Diversity Analysis of Challenge Day: Examination of the Outcomes of Diversity Training

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper was to use a synthesis of peer-reviewed research articles to investigate the effectiveness and learning outcomes of various forms of diversity training for pre-service, and more specifically, in-service teachers. The literature reveals limited research related to the benefits and learning outcomes of diversity training for practicing K-12 teachers. Bolman and Deal’s (1997) four frames model, Vaara et al.’s (2004) framework for discourse analysis, and Challenge Day’s website were used to analyze the organization’s diversity and potential for use as diversity training for teachers within K-12 schools. I examined my positionality of Challenge Day and the effectiveness of the program using Milner’s (2007) framework and made recommendations for organizational improvement. This paper supports the need for additional research on diversity training for practicing teachers, including a study on the effectiveness of Challenge Day as a form of diversity training to determine the impact on teacher awareness of bias and acceptance of student diversity.

Keywords: Challenge Day, diversity, teachers, training, outcomes
The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper was to utilize a synthesis of research findings related to the need, effectiveness and learning outcomes of diversity training for teachers, and to explore the potential effectiveness of an experiential program called Challenge Day. Specifically, this paper was used to examine the Challenge Day organization in terms of its diversity, conceivable learning outcomes of the training within school settings, and the extent to which teacher participation in Challenge Day may create a greater awareness of biased beliefs toward students and acceptance of diversity. Advocating for the inclusion of Challenge Day as a form of diversity training within schools and teacher participation in the program are potential implications for educational leaders. The literature review conducted for this paper suggests that there is a need for future research on the effectiveness of diversity training.

To assist the reader, the paper was organized into sections by APA style headings. An explanation of the organizational profile for Challenge Day utilizing Bolman and Deal’s (1997) four frames from which people view their world and organizations follows the purpose of the study: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The following section includes a summary of Challenge Day’s diversity statement and an analysis of the statement utilizing Vaara et al.’s (2004) framework for discourse analysis. Organizational sources were used to describe the organization’s diversity in the next section. The potential learning outcomes of the organization’s training program were described and justified for its importance. The research findings of peer-reviewed literature articles were summarized; including how the studies operationalized diversity, and a summary of the articles was included in the literature review section. Milner’s (2007) positionality framework was used to examine the author’s position in terms of diversity, the organization, and the importance of diversity training, as well as
determining the effectiveness of Challenge Day. The literature review and Challenge Day documents were used to make recommendations to the organization. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings.

Organizational Profile

Challenge Day was founded in 1987 as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization (Challenge Day, n.d., a). In 2005, the organization moved from a 1,500 square foot office in Martinez, California to a 5,600 square foot facility in Concord, California (Challenge Day, n.d., b). The new facility included space for workshops, staff retreats and training for potential leaders. The organization’s website, http://www.challengeday.org, reported that the program has been implemented in 400 cities, 47 U.S. states, and 5 Provinces of Canada, impacting over one-million students in grades seven to twelve since its inception. The program’s mission has been to “provide youth and their communities with experiential programs that demonstrate the possibility of love and connection through the celebration of diversity, truth, and full expression” (Challenge Day, n.d., b). The six-and-a-half hour interactive program provides students and adults with strategies to break down barriers created by diversity that separate individuals, and inspires participants to co-exist, learn, and work in an encouraging environment of acceptance, celebration, love, and respect (Challenge Day, n.d., a). Bolman and Deal’s (1997) four frames were used to gain a better understanding of the Challenge Day organization in regards to its structure, human resources, organizational politics, and symbolic nature.

Structural Aspects

Problems can occur when a company’s structure does not fit the situation, purpose or goals of the organization. NeEddra James, Director of Program Development and Education and Senior Challenge Day leader, stated that Challenge Day’s structure supports the purpose and
goals of the organization, and creates an organizational climate aligned to the vision and mission (personal communication, June 9, 2014). Rich Dutra-St. John and Yvonne St. John-Dutra, the founders of Challenge Day, influence all levels of the organization, serving in specialized roles such as board members, organizational leaders, visionaries, trainers, and program facilitators within company and school settings. The founders, board members, and office staff accomplish strategic planning, decision-making, the development of policies and procedures, and manage resources collaboratively. The office staff includes the executive director, a marketing coordinator, a customer and employee relations specialist, client relations managers, a community workshop manager, a finance director, staff accountant, information technology manager, education manager, director of program development and education, director of training and program development and four staff members who function as senior Challenge Day leaders.

Challenge Day provides training for other organizations and companies, although it is primarily marketed to schools with a focus on student learning outcomes that goes beyond anti-bullying education to accomplish the following goals: to address common school issues such as cliques, rumors, teasing, negative stereotypes, racism, sexism, homophobia, violent behaviors, loneliness and isolation, hopelessness, indifference, the pressure to conform to the expectations of others, and to challenge participants to celebrate the diversity of all people, to be true to themselves, notice what’s happening around them, develop a vision for the type of school that they would like to create, and to courageously act on the vision to promote change (N. James, personal communication, June 9, 2014). The program also focuses on the acceptance of others regardless of differences, being a leader within the school, the development of compassion and empathy, elimination of oppressive behaviors, tools to let go of self-defeating thoughts and
emotions that hold people back from change, and providing service to others. The organization recognizes the need for a sustained learning to uphold lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes by requiring schools to implement a post Challenge Day “Be The Change Team” (N. James, personal communication, June 9, 2014). The organization provides pre and post-Challenge Day curriculum and activities to support the school’s efforts to continue the Challenge Day message.

