

Article

ReformED: Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods in Research-Based Theatre

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Abstract: This article reports on a research-based theatre piece about teachers leaving education. The data and scene shared in this article examine race and racism (both interpersonal and institutional) and demonstrate how quantitative data illuminated buried and unclear qualitative data. In social science research, surveys have the potential to contextualize interview data and enable researchers to interrogate information such as demographics or percentages of agreement or disagreement. When such quantitative data are compared to qualitative analysis, gaps and silences can be identified—which was the case in this study, where issues of race and racism emerged. This essay shares how quantitative data illuminated silenced issues around race and influenced the writing of a research-based theatre piece. The analysis (both quantitative and qualitative) reveals the tensions of white teachers feeling individually like they are addressing the needs of students of color, while it also shows that white teachers, overall, are not adequately serving the needs of students of color. This complete analysis is shared, and the article demonstrates how it was translated as a piece of research-based theatre.

Keywords: mixed methods; research-based theatre



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1. Introduction

In October 2019, in the United States, some 10,000 local teachers flooded South Carolina's capital and marched to the steps of the State House Building to protest changes in education. They marched against the rise of standardized testing's influence over curriculum and instruction decisions. They marched for greater classroom autonomy, more administrative support, and higher pay. The headwaters to this deluge of protesting teachers did not form in South Carolina, however; they were forged one year prior in West Virginia. The striking teachers in West Virginia, a small southeastern state in the US, rippled through teachers and districts across the country. Educators from West Virginia, a small, so-called red state (politically conservative), organized and helped teachers understand that they were not alone in their grievances and, perhaps, there was something that could be done to address the unjust and unequal conditions under which too many teachers worked. Many other states followed West Virginia's lead. So-called blue states (politically progressive) protested alongside of their red-state colleagues to organize for their own improved working conditions. If a pin were placed on a US map in every city where teachers protested in 2018 and 2019, it would look like a topography of discontent.

West Virginia teachers protested and went on strike in February 2018. Their public schools were closed for nine days, and teachers were given a modest 5% raise [1]. The next pins placed on the map were in Oklahoma in April, where, again, teachers won a pay increase. The next day, Kentucky teachers went on strike. Three weeks later came Colorado and Arizona. North Carolina joined the map of striking teachers in May; Washington state in August. Cities as small as the one where I live, Columbia, South Carolina, protested, and cities as large as Chicago and Los Angeles were also added to the map. These protests embodied a national foment of frustration and disillusionment that swelled across the country like a vast wave.

Teachers did not wake up one morning in 2018 suddenly feeling aggrieved. These protests were years in the making. In 2016, it became clear to me that the expectations on teachers and the political pressures they faced relating to issues of instruction and curriculum were intensifying. The Obama administration's Race to the Top initiative, built on the George W. Bush administration's No Child Left Behind—two federal programs that tied school funding to standardized testing results—ratcheted the pressures on teachers and schools. In the US, federal education policies are driven by whichever administration leads the country. Consequently, every four to eight years, educational policies, research and grant dollars, and overall national education priorities change. These quantitatively driven federal initiatives fail to recognize the qualitative impacts these programs have on children and teachers. Quantitative measures in education can force us to look at numbers and not children, harming teachers as well. These cost-cutting, numbers-driven decisions that are made with every president do not allow any substantial educational reforms to gain traction. As a result, education is in a constant state of flux. Furthermore, the only consistency from one administration to the next involves cutting costs while increasing 'efficiency and accountability' measures. What Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind shared was an overreliance on linking federal support dollars to standardized testing results, tying teacher pay and advancement to student performance and, in some cases, shuttering so-called failing local public schools in favor of charter schools. The pressures on teachers to increase their test scores intensified, and the curriculum narrowed to accommodate the teaching-to-the-test mentality. Caught in the middle of these cultural, political, and pedagogical pressures were teachers and students.

The ethical dilemma of preparing young professionals to become teachers in the age of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top were the genesis for the research project that inspired *ReformED*—a mixed methods theatre-based research project that culminated in a play of the same title. In 2016, the graduate students in the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) Degree program in Theatre Education at the University of South Carolina and I discussed their questions about entering the profession now and how we could address their concerns within our program. We agreed that speaking with teachers and former teachers would be a good place to start.

