and shit like that I'm like then it feels easy [but] kind of weird." At this moment, Taylor was vastly conflicted; although the professor gave him important advice on letting writing share and captivate life experiences and one's racial identity, it was communicated in a manner that made Taylor lean towards disengagement. This instance demonstrates just how important it is for White professors to become critically conscious, especially when it comes to providing students of color the opportunity to share the aspects of their lives.

Reflection of In-Class Diversity

As implored through this paper, the identity of a student of color in their classes is critical to how they learn and further engage with various materials. This is an idea that was expanded upon by participants, as they stressed that they want to be acknowledged and recognized within predominantly white classes, causing them to desire their White professors to be more transparent about their own identity and its role within the classroom space. This reflection pushes White professors to think more critically about how racial identity plays a significant role in one's learning experiences, especially in Trinity classes. These thoughts were probed by participants specifically being asked if there's a piece of advice that they would provide to White

professors, to which all participants alluded to the desire that they have for their White professors to be more reflective upon different racial identities within a classroom space.

Hill discussed how this acknowledgment and reflection comes from White professors being more transparent with their language, not sugarcoating topics that are critical to the world around us. She explained how she would advise White professors that the space is for the students to learn while “Being transparent about the fact that we all come from different spaces, different socioeconomic statuses, different [races], different everything. Acknowledging that and moving past that or safely going forward.” For Hill, it’s vastly important for her to be in a classroom space that recognizes how her perspectives of life are in contrast to the experiences of her classmates, which pans out differently given a professor’s style of pedagogy. She stresses the value of White professors understanding this, especially through the lens of a student of color; additionally, this leads to her yearning for this factor to be addressed in a more forthright manner. Through Hill’s experience, verbally acknowledging the multiple racial identities within a space pushes for all students to feel that they’re in a brave space.

This is an idea that Mitchell dives deeper into, explaining how these ideas of race, in the context of not-so-racial diversity settings, must be considered by White professors to a greater extent. He discusses how these topics should not always be derived from books, for he believes that “you’re supposed to really listen to students who’ve had these experiences. Sometimes they say things in a way that a book can’t capture.” Mitchell, who previously discussed invisible identities being a topic of his American Studies courses, emphasized how the critical consciousness of knowing who’s in the space has been critical to his learning experiences. He also emphasized how his experiences within these courses have ensured that dialogue of thoughts and ideas was prioritized while still making textual connections. However, Mitchell

stresses the value of not always relying on academic works to curate critical conversations; in Mitchell's eyes, this creates a less organic and intentional classroom setting. This piece of advice, along with Hill's sheds light on the lack of transparency that is amongst many White professors, which pushes students of color to want White professors to share these truths more frequently and authentically.

Perspectives of Inclusive Classroom Spaces

Inclusivity is an idea that is frequently discussed within education, especially when considering how classrooms account for all students to feel respected for their identity within a space. Participants provided more insight into this, with interviews showing that inclusive classroom spaces are viewed differently by students of color, which further demonstrates individual in-class engagements. The ways that inclusivity was seen by participants had a variety of differences, and these differences were made clear by each of the different participants' experiences. However, all participants honed in on the commonality of dialogue used by professors.

Hill emphasized inclusivity being recognized on the first day of one of her courses. She explained how her professor made sure to make it known that the class can allow students to feel brave in sharing their perspectives because it is the space of the students rather than the professor; Hill explained how this immediate message "warms people up more to the idea of participating." Hill saw this entire moment as the clear establishment of inclusivity, for the professor saying these things to encourage people to have the trust within themselves to put their thoughts out for discussion. By starting the semester with this message, students can internalize just how much the space is truly theirs. Additionally, this experience showcases how constantly

emphasizing to students that the space belongs to them further creates a classroom of vast inclusivity.

Ross explained inclusivity as taking shape through the pedagogy of the professor in relation to what they were teaching. She discussed how taking a class with her Political Science advisor demonstrated how the space pushed students to gain new perspectives of different pieces of the world, stating that “we like to study a lot of American works in that class, but he also balanced it out by like allowing for international perspectives...[and] talking about...how different cultures and different races will understand us like a conversation differently." With a class so specific and focused on American works, the inclusivity of various identities can easily become neglected. However, this professor didn't want this to happen. This is what led to him going far and beyond to include various perspectives that weren't focused on the American perspectives, thus allowing students of different backgrounds to have different moments of connection and relatability. By teaching with such a pedagogy, dialogue becomes more grounded in a variety of lives and identities rather than one that isn't so applicable to all individuals. Hill and Ross' experiences provide an outlook for how inclusivity is shapeshifting, not necessarily looking in the same way, yet these different moments of inclusivity become rooted in how knowledge is communicated in aid to all students in the classroom.