The organization’s website does not provide job descriptions, management and employee assessment and reward procedures, or policy manuals. However, the website does provide structural details regarding how to request a copy of the financial statements, how to schedule a Challenge Day program, program costs and requirements for booking, evaluation and research conducted by the organization, and various resources for Challenge Day coordinators within school and community settings. The Challenge Day Program Coordinator Handbook (Challenge Day, n.d., c) contains descriptions of school coordinator job responsibilities, event planning worksheets, suggestions on how to recruit adult volunteers and select student participants, necessary equipment and supplies, welcome letters, permission slips, media guidelines, information to support special need student participation, room design guides, and other materials needed to successfully host a Challenge Day program. Resources are also provided for follow-up programming. Annual reports, located on the downloads and resources link, includes the operating revenues and expenses, a graphic depicting the resource allocations, a list of donors and the amounts, as well as organizational changes, awards, and celebrations.

**Human Resource Aspects**

Challenge Day employees embed the mission and vision of the organization into all aspects of the organization, including the interpersonal relationships of its’ members. The members’ skills, attitudes, interpersonal communication, and teamwork exemplify the Challenge
DIVERSITY ANALYSIS

Day message of acceptance and celebration of diversity (N. James, personal communications, June 9, 2014). The needs of the organization and employees are synonymous, and align with a deeply held belief about respect for individuality, and acceptance and celebration of diversity.

With their diverse life experiences they authentically connect, inspire, and empower people to remember who they truly are, challenging people everywhere to come together and create the lives and world of their dreams. Our leaders are heart-centered, passionate individuals that have come together from ALL walks of life in service to youth and the world we live in (Challenge Day, n.d., d).

Challenge Day is defined by its people; unique combinations of diverse individuals who think, feel, and act in conjunction with the purpose of the organization. The leaders serve others and act as catalysts for change. The Jobs and Volunteering link on the website describes Challenge Day as “an incredible place to work” (Challenge Day, n.d., e). The organization’s goal extends beyond serving students and communities; it seeks to serve the employees by encouraging them to “bring all of themselves to work – heart, mind, body, and spirit” (Challenge Day, n.d., e).

Husband and wife, Rich Dutra-St. John and Yvonne St. John-Dutra, founded the organization in 1987 (Challenge Day, n.d., f). Rich was a former high school teacher, wrestling coach, licensed family therapist and drug intervention specialist. As the former director of two adolescent treatment centers in California, he shared a common vision with his wife to co-found a program to positively impact the lives of teens. Rich is currently an adjunct professor at Cal State East Bay University, Challenge Day trainer and facilitator, and board member. Yvonne created numerous nationally recognized prevention and intervention programs, facilitated classroom and school assemblies, and worked with at-risk students who had addiction or social oppression issues in addition to creating the Challenge Day program. Currently, Yvonne is a
Challenge Day trainer, program facilitator, board member, and facilitator at Next Step and Living the Change Community Workshops and Challenger Trainings. The Board of Directors also includes Jeff Malone, President, Dana Callihan, Executive Director, Bruce Robertson, vice president, and secretaries, a treasurer and nine additional members.

James (personal communication, June 9, 2014) described the Challenge Day facilitators. The 26 program facilitators are diverse in terms of color, race, religion, former employment, experiences with diversity, world-travels, and in life experiences. The leaders model honesty, vulnerability, and being true to themselves by sharing personal stories on the website and with Challenge Day participants. The leaders courageously share their life stories as former gang members, addicts, children of divorced families, and survivors of the various challenges that students and adults face, regardless culture, race, gender, size, sexual orientation, or any other form of diversity. A detailed personal and professional biography and photograph of each board member, the founders, and Challenge Day facilitators are located on the organization’s website (Challenge Day, n.d., d).

Potential leaders are required to participate in six months of intense training, including home study, working with personal coaches and group practice (N. James, personal communication, June 9, 2014). There is no guarantee that applicants will become leaders after completing the training program. Leaders memorize scripts, watch videos, and undergo an extensive evaluation of their past and present life choices and an honest examination of their ability to live the Challenge Day message. All leaders must be authentic to be a compassionate role model for program participants.

Political Aspects
Problems arise in organizations when the power is allocated incorrectly. Challenge Day’s political frame is atypical of profit or non-profit organizations due to the unique purpose of the organization. A competitive hierarchy or coercive or authoritative leadership style would be counterproductive to the vision, mission, and operations of the organization. Rich and Yvonne, the founders of Challenge Day, would best be described as affiliative, democratic, and coaching leaders (Fullan, 2001). The board of directors, office staff, and program leaders work collaboratively to achieve organizational goals.

Challenge Day is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Financial resources are earned primarily through bookings in school settings. The Challenge Day program costs $3,300.00 per day, September through March of 2014-2015, plus airfare, van rental, and hotel costs (Challenge Day, n.d., g). Prices are reduced from April through July. Challenge Day encourages fundraising within communities, and supports school coordinators by sharing fundraising strategies and materials. Schools that are located more than one hour from Concord, California must schedule three days of programming. Schools are encouraged to collaborate with neighboring school districts to share programming expenses if the size of the school does not warrant booking three days.

Schools or organizations that examine the website to determine whether the experiential program will meet their diversity training goals and objectives will find an impressive list of 23 individuals who publically endorse Challenge Day. The list includes the singer and actress Alanis Morissette, Arnold Shapiro, the producer of the Emmy Award winning Teen Files, Dr. Patch Adams, founder of the Gesundheit Institute, the singer and activist Peter Yarrow, the actor Ryan Reynolds and Marianne Williamson, the author, international lecturer and Chairman of the Peace Alliance (Challenge Day, n.d., h) and the Herff Jones company. In addition, Challenge
Day has received numerous awards and has been featured in newspaper and magazine articles (San Francisco Chronicle and the Washington Post), in addition to book (Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul), newscasts, and television shows. Challenge Day was featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show on November 9, 2006, the UPN National Network “Teen Files: Surviving High School”, which won an Emmy Award in 2000, and the Tom Brokaw special titled “Bridging the Divide”, which aired on the USA Network in December, 2010. MTV aired 12 episodes of “If you Really Knew Me”, to depicting Challenge Day’s impact on schools such as Anthony Wayne High School in Whitehouse, Ohio; Riverside High School in Belle, West Virginia; and Putnam City West High School in Oklahoma City. A similar television show ran for four seasons in the Netherlands, titled “Over de Streep.”