2. A Research Turn

Denzin [2] views performed research as a way to concretize experience and create plausible accounts of lived experiences and social challenges. As such, performed research relies on drama techniques and social science research methods to generate and contextualize data. Renowned theatre practitioner/researcher, Joe Norris [3], calls this generative process providing *contexture* (p. 49). This research project was initially a class assignment with graduate students to prepare them for the challenging landscapes of US education, and it evolved into a large, multi-year research project to understand what drives teachers out of the profession and what we can do about it.

Initially, a few Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) graduate students in Theatre Education at the University of South Carolina and I thought that if we could talk to the teachers whom we knew about how teaching is changing, they might feel better equipped to handle those pressures. We discussed semi-structured interviews, and I conducted three that they observed. By watching me interview participants first, students experienced and could critique how I followed the thread of the inquiry and listened to participants rather than remaining wedded to my list of interview questions.

We read research about why teachers were leaving the profession and then went to local elementary schools (with students aged 5–11), middle schools (students aged 11–14), and high schools (students aged 14–18) to see if we could identify those trends at the local level. Each student went into schools with their own queries based on research, and this informed the ethnographic notes they took. We discussed these notes from schools and crafted analytical memos, and it was clear that our findings affirmed the research and

accounts of teachers we were reading [4–6]. The ethnographic study did not lead to new insights, but it did lead to more questions.

While this local qualitative context was important, we decided to include a survey to address the additional questions we had. Why were teachers staying? How widespread were these pressures? Did more seasoned educators feel these pressures as well? Was there a common ‘last straw’? To address these and other questions, we employed a mixed-methods approach through the inclusion of a survey. Mixed-methods approaches expand and complicate data and provide a variety of lenses to interpret and understand. According to Adu et al. [7], a “mixed methods approach allows researchers to gain a deeper and broader understanding of a given phenomenon compared to studies that use monomethod” (p. 323). Connecting with teachers across the US through a survey provided scope on the issues and also specific examples of how these issues impacted their work.

We piloted a brief survey using Google forms and sent the instrument to teachers whom we knew or with whom we connected through Facebook teaching groups. The graduate students and I wanted to have specific information about why teachers are leaving, beyond what we thought we understood. We hoped a survey would provide insights from those still in classrooms or those who recently left. We asked 32 questions in our first survey, and the 102 responses we received revealed that there was much more we needed to understand. After analyzing our initial survey, it became clear that we needed a broader instrument. We scrapped our initial survey and created a new one with a much larger scope. We refined the useful questions and expanded the survey to a 100 multiple choice (Likert scale) item instrument that also had seven short answer items. Through the pilot, we discovered what we were most interested in was teacher satisfaction. We plunged into that research and framed the instrument around that concept.

From Survey to Script

The graduate students conducted thirteen initial interviews, and I continued interviewing participants, talking to over 100 teachers since those first discussions. After organizing the coded data into themes, I iteratively worked with verbatim text and the themes that emerged from the research to organize a basic framework of a story. Each scene was based on a research theme. I made the decision to write a scene about each theme that emerged after the analysis. Themes included administrative support, relating to students, fighting the system, making a difference, depleting mental health (students), depleting mental health (teachers), disciplining students, coping with stress, conflicts with parents, student learning, teaching to the test, respecting teachers, compressing time, finding joy, and addressing diversity and race. I created composite characters as opposed to crafting monologues or selecting one participant to represent a theme—as working with composite characters enabled me to delve into the complexity of what people said. I was able to create characters who represented points of view that could be in opposition to other characters while keeping participants’ words intact.

Initially, when I conceived of the play, I imagined the participants’ words would largely remain whole and their stories and experiences would be the bulk of the play. Monologue plays can be powerful pieces of theatre. However, with the sheer volume of data and the variety of points of view and experiences revealed in the interview transcripts and survey responses, it became clear that utilizing such an aesthetic would be limiting. Creating composite characters provided more artistic freedom while ensuring that I remained true to both the intentions behind their words and their words themselves. A scene between a principal and a teacher about filling in as a proctor became quickly layered, as it dealt with our reliance on standardized testing, the disrespect of teacher time, and threats of violence against teachers. If we worked with the original discrete verbatim text only, it would be much harder to weave those themes together into one scene. The goal of the play was to display the dynamic tensions found within the data to show the complexity of the education ecosystem. From student behavior and administrative support to the reliance some teachers have upon alcohol to help them cope with the increasing pressures

of teaching, centering the themes and tensions found within the data led to the creation of composite characters who were able to speak lines from across interviews. The scenes were opportunities for the audience to experience teachers' challenges in real time and not simply be told about them as in a monologue play.