The Impact of Professors of Color on Students of Color

Participants emphasized how they felt that teaching by a professor of color provided a more relatable and authentic learning experience. This was vastly shown through dialogue and how professors of color would teach various topics and engage with students, something that wasn't as demonstrative with White professors. Part of this experience was due to the connection that students of color felt with professors who shared the same racial identity.

Thomas Reyes, a Trinity senior of South Asian descent, discussed having a professor who shared the same South Asian identity. This class, which dove into deep topics of racism relating to South Asia, provided Reyes the opportunity to share his thoughts on situations about his own experiences; he explained how when “I [talked] about [my experiences] in class, she [was] very supportive and [backed] me up. Even when in that class it was actually predominantly white students...she was engaged [and] supportive, and she wasn't really letting the white students, I guess, win.” Winning, in this case, does not refer to the idea of domination over another being. Instead, winning refers to students of color having the chance to put their voices out in the space without having White students serve as the dominant voice. Reyes was able to engage greatly with the material due to it being connected to his own life, which was understood by the professor. Sharing this similarity led to her constructing the conversations on these topics in a manner that took into account varying thoughts from students who could potentially speak even greater on this experience than others. This shouldn't be mixed up with manners of limiting voices, for this practice in pedagogy provides a more transparent learning experience by learning from those who relate more closely to the topic than others. By recognizing this, an educator is then able to take into their pedagogy can serve to uplift marginalized voices and recognize how various topics can connect to various students, which further provides more in-class conversations that are rooted in more authentic learning experiences.

Khan Taylor, a Trinity junior at Trinity, discussed more about how sharing the same racial identity as his American Studies advisor has greatly assisted his in-class engagement. Taylor explained throughout the interview that he's always had a struggle with engaging in a majority of his classes here at Trinity; however, this is typically changed when he's taking one of his advisor's courses. A critical piece to this is Taylor and his advisor both identifying as a Black

man. Taylor explained how his advisor's pedagogy can captivate him in a manner that isn't similar to other professors that he's had here at Trinity, stating how this aspect of his classes with him is "It's a huge, content thing...the way in which they they're able to explore content in a manner that just feels relevant to you in that kind of relates to you on a personal level, because they've either been through it or going through it, or have years of experience about it first hand." Taylor stressed how his advisor taught in such a manner that highlighted experiences that were personal to him and vastly engaged him, and these types of conversations are what have gravitated Taylor to this professor's pedagogy. Not only has it been about *what* is being said to Taylor, but it's also connected to *why* it's being said. The professor, having taught with both authentic and relatable pedagogy, provides a space that provides a new perspective on topics that most students may not be familiar with. On the other hand, this style of pedagogy makes certain that those who *can* relate to the experience can understand where the connections are made. By this happening, professors of color demonstrate the value of addressing topics of various perspectives as relatable and authentic as possible.

Discussion

My findings showcase examples of pieces on how the engagement styles of professors, varying in racial identities, lead to various in-class engagements for students of color. Participants focused on engagement styles based on dialogue and how different professors established and facilitated conversations that provided students with either engaging or disengaging experiences in the classroom.

Participants noted how transparency and authenticity with engagement styles are more frequent with professors of color as opposed to White professors. Considering critical topics that

are brought up in class, whether that's about race or social class, talking straightforwardly to students of color provides learning experiences that are more rooted within the purpose of pushing these students to make deep connections. By doing this, students of color can flourish; with its integration, there becomes an establishment of critical learning opportunities for students of color, being deeply ingrained in their worldviews. Various professors have been able to establish a class that encourages students to share their perspectives, rather than them being lecturers of these perspectives, making sure that students “apprehend the challenge [of posed problems] as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated” (Freire 81). By using dialogue that emphasizes the realities of various worldwide aspects, students can reflect on how their understanding of these ideas shapes their perspectives through the lens of their lives. By being unclear and broad about issues, students are mentally trained to become recipients of information from the professor instead of true scholars; this creates a continuous system of students of color becoming oppressed and unprepared for the world's challenges.