Figure 1: Frame-Related Issues and Areas of Focus  (Bolman & Deal, 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Possible Frame-Related Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>rules, regulations, goals, policies, roles, tasks, job designs, job descriptions, technology, chain of command, vertical and horizontal coordinating mechanisms, assessment and reward systems, standard operating procedures, authority spans and structures, spans of control, specialization/division of labor, information systems, management processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource</td>
<td>needs, skills, relationships, norms, perceptions and attitudes, morale, motivation, training and development, interpersonal and group dynamics, supervision, teams, job satisfaction, participation and involvement, informal organization, support, respect for diversity, formal and informal leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>key stakeholders, divergent interests, scarce resources, areas of uncertainty, individual and group agendas, sources and bases of power, power distributions, formal and informal resource allocation systems and processes, influence, conflict, competition, politics, coalitions, formal and informal alliances and networks, interdependence, control of rewards and punishment, informal communication channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>culture, rituals, ceremonies, stories, myths, symbols, metaphors, meaning, spirituality, values, vision, charisma, passions and commitments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Symbolic Aspects
Problems arise when employees lose focus of the corporate culture and purpose of the organization, resulting in the symbols and ceremonies of the organization losing their meaning and power. NeEdda James described the organization’s culture, diversity, relationships, and symbolism (personal communication, June 9, 2014). The culture was described as accepting and diverse. Organizational stories are not myths or fables; the stories comprise the reality and life experiences of the members. Staff members are charismatic, passionate and committed to achieving organizational goals. The vision of Challenge Day is located on the home page of the website: “Our vision is that every child lives in a world where they feel safe, loved and celebrated” (Challenge Day, 2014, Home).

The symbols that represent Challenge Day are the logo, the Be The Change graphic, the phrase, Notice Choose Act, and the American Sign Language symbol for “I love you”.

The Challenge Day program imparts the learning goals through a purposeful coordination of interactive experiential exercises. Two trained leaders from the organization facilitate each daylong program. One hundred diverse students and 25 teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and community members participate fully in the program per day. The adult participants act as small group leaders, model full participation in all activities, offer encouragement and support, and provide an important aspect of diversity, age. The adults do not need prior training, although the adults are required to attend a meeting before Challenge Day to review the
activities, role of the adult and to answer questions. Adults are also required to attend a
debriefing meeting at the conclusion of the program.

Powerful, high-energy activities and games alternate with whole and small group
activities and stories of life experiences. Facilitators describe program norms, enthusiastically
demonstrate appropriate hugs, and define diversity and oppression in terms that students can
understand. Gender identity issues are visually represented by the “Be the Man Box” and the
“Girl Flower” as members shout out gender stereotypes, common phrases like “boys don’t cry”,
and the pressures to conform to acceptable male versus female behaviors. Challenge Day
facilitators model how to “lower the waterline”, visually represented by an iceberg in the ocean,
by sharing personal stories and describing whom they really are (below the waterline), versus the
image or stereotype that society and the media perpetuates (above the waterline). Students and
adults take turns making statements in small groups with the initial phrase, “If you really knew
me.” The hallmark activity, called “Crossing the Line”, builds diversity awareness as adults and
students alike, cross the line and turn and face other participants as Challenge Day facilitators
describe categories of diversity based on race, culture, sexual orientation, disability, physical
characteristics, family make-up, religion, socioeconomic status and other categories that
separates us as individuals. This powerful and thought-provoking activity is completed in
silence. Participants reflect on their own identities, and the beliefs and biases toward others in
small groups following the activity. The program concludes with an activity called “Speak Out”.
Students and adults take turns openly speaking to the group on a microphone about what they
learned during Challenge Day, challenging themselves and others to change, expressing regret
for misjudging others and offering apologies, openly expressing insights about their identities
and who they want to be, professing personal goals and describing the school of their dreams.
Diversity Statement Analysis

Rich Dutra-St. John and Yvonne St. John-Dutra, co-founders and leaders of Challenge Day, envision a world in which every child feels safe, loved, and celebrated. Their mission “is to provide youth and their communities with experiential programs that demonstrate the possibility of love and connection through the celebration of diversity, truth, and full expression” (Challenge Day, 2014, Home). Although the recognition and celebration of all forms of diversity is the foundation of the Challenge Day program, the organization’s website includes an employment and volunteering statement to address diversity rather than a distinctive diversity statement.

A framework for discourse analysis utilized to evaluate Challenge Day’s website and employment and volunteering statement included the following categories: problematization, rationalization, fixation, reframing and naturalization (Vaara, Kleymann, & Seristo, 2004). According to Vaara et al. (2004) framework, the language used in the employment statement would be categorized as problematization. The problematization discourse defines diversity as a human feature that needs the protection of employment policies, focuses on nondiscrimination, and lacks statements regarding respect or value for diversity. The following statement addresses a non-discriminatory hiring practice:

Challenge Day is committed to equal employment opportunity. We will not discriminate against employees or applicants for employment on any legally recognized basis (“protected class”) including, but not limited to: veteran status, uniform service member status, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, physical or mental disability or any other protected class under federal, state or local law (Challenge Day, 2014, Employment & Volunteering, para. 2).
The organization does not address discrimination based on sexual orientation in the employment statement, although it mentions eliminating homophobia on other links on the website.

The website as a whole includes statements that are categorized as naturalization by Vaara, Kleymann, and Seristo (2004), although these statements do not identify specific forms of diversity. For example, the mission of the organization promotes “connection through the celebration of diversity” and “a diverse Board of Directors and staff that live this vision every day” (Challenge Day, 2014, Home). The naturalization discourse finds diversity integrated into all facets of the organization. Acceptance of diversity and the rationale for why this is important as a program outcome is included in the coordinator program materials and is categorized by Vaara et al. (2004) as the rationalization discourse. The fixation and reframing discourses are not found on the organization’s website. The fixation discourse defines diversity in terms that may seem incompatible with the meaning of the term, focused on employment expectations and benefits, and the reframing discourse describes an organization’s change in stance regarding diversity and solutions to address previous issues with diversity (Vaara et al., 2004).