Additionally, the quantitative data revealed important silences in the interviews. The experiences of some participants depicted specific and rigid understandings that countervailed the emergent research themes. Some of the examples the research participants shared were so stunning and emotionally raw that they outweighed the trends and themes that emerged from the research. Balancing those themes with the heft of "counter voices" challenged me to write a play that held and respected the multi-vocal quality of the research.

3. Research-Based Theatre

As a theatre artist and educational researcher, it is no surprise that arts-based approaches to research are of interest to me. Theatre is a form of research methodology [8] and data generation [9] (p. 64). In his chapter on ethnodrama and ethnotheatre, Joe Salvatore states,

My work in ethnodrama and ethnotheatre is always driven by some question that I have, some event that I am trying to learn more about, or some phenomenon that I am trying to explain, and my goal is to stimulate these "multiple meanings" and even raise new questions about the topic I am exploring rather than providing an audience with "authoritative" answers or conclusions [10] (p. 267).

These questions and phenomena that spark Professor Salvatore's inquiry are familiar to my own work. With *ReformED*, for example, I wanted to learn more about the phenomenon of leaving a profession that one has spent years training for and investing in. I wanted to understand how a profession often viewed as a *calling* could become a source of anxiety, depression and, in some cases, trauma. I started with these questions, and Research-Based Theatre (RBT) provided a framework to share the findings as a form of "knowledge exchange" with teachers, legislators, and those beyond education "to make the challenges faced by these communities visible to broader audiences" [11] (p. 56).

Beck, Belliveau, Lea, and Wagner [12] find that Research-Based Theatre falls along continua of performance and research traditions. They argue that this performance and research "spectrum moves between formal and casual research, and between performances for specific and general audiences created for a variety of purposes" (p. 696). While RBT is often created for specific audiences who are personally familiar with the content or the community of the research inquiry, the spectrum of RBT allows for latitude in performance and research traditions.

The research used for this piece of theatre was conventional social science research (a survey, interviews, social media searches, newspaper articles, news stories, etc.). Beck et al. would consider such methodologies *Systematic Research* [12] (p.695) and the performance of the play based on *Aesthetic Performance-Based Systematic Research* because it was for a general audience and not just research stakeholders. When the play was performed in Australia (May 2023), it was performed for students in teacher education programs as well as current and former teachers. On the performance spectrum, the specific audience for *ReformED* as staged at the University of Melbourne would have aligned on the continuum as *Stakeholder/Aesthetic Performance-Based Systematic Research*.

The role and relationship of the audience to the piece of embodied research influences how the research will be presented. The relational nature of the research to the performance and of the performance to the audience is an essential understanding in RBT [11] (p. 56). These elements are intertwined and influence each other greatly. Because of the vast geographical expanse of the ReformED research participants across the United States, it was impossible for them all to attend the play. Their absence made me feel even more responsible for their words and intentions. Their words were not going to be reflected back to them in live performance (though they were provided with their interview transcripts for correction and revision as well as copies of the play for approval). Not having many of

the research participants in the audience heightened the performance expectations. It is one thing to have monologues created from your own words that you have the opportunity to hear spoken back to you by an actor. It is another thing entirely to have your words combined with other participants in the creation of composite characters who could speak verbatim text from several interviewees within one line. When you know which participants will be in the audience, the research and play writing team might make decisions about the script based on specific participants. Those decisions might be more personal than aesthetic. To be clear, this can belong to the process. However, when it is a general audience, those personal influences over the script-crafting process are not as present. Their absence allows the writer(s) to follow the themes and data and write the script that emerges from the research process without the influence of the participants in the audience. As Belliveau [13] reminds RBT practitioners, “To step outside this so-called norm of presentation style, and to theatrically perform one’s research, challenges the performance expected of us (or that we assume is expected of us) and brings risks and vulnerability” (p. 12). The research representation is best when those risks and vulnerabilities are embraced. The learning should not just happen within the audience but within the researchers as well.