For students of color to have positive in-class engagements, professors must make certain that their identity isn't overshadowing a topic at hand. By creating a curriculum that allows students to relate in different capacities, a professor can shift a class to create students who understand frameworks and ideas through things that are part of their own racial identity. However, this shouldn't be thought that every student has had the same experiences in life because of their racial identity. Connecting to the points of Brown-Jeffy and Cooper, educators must “realize that students who are racial or ethnic minorities see, view, and perceive themselves and others differently than those who are of the majority group” (Brown-Jeffy and 73). The life

of a student of color is very different than the life of a White student, especially at Trinity. Because of this, professors must establish a pedagogy that teaches a curriculum that can bring new and unique perspectives and backgrounds into the space. By this occurring students of color can have an even more engaging in-class experience, as showcased by participants in this study. This further paints a picture of CRP's integration within these classroom spaces, as it ensures that a professor practicing CRP takes into account the diversity in the space and how "the cultural differences and similarities that groups bring to the table and can assist in the acculturation process by mediating the alienation often experienced by minority groups on the campuses of PWIs" (Hinton and Seo 135–136). Adjusting to a PWI as a student of color becomes a challenge in itself, and the challenge becomes even greater when being in classes with a domination of White individuals. Nonetheless, professors can use CRP to build opportunities for students of color to affirm that these classes are indeed their spaces.

Through my findings, it's become clear that the effort made by professors of various racial identities holds a vast amount of weight for how students can further their engagement within the class. By putting in an intentional effort to create impactful relationships with students, professors can have a pedagogy that embraces the dialogue of people rather than the dialogue of educators and students. Furthermore, students of color are then able to find further support and resources from a professor who understands them as a person, regardless of differences in racial identities. This was emphasized further by Reyes, stating how he's able to confide in his White Sociology professors, being able to "trust and engage with them and tell them what's going on without being judged." This experience for Reyes signifies the strength of intention cross-race mentoring that often thrives at Trinity, emphasizing how cross-race mentoring works at an even greater extent when "there is a reciprocal level of trust, honesty,

commitment to human development, and openness to providing and receiving constructive feedback” (Stanley and Lincoln 48). By embracing this, students of color can have trust in different professors to understand what’s happening with them and how they can best assist them to success both in and out of the class, which reassures that dialogue between the two enhances the professor’s pedagogical practices.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to determine how students of color at Trinity have expressed their experiences with professors of various racial identities while also considering how these experiences correlate with their individual definitions of in-class engagement. Through my interviews with junior and senior students of color, I was able to determine that these students vouched for professors of various racial identities to lean more toward being more transparent and authentic, focusing on how this leads to various in-class engagements and different pedagogies.

Trinity classrooms must be a space where people can be open and encouraged to share their experiences for the greater sense of one’s education and identity, which can’t be done if there’s no balance of creating diverse and inclusive opportunities for students. In addition, the research should serve as an opportunity for Trinity faculty to reflect on how they're culturally aware in the classrooms. As the old saying goes, treat others how you want to be treated. In our Trinity classes, this can be seen if a professor is acknowledging the history of a minority group or the historical background of someone whose theoretical framework will guide a certain lesson; nonetheless, it’s key for these faculty to reflect on how their classrooms can bring various identities together. As further discussed by Dawn McBride, “The long lasting benefit of taking

[the] time to get to know them...is that they are often forthcoming in sharing their thoughts and feelings about their culture, religion and lifestyle. By learning more about their background, [one will] be more culturally sensitive to their needs and worldviews” (McBride 19). Teaching is a job of intentionality. An educator must be willing to step out of their comfort zone to create an even greater learning experience for students, and faculty here at the college must be considerate of how they’re making valuable relationships and powerful scholars with those who walk in different shoes.

This research is vastly critical to emphasize to professors that they must create classroom experiences that continually push students of color to make deep-rooted connections. By embracing the frameworks of CRP and the pedagogy of the oppressed, this becomes much more natural and powerful. However, being negligent of the importance of these two ideas does further harm to the student’s learning. The ultimate goal is for our students to obtain degrees, and it’s key for all professors to prevent establishing a pedagogy that doesn’t grasp the key of these ideas.