The State of Diversity within the Selected Organization

The 26 program facilitators are diverse: 50 percent are people of color (including people of African descent, South Asians, Mexicans, and Filipinos), 50 percent are White, there are an equal number of male and female presenters, with diverse educational backgrounds ranging from high school graduates to leaders with Masters degrees, representing a wide geographic areas, including India, Mexico, Canada, Hawaii, Arizona, Alabama, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Florida, California, and Minnesota (N. James, personal communication, June 9, 2014). The leaders are also diverse in terms of religion, former employment, experiences with diversity, world-travels, and in life experiences, demonstrating the capacity to overcome human tragedies.
and life’s ups and downs to flourish as Challenge Day leaders. The diversity of the organization’s founders, board of directors and program leaders is evidenced by the member biographies (Challenge Day, 2014, Leaders).

The organization is also diverse in terms of the schools it serves, awards it has earned, and the type of events it supports. The 2005-2006 Annual Report is located on the Downloads and Resources link on the Challenge Day website. The report includes descriptions of programming, awards, events, and organizational changes. Challenge Day conducted 586 program days in 320 schools, serving approximately 60,000 diverse students and 12,000 adults across the world, including the International Schools in Japan in 2005-2006.

**Selected Organizational Outcome**

The organizational outcomes examined in this paper were the value of diversity training and the use and effectiveness of the Challenge Day program within school settings to increase teacher self-awareness of biased beliefs and acceptance of diversity. Essentially, a research study could determine if it was beneficial for teachers to attend Challenge Day as a form of professional development or diversity training. In addition, it would be beneficial to identify the learning outcomes for teachers based on their race, age, gender, years of teaching experience, experience with diversity, prior exposure to diversity training, socioeconomic status, and other forms of diversity, including the teachers’ perceptions of the conditions of the program and effectiveness of the experiential exercises. The findings have implications for administrators in charge of teacher professional development or leaders addressing destructive interpersonal relationships between teachers and their students.

The impact diversity training had on changing attitudes, knowledge, and skills, with a focus on affective outcomes, was investigated in a meta-analysis conducted by Kalinoski et al.
The additional goals of the study were to identify aspects of diversity training that result in greater effects on affective or attitudinal outcomes and to provide real-world implications for leaders needing to coordinate diversity training in organizations. Kalinoski et al., (2012) stated, “We focus on affective-based outcomes because attitude change seems particularly important in relation to diversity training, yet diversity training has failed to reveal consistent beneficial effects on affective-based outcomes” (p. 1079). Kulik and Roberson found that 67 percent of organizations in the United States implement diversity training geared toward providing information, increasing self-awareness of biases and stereotypes, and developing skills: While researchers have provided qualitative evidence that diversity training has positive effects on learning outcomes, “there has been little empirical evidence to suggest when and under what conditions diversity training is most beneficial” (as cited in Kalinoski et al., 2012, p. 1076). Of the 65 studies conducted on diversity training between 1964 and 2013 (Kalinoski et al., 2012), the researchers examined none that were conducted on practicing teachers.

Journal articles focused on pre-service and practicing teachers also note a lack of research conducted on the effectiveness or learning outcomes of diversity training. DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) found that none of the studies that utilized the Intercultural Development Inventory had evaluated environmental aspects, processes, or experiences of the training geared toward increasing teachers’ intercultural competence.

While scholarship and research have begun to demonstrate the impact of professional learning on general and academic teaching, there is an inadequate amount of empirical work that has studied the relationship between in-service professional learning and teaching for equity, diversity, or social justice. This relationship is important to
understand in light of the need for this transformative teaching (Kose & Lim, 2011, p. 197).

Research has shown that professional development improves teaching and student learning: transformative professional development geared toward multiculturalism and diversity is increasingly important due to the growing gap between minority students and a teaching force that is 80% White; evidence that schools oppress students with various forms of diversity; and disparities in drop-out rates and academic achievement (Kose & Kim, 2011).

The examination of the effectiveness of diversity training is justified in light of the research findings on the importance and lack of teacher awareness of diversity. In a study conducted by Picower (2009), a majority of pre-service teachers were unconscious of their racial identity and whiteness and to the privileges and power differential that whiteness provides in society. A national survey revealed that only 20% of teachers felt they were prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners, more than 54% of teachers taught students who had limited English proficiency or were culturally diverse and 71% taught students with a disability (Parsad, Lewis, & Farris, 2001). Teacher beliefs, fears, or uneasiness may impact the implementation of diversity curriculum and affect instructional practices (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008). Teachers must be knowledgeable about diversity and oppression issues in order to prepare their students for the future, in addition to examining their own beliefs and biases so that they can build positive relationships with their students.

Shockley and Banks (2011) concluded teacher pre-service programs have inadequately prepared teachers to explore biased beliefs and assumptions about people who are different from them before entering the profession. The researchers conducted a study on the impact of practicing teacher participation in a two-year master’s degree program on perceptions of racial
and cultural bias toward students, social justice, and the transformation of teacher attitudes and beliefs. The researchers asserted that participants had not been required to adequately examine and challenge personal beliefs regarding bias in pre-service programs. Critical findings of the study included evidence that teachers can change beliefs and attitudes when exposed to bias related curricula in a non-traditional manner when given the opportunity to honestly reflect on personal beliefs within a safe environment, and teachers can learn to accept others regardless of differences. “Most teachers admit they have had little or no training at all to work with culturally diverse children and lack the necessary pedagogical strategies to enable them to obtain good results with these students” (Aguado, Ballesteros, & Malik, 2003, p 58). Picower (2009) likewise argues that a transformation in teacher education programs to overcome a lifespan of deeply embedded hegemonic beliefs must be broadly addressed, provide opportunities for honest self-reflection to challenge stereotypes, and investigate educational inequities as “issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religious diversity” should not be taught solely in one semester course at the collegiate level (p. 212).