4. Mixed Methods and Productive Tensions

Ever since researchers marked distinctions between qualitative and quantitative traditions, there has been a simmering tension between the two. According to Mahoney and Goertz [14], qualitative research occupies itself with the *cause of effects*, while a statistical approach looks to the *effects of causes* (p. 230). Clearly, this positivist versus pragmatist orientation is an oversimplification. However, the either/or mindset is often subscribed to within research. It can separate and limit potential insights, whereas a mixed-methods approach, when employed appropriately, can richly complicate understandings of the area of research. Many within drama-based research have argued [15–18] that mixed-methods approaches offer opportunities to gain rich insights. Mixed methods deepen how we create knowledge (epistemology) and what we hold to be true and real (ontology) as well as the conceptual tensions that follow from thinking through these frameworks. Or, as Plano Clark [19] states, “the value of using mixed methods research arises when quantitative and qualitative data and methods are strategically combined and lead to more nuanced, contextualized, and corroborated conclusions about human flourishing and well-being” (p. 305). This essay argues that leaning into these tensions mutually complexifies data analysis in ways that provide additional insights into quantitative and qualitative inquiry.

The more ways we seek to find multiple points of entry into the research data, the more ways we can listen to the data and the participants. This “multi-nodal” (representing various social experiences) and “dialogic” way of engaging research puts the researcher at the center of meaning making—trying to see how participants come to make meaning of their work and world and understanding the nature of their lived realities [20] (p. 20).

To understand the themes that emerge from the data and listen to the stories (both the outliers and the ones that reify the themes) provides guidance on writing scenes based on data that capture not only the words that the participants say but the silences, the contradictions, and the inexpressible. Taylor and Raykov [21] look to Hesse-Biber [22] to discuss their dialectical approach to validating what the data have to say. They describe their “dialectical approach to triangulation, which involves seeking different versions of the same phenomenon and placing disparate or contradictory findings in dialogue with one another” (p. 129). That approach can also add context and levels of complexity to findings. This dialectical approach *is* theatre. Characters speak from a specific point of view and take action to achieve a goal; this transpires on every stage in every play. This fusion of various points of view and points of reference places differing versions of the same phenomenon in direct tension. This is not only a sort of triangulation, it is the heart of drama.

It is exciting for researchers when data clusters around themes. It is equally exciting when tensions are found that reveal contrapuntal connectedness [23]. Sandberg et al. [23] cite Ingersol [16] and Said [24] in demonstrating how comparing various data sources and

disparate trends within the data function like a complicated musical score—the data do not function in opposition to each other; they can exist as harmonically distant but still interconnected (p. 53). Quantitative findings, as will be seen here, offer new ways to understand, question, and contextualize the qualitative data. They provide harmonies that might not have been heard through a singular instrumentation or research paradigm.

5. Survey Description

Human experience rarely fits neatly into distinct categories and a priori codes. Surveys allow researchers to capture how a majority within a given group thinks; with an understanding of this, the data and the associated messy emergences can be contextualized. They can reveal conflicting and uncertain positions, which are a productive space for arts-based research. What is more, surveys can also provide clarity to non-majority opinions as well as gaps and silences within the data.

I administered a one-hundred-item survey to teachers across the United States in the fall of 2019 (an updated and revised 2024 survey will be released soon, to include questions about post-COVID-19 pandemic teaching as well as the explicit state legislation that narrows and censors the curriculum). Ninety-three were Likert-scale items (using five-point scales such as very unsatisfied to very satisfied or very much disagree to very much agree). Seven questions were short answer, offering participants opportunities to provide further details, tell significant stories, or offer context for their opinions. The survey was designed to understand why teachers are leaving the profession in such large numbers. It was completed by 876 teachers across the United States; 86% of whom self-identified as white. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics [25], 79.3% of all teachers in the US identify as white (US Department of Education). Given that imbalance, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of survey respondents were white.