As previously mentioned, diversity is growing at Trinity. With the potential to bring more students of color over the next few years, we, as an institution, must think about the relationship between diversity and relationships. While diversity simply accounts for the number of students of color, inclusivity accounts for how these students of color are becoming leaders and scholars in our community. By simply focusing on increasing the number of students of color at Trinity, the college begins to shift its focus on using these students as diversity quotas rather than an intentional desire to bring in new perspectives within our classes.

When asked about advice that he would give a White professor, Reyes said something that I found critical to my overarching objectives of this study. He explained how White

professors should have an “understanding that other people have different lived experiences and not to invalidate that.” Though this question was specifically asking about White professors, this is an understanding that can apply to all professors. Trinity aims to make students feel like it's a home away from home, but can this be accomplished when students of color are having in-class experiences that hurt the way that they see themselves in this community? For this to be combated, all professors at Trinity must make an effort to validate the experiences of all types of students. Everyone’s identity is important to their story, and these identities are crucial for students of color to embrace how they can be people who will uphold the Trinity pillars being willing to engage, connect, and transform the world around us.

Works Cited

Brown-Jeffy, Shelly, and Jewell E. Cooper. "Toward a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy: An overview of the conceptual and theoretical literature." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 38.1 (2011): 65-84.

Eliason, Michele J., and Ruby Turalba. "Recognizing oppression: College students' perceptions of identity and its impact on class participation." *The Review of Higher Education* 42.3 (2019): 1257-1281.

Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59-109.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059>

Freire, Paolo, and Myra Bergman Ramos. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"." *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2.2 (2009): 43-69, 71-86.

Good, Jessica J., Kimberly A. Bourne, and R. Grace Drake. "The impact of classroom diversity philosophies on the STEM performance of undergraduate students of color." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 91 (2020): 104026.

Hinton, Dawn, and Byung-In Seo. "Culturally relevant pedagogy and its implications for retaining minority students in predominantly white institutions (PWIs)." *The stewardship of higher education*. Brill, 2013. 133-148.

Hussain, Maryam, and James M. Jones. "Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging: Experiences of students of color." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 14.1 (2021): 63.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy." *American Educational Research Journal* 32.3 (1995): 465-491.

Mack, Natasha, et al. *Qualitative research methods*. 2005.

Marin, Patricia. "The educational possibility of multi-racial/multi-ethnic college classrooms." *Does diversity make a difference* (2000): 61-83.

Nayir, Funda. "The relationship between student motivation and class engagement levels." *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research* 17.71 (2017): 59-78.

Reddick, Richard J., and Katie Ortego Pritchett. "I don't want to work in a world of Whiteness: White faculty and their mentoring relationships with Black students." *Journal of the Professoriate* 8.1 (2015): 54-84.

Stanley, Christine A., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. "Cross-race faculty mentoring." *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 37.2 (2005): 44-50.

"The Class of 2027 Comes Together." *Trinity College*,
www.trincoll.edu/news/the-class-of-2027-comes-together/.

"Trinity Community Celebrates the Enrollment of the Class of 2025." *Trinity College*,
www.trincoll.edu/news/trinity-community-celebrates-the-enrollment-of-the-class-of-2025/.

Wu, Zebing. "Academic motivation, engagement, and achievement among college students." *College Student Journal* 53.1 (2019): 99-112.

Yee, April. "The unwritten rules of engagement: Social class differences in undergraduates' academic strategies." *The Journal of Higher Education* 87.6 (2016): 831-858.

Appendix

Appendix A

Flyer for Interested Participants:

BE PART OF MY RESEARCH STUDY:

IN-CLASS ENGAGEMENT AND TRINITY COLLEGE CLASSROOMS: THE STUDENT OF COLOR EXPERIENCE



Qualifications :

- Trinity College student of color
- Current junior or senior
- Not required but helpful to have had experience being taught by both a White professor and a professor of color



WILL BE COMPENSATED WITH A \$5 GIFT CARD TO THE UNDERGROUND COFFEEHOUSE!