Practicing and future educators must be aware of how they view students different from themselves, the effect that view has on their relationship with students and the impact on providing an equitable education for all students. This lack of awareness perpetuates the practice of holding biased and stereotypical views of students. According to critical race theory (CRT), racism is a natural feature of society and “must be analyzed, in conjunction with other forms of oppression, to understand inequality” (Picower, 2009, p. 198). Acknowledging and identifying the problem is a critical first step to transforming beliefs and behaviors. A greater emphasis on critical race theory (CRT) within education programs, which enroll predominantly White, middle
class pre-service teachers, is vital to building an equitable classroom and eliminating bias (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011).

The lack of research on effective diversity training for teachers has implications for improving teacher diversity competencies. The literature is clear about the importance of teacher awareness of biased beliefs and sensitivity to student diversity. Teachers must understand and be sensitive to the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds of their students, possess the self-efficacy to teach diverse learners, build caring relationships with students, and accept responsibility for the academic achievement of all students (Cooper, 2003). Teacher acknowledgment of the inequalities that result from biased beliefs is vital due to the impact bias has on the relationship teachers build with their students. The quality of the teacher-student relationship is directly related to student achievement (Fraser & Walberg, 2005), and is altered by teacher interpersonal behaviors that are influenced by biased beliefs (Brok & Levy, 2005).

Teachers report that the effort to sustain a mental focus on curriculum and instruction, classroom management, and other job duties inhibits the amount of time and ability to focus on personal bias and behaviors (Shockley & Banks, 2011). The examination of personal bias held by teachers is particularly challenging due to the nature of the profession and the perception that teachers should treat all students justly; therefore, examining personal bias with colleagues involves risk and vulnerability (Shockley & Banks, 2011). A safe environment and adequate time is needed to systematically explore personal bias, a topic that is often considered taboo. An evaluation of the climate and learning outcomes created by the Challenge Day’s experiential activities would determine whether teachers were able to use the time to safely explore their biased beliefs and develop an acceptance of diversity.
Eliminating biased beliefs so that all students, regardless of diversity, have the opportunity to participate in an equitable education is a critical goal of transformative learning theory in teacher education and professional development (Shockley & Banks, 2011). Participation in professional development programs designed to empower teachers to examine biased beliefs and the impact on students is an important addition to educational reform efforts. Challenge Day has been successful in changing student perceptions of diversity. However, it is not clear what level of impact the program has on teacher bias. A research study has not been conducted to determine the capacity of Challenge Day to enhance teacher awareness of bias and acceptance of diversity or to improve teacher-student relationships.

Teacher bias is important to study because the literature confirms that it negatively impacts the teacher-student relationship as perceived by students, which in turn negatively impacts student academic achievement. Teachers must eliminate bias from their instructional practices to enhance the academic success of all students. Providing teachers the opportunity to safely explore personal bias during professional development is the first step in transforming beliefs and behaviors.

**Brief Literature Review**

As a result of the focus on school performance and accountability, educational reform has placed an emphasis on teacher content knowledge, implementation of the common core curriculum, and the preparation for high stakes achievement assessments (Cooper, 2003). The U.S. Department of Education (2005) reported that 73% of teachers participated in professional development focused on instructional methods and 59% of teachers participated in professional development focused on curriculum. Less than 50% of teachers reported that they attended more than eight hours of professional development within the school year. Practitioners and
researchers in the education field agree that the teacher’s ability to impact student academic achievement is linked to his or her knowledge and use of appropriate pedagogical strategies, and yet teacher effectiveness is associated with teacher beliefs and biased judgments of students’ intelligence, aptitude, behaviors, and character (Cooper, 2003). Looking for solutions to closing the achievement gap by focusing on these reform areas ignores the need to address the root of the problem: an honest examination of how diversity training impacts teacher awareness of biased beliefs, acceptance of diversity, and subsequently how the training impacts the teacher-student relationship and therefore student achievement.

Brown (2004) used the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale: 2 and the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) to examine the relationship between 100 European-American pre-service teacher’s “self-concepts” and their cultural diversity awareness on the first and last day of a 10-week, junior level, multicultural course at a Midwestern public university. Two journal articles were written to discuss the mixed-method study. “The Relationship of Self-concepts to Changes in Cultural Diversity Awareness: Implications for Urban Teacher Educators” focused on the quantitative findings. Brown (2004) found that the total “self-concept” of pre-service teachers was significantly related to cultural diversity awareness. The data analysis also showed a statistically significant positive correlation between “personal self-concept” and “multicultural classroom environment” and “total diversity awareness” at the completion of the multicultural course. There were no significant differences between male and female “self-concept” on the pre-surveys. Female (65) participants had a greater change in cultural diversity awareness than males (35). In addition, the changes in “total diversity awareness” and “parent/teacher/student cross-cultural communication” were statistically significant between males and females, with females showing a greater change. A greater variance in results existed for age of participants as
DIVERSITY ANALYSIS

compared to gender. A statistically significant change in cultural diversity awareness existed between the three age groups (19-22, 23-26, and 27-48), with the oldest students demonstrating the most gains in sensitivity.

The journal article, “What Precipitates Change in Cultural Diversity Awareness During a Multicultural Course, the Message or the Method?” utilized qualitative data to draw conclusions. Brown (2004) found that a relationship existed between the form of instructional methodology used in a multicultural course and the gains in pre-service teacher’s cultural diversity awareness.