Six survey items examined teacher opinions of race and culturally responsive pedagogy/professional development, one's ability to engage students of color, and professional development (PD) in these areas. We asked about one's inclination toward such PD, as research suggests that PD around issues of race, privilege, and culturally responsive pedagogy has a mitigating effect on insensitive teacher practices [26–28]. Asking about whether a teacher might want more support in these areas signaled overall opinions toward the topic. While six questions are far from exhaustive, they offer a provocative glimpse into teacher's thinking and can unearth silences found within the qualitative data.

These questions were not in the initial pilot survey and were added later, as it became clear that issues of race emerged in the interview data but that the theme was not represented within the survey. Examples such as the two that follow made it clear why we needed to include themes connected to race in the survey. One interview participant, for example, when discussing why they moved schools within one district, stated the following:

Teacher: Are you familiar with Title One schools?

Interviewer: Yeah, but if you could give us maybe a little bit. . .

Teacher: Sure, 70 percent of the school was below the poverty line.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Teacher: And largely African American descent.

Interviewer: Ok.

Teacher: And, I had very little support from the parents. I did have a couple of parents that really, really worked hard with me. But, overall, it was—it was difficult because I didn't have a lot of parents that could help with homework or wanted to help with homework.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Teacher: At home. And behavior problems. And stuff like that. So I—I stayed there for 5 years and I wanted a change. And then I went to another school

in that district. And it is like a blue collar. . . I would say. . . the. . . the most of the people—the parents—are like, they had, they both mom and dad had jobs (Interview 16, Para. 27–35).

Another interview participant of color said, “[white teachers] expected more of the black teachers to handle discipline with the black students and let the administration handle discipline with the white students”. Statements like these and survey scores made it clear that race was an element driving a lot of educational practice and malpractice in schools. There were not explicit questions in our interview protocol that addressed race, and yet, many stories surfaced along these lines. These two examples demonstrate the range of perspectives found within the data. From coded, euphemistic, and racist language like *Blue Collar* to discussions of the added labors placed upon black teachers to address the behavior of black students on behalf of their white peers, race was a prominent feature of the interviews.

It is important to say here that despite this topic’s presence in the interview data, it was not more prominent than other issues raised. As a matter of fact, topics surrounding race were in the bottom third of themes, if a topic were judged by frequency alone. The frequency (but not importance) of other topics overshadowed race. For example, a general lack of respect for teachers by parents was coded about four times more frequently than questions surrounding race. As we were investigating the multiple challenges facing teachers, we inquired about topics ranging from teacher pay to educator coping mechanisms for stress. The number of times a code was identified within the data does not equate to importance, merely frequency.

As research into surveys with sensitive questions shows, the social desirability of the response to a survey question can influence how someone responds to an item [29]. It is more socially desirable to be viewed as not racist, so asking questions about one’s own beliefs might not yield honest results. It would be impossible and inappropriate to ask a question such as “How much does your racist ideology inform the deficit mindset that you foster with the children and families with whom you work?” with a Likert scale of *Very Much* to *Not At All*. Of course, this ridiculous example hopefully illustrates how profoundly unhelpful it would be to ask such a leading and judgmental question. I chose to write questions about teacher satisfaction with ideas and practices connected to race than to ask specific questions about one’s views around racism or white privilege. It was my fear we would only hear a sanitized version of a belief and not have a complex understanding of how constructs of race and racism contribute to tensions in teacher retention. I hoped that these opinions could serve as a proxy for larger trends and attitudes. The Likert scale for five of the six questions ranged from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. The sixth item’s scale was *Very Satisfied* to *Very Unsatisfied*. The six items addressing race were as follows:

- I feel like teachers do a good job thinking about race and teaching about race.
- I feel like current schooling practices do not meet the needs of students of color.
- I wish I had more training on teaching for social justice and equity.
- I would like more professional development teaching students of color.
- I don’t see race, I see children.
- How do you rate your overall satisfaction with your ability to teach students of color effectively?

When asked *How do you rate your overall satisfaction with your ability to teach students of color effectively?*, 13% of all respondents were very satisfied, 30% were satisfied, 32% were mostly satisfied, 19% were somewhat unsatisfied, and 6% were very unsatisfied. The numbers suggest that three-quarters of respondents are at least somewhat satisfied with their impacts with students of color and over half do not feel the need for more professional development employing culturally responsive pedagogies. The numbers might demonstrate that the needs of students, schools, and teachers are being met. But, of course, that is a superficial reading of the survey data. When looked at again, this incomplete story becomes more complex as we engage in various approaches to data analysis.