MORE INFO:
XAVIER MERCADO, CLASS OF 2024
XAVIER.MERCADO@TRINCOLL.EDU

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form:

Introduction: Thank you so much for agreeing to be part of my thesis! Your participation is vastly helpful for me and my further understanding of the student-of-color experience here at Trinity along with the ways that Trinity professors have an impact on this experience. I'm excited to learn more about your experiences, and I will now read the consent form that has been approved by the Trinity College IRB...

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about how the in-class engagement for Trinity College students of color is impacted by their perceptions of their professors' racial identities. Participants will be asked to describe their in-class engagement in relation to their relation to the various classes that they've taken and various professors that they've had, circling back to the idea of the impact of racial identity in predominantly white institutions. It's estimated that this will require 45 minutes to an hour of your time.

This study is geared to raise awareness of the criticalness of culturally responsive pedagogy in a predominantly white institution, which is an idea that many students of color have vouched for. Although there are minimal risks, there's still a chance that your identity will be revealed. To combat this, I'll be giving you a pseudonym name, or a false name, and referring to anything related to you and your identity as vague and general as possible. All files of your information will be stored in a password-protected file. It's your decision as to whether or not you want to be audio-recorded. Your identity will be kept secret from all parties, including professors. As the faculty advisor, Professor Britany Jones will be the only faculty member with access. Partaking in this study also ensures that you're not under the age of 18 years old, as this study will not include minors.

As a token of my appreciation for your participation, I'll be providing you with a \$5 gift card to the Underground Coffeehouse after we conclude our interview.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and you're free to stop or withdraw at any time, without any penalty.

All of your responses in this study are completely confidential and will be used only for research purposes. If you have any questions about this study or want more information, you're free to contact:

Xavier Mercado, xavier.mercado@trincoll.edu, 872-232-8898, Trinity College
Britney Jones, Visiting Assistant Professor of Educational Studies, britney.jones@trincoll.edu,
Trinity College

Or contact the Trinity College IRB administrator via email: irb@trincoll.edu

Print your name: _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____

All signed forms will remain confidential. Participants may keep a blank form if desired.

Appendix C

Interview Questions:

1. Generally, how has your experience been in your classes?
 - How has the environment of your class contributed to these experiences?

 - What has been your overall experience with your professors, varying in racial identities?
2. How has your racial identity contributed to your in-class experience?
3. What do you define as your style of engagement? Follow-up/definition
 - Have your professors acknowledged/embraced this style of engagement? If so, how?
4. What has your experience been with white professors at Trinity?
 - What types of support/resources have they provided you? How have they provided these supports/resources?
5. What have your White professors done to make your class more inclusive?
6. Have you had the opportunity to be taught by a professor of color?
 - How has that experience been different from being taught by a White professor?

 - Is this experience more aligned or disconnected from your style of engagement? How so?
7. What's a piece of advice that you would offer a White professor for how they should create an inclusive classroom space?

8. Are there any final things you want to state before we conclude this interview?

Appendix D

Codebook:

CODE	DEFINITION
Experience in classes (participant) → Positive (PEC) → Negative (NEC)	The student explains how they've generally had a positive and/or negative experience within their classes
Experience with professors of different racial identities → Positive (PERCI) → Negative (NERCI)	The student explains positive and/or negative experiences that they've had with professors of various racial identities
Class Community and Learning (CCL)	The student explains how their experience in the class has been correlated to the community of the class and how that's impacted their ability to learn
Racial identity and in-class experience (RIICE)	The student explains how their own racial identity has contributed to their in-class experience
Definition of engagement (DE)	How the student describes their in-class engagement
Professors embracing different engagement (PEDE)	Professors are described as having versatile styles of teaching that correlate to the student's style of engagement
Experiences with White professors → Positive (PEWP) → Negative (NEWP)	The student explains positive and/or negative experiences that they've had with White professors
Taught by a Professor of Color (TPOC)	The student has had a professor of color and has explained what that experience was like
Indication of imposter syndrome (IIS)	The student goes into an explicit or implicit idea of having imposter syndrome in the classroom
Supports/Resources (SR)	The student dives into what types of support or resources their white professors have provided them
Inclusive Classroom Space (ICS)	The student explains how their white professors have made efforts to build up

	inclusivity within the classroom space
Advice for White Professors (AWP)	The student provides pieces of advice that they would give White professors