The data collected from the non-traditional course showed statistically significant changes in total sensitivity to diversity, interactions between the school and family, classroom environment, and communication between cultures. The traditional course showed statistically significant changes in total sensitivity to diversity and the classroom environment. The changes in the pre and post-test scores for students enrolled in the non-traditional course were greater than the traditional course on all subtests, with the exception of the classroom environment. The only statistically significant change between group 1 (non-traditional) and 2 (traditional) over time was found in the interactions between the school and family. The qualitative data collected for group 2 was inadequate; therefore percentages were not calculated. Brown came to the following conclusions based on the qualitative data collected from students enrolled in the non-traditional course: 87% of the 56 students in group 1 reported a significant change in their attitude toward other cultures; 95% reported that they needed to continue to improve their awareness and sensitivity toward the multicultural classroom and the interactions between the teacher, students, and parents; 64% of the students reported that interactions between the school and community were the best methods to understand cultural values, beliefs and traditions; 90% reported that they would incorporate community resources to enhance the diversity within the multicultural
classroom; and 74% reported that they had a greater sensitivity for the differences in the cultural communication styles between students and teachers.

Cultural diversity awareness was operationalized by Brown (2004) as the continual revision of an individual’s belief system through the acquisition of knowledge related to their own culture, knowledge of other cultures, recognition of contributions made by cultures that resulted in societal improvements, equitable behaviors toward other cultures, and interpersonal behaviors that indicated value and respect with individuals from other cultures. Study participants were exposed to diverse K-12 students during the junior level multicultural course: race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, religion, and disabilities. Brown (2004) concluded that a multicultural course has the capacity to increase the cultural diversity awareness of pre-service teachers, although there was no way to predict whether the changes in awareness will exist over time. In addition, there was no way to predict whether changes in cultural diversity awareness swayed changes in self-concept or if changes in self-concept swayed changes in cultural diversity awareness.

Reiter and Davis (2011) conducted a research study, emphasizing the fundamental concept of diversity awareness and pre-service teacher attitudes, to examine the effectiveness of diversity training at a mid-sized, Southern university. Diversity was operationalized as race, SES, father’s educational attainment, pre-service teacher age, and how students were raised. The study examined the impact of the pre-service teacher race, age, gender, and SES on their thoughts, feelings, and academic expectations of students based on student background characteristics.

Reiter and Davis (2011) didn’t find a correlation between pre-service teacher attitudes regarding the influence student background characteristics have on academic achievement and
the completion of a diversity awareness program. The data did not show an association between the participation in diversity seminars and a change in teacher attitudes. According to Gorski’s typology that categorizes diversity training as conservative (emphasis on assimilating minorities into the dominant culture), liberal (emphasis on tolerance, sensitivity, multicultural competence, and celebration of diversity) or critical (emphasis on social justice and examination of systematic inequities to promote change), the seminars failed to create sustainable change in attitudes and instruction for diverse students. Reiter and Davis were critical of the training and the failure to address deeply embedded institutional inequities. Reiter and Davis claimed that the data showed two interesting findings. Female pre-service teachers were less likely than males to believe that student’s background (race, SES, home-life, and father’s educational attainment) impacted student learning. Pre-service teachers with a higher SES background, defined by their father’s education, were more likely to attribute student learning to student background factors.

Kose and Lim (2011) collected data from 330 elementary teachers in 25 small urban communities in a Midwestern state, using a survey developed by Kose and administered using SurveyMonkey to measure professional learning process (PLP) and transformative professional learning (TPL) variables. The focus of this study was the transformation of teacher’s beliefs regarding reduction of bias and acceptance of diversity, professional expertise, and instructional practice as a result of transformative professional development. The literature review included the importance of transforming colorblind beliefs to valuing diversity and understanding the unique needs of diverse students. Diversity was operationalized as race, ethnicity, color, socio-economic status, English language learners, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and students with disability.
The study by Kose and Lim (2011) defined professional learning as engaging learning activities embedded within the school rather than the traditional “sit and get” external workshop or college course. PLP was defined by the length, type, and quality of school-embedded professional learning (e.g., teacher collaboration and peer observation). TPL was defined by the amount of content teachers acquired in the areas of ELL, IEP, SES, students of color and instructing students for social justice. The researchers determined that PLP and TLP were correlated with a low to moderate variance in the transformation of teacher’ beliefs regarding reduction of bias and acceptance of diversity, professional expertise, and instructional practices. PLP was somewhat superior in transforming teacher’ beliefs while TPL was superior in transforming professional expertise and slightly superior in transforming instructional practices. The only factor associated with reducing deficit thinking was in-service and staff meetings associated with the PLP model. Kose and Lim (2011) concluded that successful professional development must include specific academic content related to the intended learning outcomes for transformative teaching to occur.

The professional development (PD) analyzed in a quantitative study conducted by DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) was based on Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Data was collected before and after participation in the on-going program using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The DMIS model defines cultural competencies on a continuum, ranging from a monocultural worldviews (“Denial and Defense/Reversal”) to intercultural worldviews (“Acceptance and Adaptation”) (p. 438). The study was conducted in an urban, Midwestern school district. DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) defined intercultural competence as a person’s worldview and responses to different cultures, the ability to understand other cultural perspectives, and alter behaviors to fit cultural similarities and
DIVERSITY ANALYSIS

Differences. Diversity was operationalized as race, English language learners, and teacher gender, level of education, and years of experience working with diversity.

DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) determined that the IDI showed a significant and positive change in the overall teacher intercultural development and teacher’ perceived score after completing the PD. Teachers moved along Bennett’s continuum from the monocultural worldview toward the intercultural worldview. The most significant changes occurred in teacher understanding of the similarities and differences among cultures and altering behaviors to interact with diverse individuals. Changes in teacher’ intercultural competence were found regardless of gender, former experiences with diversity, educational attainment or length of the PD. The PD had a significant impact on teacher’ competencies and intercultural behaviors within the organization.

