

Challenging Whiteness in Science Education

Abstract

Whiteness is a social construction that works as a tool to maintain the systemic advantage of Whites over other groups. It provides a way of being in the world and a way of responding to interrogations about race that ultimately work to maintain the status quo, cover up institutionalized racism, and silence communities of color. By analyzing discourse from one of the working groups at this Symposium, five ways were identified that whiteness was used to deflect consideration of STEM classrooms as racialized spaces. Though conceptual tools were provided to the participants, with the intention that those tools would facilitate the work of challenging whiteness and grappling with why race matters in science and math education, those tools did not allow the participants to position themselves outside the system that whiteness protects. The propensity to portray goodness in the system and to call upon dominant narratives and counter-examples were powerful ways of denying, evading, subverting, and avoiding the issue of race in STEM education. By revealing and reflecting upon these ways, we may learn how to better challenge this active protection of the status quo and meet the goal of the conference as planned.

Key Words: Race, whiteness, white supremacy, color-blindness, dominate narratives