When asked to evaluate other teachers, the statistics change. The item, “I feel like teachers do a good job thinking about race and teaching about race” reveals a slightly different picture. Only about 20% of all respondents agree or strongly agree with that statement. That begs the question, how can 75% of teachers feel as if they can at least somewhat meet the needs of students of color, and yet approximately 80% of those same teachers wonder about how other teachers think and teach about race.

What is more, 65% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I feel like current schooling practices do not meet the needs of students of color”. Interestingly, when asked to respond to the statement, “I would like more professional development teaching students of color”, just under half either agreed or strongly agreed, a quarter either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and a third responded as neutral. The data suggest that respondents might think along the lines of, *reaching students of color is important, schools should do better, but I am doing fine. It is a problem for other teachers to fix through professional development, not me.* The contradictions in these survey responses illuminate the confounding feelings teachers have about reaching and engaging students of color.

It is surprising that there was also such a wide band of responses for obtaining more professional development on race-conscious and culturally responsive pedagogies—roughly 35% of all teachers have questions about their own abilities or the abilities of others to deal with issues of race, and roughly half do not want more access to PD. It could be that teachers doubt the impact of PD opportunities. As Osman and Warner [30] share, teacher perceptions of professional development are mixed at best. Teachers tend not to have positive associations with professional development. Another possibility is that professional development around issues of race brings up conflicting and guarded responses from white teachers [31].

When the survey data are disaggregated to examine the responses of teachers who self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, Black, Asian, or Biracial, (the only ethnicities shared by the participants), the responses show less ambiguity. Like their white peers, about 80% of teachers of color believe that they are at least somewhat satisfied with their ability to teach students of color effectively. Similarly, 44% of those respondents reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I would like more professional development teaching students of color”. In addition, 78% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I feel like current schooling practices do not meet the needs of students of color”, whereas 65% of their white colleagues felt the same. That is a 13 percentage point difference. Twice as many teachers of color either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I wish I had more training on teaching for social justice and equity”. Only 9% of teachers of color who responded to this survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I feel like teachers do a good job thinking about and teaching about race”, whereas 24% of their white colleagues felt the same. These last three items show where ideas of meeting student needs differ. This is telling, and the disaggregated data clearly demonstrate discrepancies between respondents who self-identify as white and those who do not (see Table 1).

The quantitative data delineated the teachers’ sentiments and helped us hear deafening silences from within the qualitative analysis. While the teachers might not have articulated it as such, the data were clear that most white teachers thought they were at least moderately meeting the needs of students of color and that they, themselves, did not necessarily need more training in this area. Additionally, white teachers did not feel as if their peers shared in their abilities in meeting the needs of students of color. Echoes of these opinions, however, were not consistent in the qualitative data. If, in the qualitative data, all we do is code what is said or otherwise embodied, we miss the loudness of the participants’ silences. The quantitative data helped bring that to light. For example, when one conducts a lexical search of the total interview data corpus, the term African American is said 315 times. Across almost 100 interviews, it was only spoken in 37 interviews. There were not explicit questions about race in the survey, so this result is unsurprising, perhaps. What was telling, however, was that thirty-three of those thirty-seven participants were African American

themselves. The word race was said sixteen times, and four of those sixteen times were describing the Obama Administration’s federal education initiative, Race to the Top. The term “of color”, describing teachers of color, students of color, or people of color, was said fifty-six times. Twelve interviewees used this term, and eight were African American. The lexical search reveals that white teachers were more apt to use euphemistic terms such as poverty, 46 times, and poor (used to describe an economic circumstance and not in phrases like poor test scores or poor decisions), 27 times. The term “black students” was used once (by a teacher of color) and “black kids” was used three times—twice by one teacher of color and a third time by a white teacher who explained that a student called her racist against whites because she “favored the black kids”.

Table 1. Disaggregated Survey Data.