Using qualitative data, McAllister and Irvine (2002) investigated elementary and middle school teacher perception of empathy following participation in a professional development seminar called CULTURES (Center for Urban Learning/Teaching and Urban Research in Education and Schools). Diversity was operationalized race, gender, years of teaching experience, and percentage of students receiving free lunch. The 34 participants in the study reported that empathy, consisting of affective and cognitive components, was important component of working effectively with diverse students. The three activities within CULTURES that impacted teacher empathy were participation in a cross-cultural simulation called Bafa Bafa, engagement with families and students of a different culture from their own, and reflection on their experiences with oppression. The Bafa Bafa simulation allowed teachers to experience the powerful emotions of being part of a different culture, such as “ostracized, demoralized, and uncomfortable” (p. 437), and the challenges of cross-cultural communication. The one-on-one
contact with people from different cultures provided the most impactful opportunity to understand, develop empathy, and connections with diverse individuals. Teachers in the study expressed the desire to get involved with cultures while traveling to other communities to enhance their sensitivity to diversity and effectiveness as teachers. Teachers described the positive impact of empathetic behaviors, such as “sensitivity, patience, respect, tolerance, acceptance, understanding, flexibility, openness, and humility” (p. 439), on their relationships with students and the creation of supportive, student-centered classrooms in the post CULTURE data.

Limited research exists regarding teacher perception of biased beliefs, teacher interpersonal behaviors toward students, and the impact on the teacher-student relationship: A majority of studies assess student perceptions of teacher interpersonal behaviors and the impact on the relationship (Brok & Levy, 2005). In addition, limited research exists regarding quality professional development programs designed to change teacher beliefs in order for them to meet the needs of diverse learners: “What often goes unstudied are the teachers’ attitudes related to transformative curricula on teacher bias” (Stockley & Banks, 2011, p. 223). Witherspoon (2011) suggests that further research needs to be conducted on practices that provide a foundation to improve teacher-student relationships. The U.S. Department of Education (2005) advocates for professional development that requires active learning (“opportunities for practice designed into the training”) and further research to be conducted on this component of professional development (p. 3).

In summary, Brown’s (2004) mixed-method research focused on pre-service teachers’ cultural diversity awareness. The researcher concluded that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between “personal self-concept” and “multicultural classroom environment”
and “total diversity awareness” at the completion of the multicultural course. In addition, a relationship existed between the form of instructional methodology used in a multicultural course and the gains in pre-service teacher’ cultural diversity awareness, with the non-traditional course resulting in greater gains. Alternatively, Reiter and Davis (2011) didn’t find an association between the pre-service teacher participation in diversity seminars and a change in teacher attitudes at the conclusion of their quantitative study. DeJaeghere and Cao’s (2009) quantitative research on in-service elementary teachers determined that the IDI showed a significant and positive change in the overall teacher intercultural development and teacher’ perceived score after completing the PD. The most significant changes occurred in teacher understanding of the similarities and differences among cultures and altering behaviors to interact with diverse individuals. Similarly, Kose and Lim (2011) conducted a quantitative study on elementary teachers and found that the PLP and TLP were correlated with a low to moderate variance in the transformation of teachers’ beliefs regarding reduction of bias and acceptance of diversity professional expertise, and instructional practices. The qualitative study conducted by McAllister and Irvine (2002) found that elementary and middle school teacher perception of empathy improved following participation in a professional development seminar called CULTURES.

The results of research on the effectiveness of various forms of diversity training is mixed and limited. Two quantitative research studies conducted on the effectiveness of diversity training for practicing elementary teachers were reviewed for this paper. The only study that focused on middle school teachers was qualitative. None of the studies focused on high school teachers’ learning outcomes after participating in diversity training. Study descriptions of the 65 studies detailed in Table 1 by Kalinoski et al. (2013) revealed that 29 studies were conducted on undergraduate students, 18 of which specifically analyzed affective outcomes of diversity training.
education; the descriptions did not clarify whether the students were pre-service teachers.

Kalinoski et al. (2013) determined that diversity training longer than four hours had a small to medium-sized effect on affective-based outcomes. Affective-based outcomes were defined as internal attitudes and motivation that impact perceptions and behaviors. Interestingly, the researchers determined that studies showed a significantly larger effect on participant self-efficacy compared to attitudes. Shockley and Banks (2011) and Brown (2004) also found that non-traditional training, rather than “set and get” traditional coursework, including more social interaction and interdependent exercise completion between participants had a greater impact on affective-based outcomes.

**Positionality Statement**

Milner (2007) developed a framework to assist education researchers in evaluating personal awareness of race and culture, their conscious, hidden beliefs and feelings about diversity, and position on the research outcome of interest. The careful examination of a researcher’s stance regarding their research is important in order to avoid the impact biased beliefs may have on data interpretations and research conclusions and “circumvent misinterpretations, misinformation and misrepresentations of individuals, communities, institutions, and systems” (Milner, 2007, p. 288). Milner’s framework will be utilized to examine my positionality on Challenge Day as an organization and the effectiveness of the diversity training it provides to educators. As a White, female and member of the majority within the field of education, it is important to divulge my personal history with Challenge Day to thoroughly examine my conscious and unconscious position on the organization and effectiveness of the programming.
In 2000, I attended a Challenge Day program at Anthony Wayne High School in Ohio as an adult participant. I was invited to attend due to my position as the Director of Guidance at Perrysburg High School. At the conclusion of the day, a self-proclaimed bully and football player stood before 100 of his peers and apologized for his insensitive judgments and behaviors as he held the microphone and spoke with raw vulnerability, his trembling voice and shaking hands, seared into my memory. The Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATOD) counselor and I were eager to coordinate a Challenge Day at Perrysburg High School. In 2002, we secured the funding from local agencies to host Challenge Day for all sophomore students. The concepts of Challenge Day were incorporated into the health curriculum and supported by a Be The Change club. I continued to coordinate approximately four days of Challenge Day per year at Perrysburg High School through 2005-2006. In August 2006, I was hired as an assistant principal at Findlay High School, in Findlay, Ohio. African American community leaders were concerned about racial tensions and demanded the school take action. The building principal needed to address the growing diversity and gang issues as families moved from Detroit to a primarily White town and school. Mark Butler, the Diversity and Inclusion manager, hosted a luncheon at the Marathon Petroleum Corporation to assist the high school in securing funding from local businesses. Marathon Petroleum Corporation, as well as other local businesses, supported Challenge Day financially, with donations and by encouraging their employees to attend as a form of diversity training. I continued to coordinate and attend Challenge Day at Findlay High School as an adult participant through 2012-2013. To serve as appropriate role models, I recruited 25 teachers, counselors, administrators, board members, public officials, university professors and their education and social work students, parents and community members attended per day.
I estimate that I coordinated 40 Challenge Days and attended approximately half of those as an adult participant. The experiential program has been instrumental in developing my self-awareness as an educated, middle-class, female of the White race and providing me with a safe environment to explore my honest, and sometimes painful to consciously confess, beliefs about diverse individuals. The program reinforced the notion that my experiences and beliefs are a product of my heritage. I look at students and colleagues differently having attended Challenge Day, consciously refuting any immediate judgments that my upbringing might conjure, intentionally accepting them for who they are as individuals, with the realization that they too are a product of their heritage.

One of the many learning outcomes I gained is the awareness that all human beings, regardless of form of diversity, suffer adversities and experience happiness. Each of us defines adversity and happiness uniquely; each of us will experience Challenge Day uniquely. As a researcher, it would be dangerous to make assumptions about the effectiveness of the program based on my experiences. Due to positive nature of my experiences, caution must be used to avoid assumptions about the potential learning outcomes for participants, as well as the overall effectiveness of the program.

It is also important for me to view Challenge Day through the lens of a school administrator. Administrators must consider the cost to benefit constraint of hosting Challenge Day within the school. The amount of funds raised through donations or grants, cost to the district, and amount of time needed to coordinate the program all factor into the overall value of the program. Administrators must consider whether the collective learning outcomes of the students, teachers, and community members outweigh the costs of time, money, and resources.
School leaders must also consider the public relations benefit of inviting parents, local businesses and agencies to participate in the experiential program.

**Recommendations/Implications for the Selected Organization**

The Challenge Day organization has been implementing the experiential program in schools for 27 years. The organization has won awards and has been the focus of articles, newscasts and television shows. The popularity and increasing number of Challenge Days conducted each year is due to informal discussions between educators and social media. The website, media, and publications have focused on student learning, behavioral changes and overall school climate. The organization has failed to promote the program to a quarter of the participants, the adults. It seems logical that adults would have similar learning outcomes and experiences as students if they participate equally in all activities. In my experience, the customer relations department focuses the lengthy pre-Challenge Day event planning conferences on selecting diverse student participants and minimally on recruiting 25 adults. The organization would benefit from advocating for school employee involvement. As an organization focused on transforming schools, it seems logical that lasting transformation would need teacher support.

Challenge Day has collected and published student survey data, as well as a single doctoral dissertation focused on student learning and behavioral outcomes written by Nail (2007). Nail (2007) sought to examine the impact Challenge Day had on high school student leadership, improved life effectiveness as measured by the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ), awareness of bias and oppression, and acceptance of diversity. Teachers and students participate collaboratively in the Challenge Day program, therefore it is a reasonable assumption that teachers would have similar learning outcomes as students as a result of participating in the
same experiential learning exercises. Although adults are required to attend the program, the organization has not collected data from the adult participants regarding their learning outcomes. In addition to a lack of research conducted on the effectiveness of diversity training on practicing teachers in the literature, Hite and McDonald (2006), Perry et al., (2009), and Rynes and Rosen (1995) found that “organizations rarely conduct in-depth evaluations of their diversity training interventions” (as cited in Kalinoski et al., 2012, p. 1078). Challenge Day should conduct a thorough evaluation of the environment, experiential exercises, and learning outcomes of all participants to support the popularity of the enduring program. A quantitative and qualitative data analysis would provide Challenge Day and potential consumers with valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the program.

Lastly, Challenge Day needs to update their website to create an accurate and up-to-date organizational profile. For example, there are inconsistencies between data found within the website links, such as the number of states and provinces Challenge Day has operated. The Downloads and Resources link merely includes annual reports for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. The leadership team should publish reports on an annual basis, including financial statements, organizational changes, awards and other appropriate updates.

In Summary

The literature indicates that diversity training for teachers is critical due to the growing gap between White teachers and students of color, teachers’ lack of awareness of biased beliefs, and the importance of acceptance of diversity to the quality of instruction, the teacher-student relationship, and subsequently academic achievement. The review of literature for this paper confirmed mixed results regarding the effectiveness of diversity training, and a lack of research specifically designed to measure teacher learning outcomes and perceptions of the effectiveness
of training. “Future research integrating attitude and training theory and models into diversity training research is needed” and “more direct measures of motivation or perceptions of training importance and value” (Kalinoski et al., 2013, p. 1099). Kalinoski et al. (2013) suggest that trainers need to know more about how to design and deliver programming that supports participants in modifying reactions and responses to diversity attributes through both implicit and explicit processes. The researchers also advocated for examining the differences between the affective-based outcomes after training for favorable versus unfavorable participants’ attitudes toward diversity.

As a result of coordinating and participating in Challenge Day programming, it is vitally important that I use caution when researching the effectiveness of the program. Assumptions must not be made regarding the potential learning outcomes of diverse participants based on my experiences and learning outcomes. Research conducted on the effectiveness of the Challenge Day organization and how the individual experiential exercises impact participant perceptions would add to the literature and have implications for administrators searching for diversity training options and trainers seeking to improve the quality of training programs.
References


http://www.challengeday.org