	Teachers Who Self-Identify as White (86% of All Respondents)	Teachers Who Self-Identify as a Person of Color (14% of All Respondents)
How do you rate your overall satisfaction with your ability to teach students of color effectively?	75% of respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with their abilities to reach students of color effectively	78% of respondents were at least somewhat satisfied with their abilities to reach students of color effectively
I feel like teachers do a good job thinking about race and teaching about race.	24% Either Agree or Strongly Agree	9% Either Agree or Strongly Agree
I feel like current schooling practices do not meet the needs of students of color.	65% Either Agree or Strongly Agree	78% Either Agree or Strongly Agree
I wish I had more training on teaching for social justice and equity.	31% Either Agree or Strongly Agree	59% Either Agree or Strongly Agree
I would like more professional development teaching students of color.	43% Either Agree or Strongly Agreed	44% Either Agree or Strongly Agree
I don’t see race, I see children.	53% Either Agree or Strongly Agree	27% Either Agree or Strongly Agree
	18% Were Neutral	7% Were Neutral
	15% Disagree	27% Disagreed
	15% Strongly Disagree	40% Strongly Disagreed

Again, it is worth stating that there were no explicit interview questions that looked at race. As we set out on this project, we were looking for universal hardships and did not approach this with the lens of race. Looking back on it now, of course race plays a large role in the experience of being a teacher. Simply acknowledging the fact that almost 80% of all teachers in the US are white reveals a structural racial bias in education.

The survey questions considered changes in the classroom, administrative support, student/teacher relationships, changes to curriculum, and what teaching has meant to the participants. However, every participant of color mentioned some aspect of race in education, while only about a third of white teachers did. Of course, this does not mean that white teachers do not care about being equitable and just teachers who teach to challenge, engage, and lift up all students. Epstein [32] cites Gere et al. [33] (2009), who describe how white teachers are either silent or silence conversations about race, while teachers of color recognize the pernicious impacts of racism (p. 479). The survey data support this claim.

But, as Drs. Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, and Powers [34] remind us, “The reality that the vast majority of educators do not intentionally commit acts of racism does not negate the fact that anybody can contribute to institutional racism unless efforts are taken to avoid doing so” (p. 365). Confronting racism means talking about it. It means eschewing old habits of mind and cultivating more complex and dynamic ways of being in the world. Concepts such as *colorblindness* are still commonplace in schools despite their limitations and inability to hold teachers accountable for how they engage young people. The survey data revealed that 40% of African American teachers strongly disagreed with the statement, “I don’t see race, I see children”, when only 15% of white teachers felt the same way. Colorblindness is problematic for a variety of reasons. According to Boutte et al. [34], first,

it is impossible to address and counter racism if we do not admit that it exists. Second, we cannot equip children with strategies for interrupting racism if we do not teach them how to name and recognize it. Finally, silence in early childhood classrooms [and all classrooms] on issues of racism prevents preparation for active and informed participation in our democratic society, which includes multiple (even dissenting) perspectives (p. 339).

Perpetuating tropes about race in education while not seeking more information about improving our practice (and humanity), nurturing confidence in how white teachers address students of color, and feelings of superiority over fellow white peers in teaching students of color paints a complicated picture when it comes to how white teachers engage in American schools. The survey reveals a silence of white teachers around issues of race, which is consistent with the majority of research in teacher education [32,35,36]. It was for these reasons that a scene about race was written for the play, *ReformED*.

6. Quantitative Data in Verbatim Plays

Below is one scene from the 13-scene *ReformED* [37]. The data from the play was pulled largely from interviews of teachers who have either left teaching or are considering leaving (verbatim text is in bold in the script). Other data came from online sources such as the “Why I quit” letters that were circulating in social media for a while, news articles, images and sound recordings from teacher protests, blogs, vlogs, and social media posts, providing rich contexture [3] for the play.

This scene, *Can You Talk to Him?*, took to heart the earnest desire teachers have to be responsive and to address students’ needs. It endeavored to capture the exhaustion and the feeling that one more session of professional development is one too many—regardless of the topic. The scene is informed by a story from the research (the incident surrounding *To Kill a Mockingbird*) and a theme in the data of white teachers seeking support with disciplining students of color from their black colleagues. Those stories, along with the perception that most teachers do not believe that their colleagues are reaching students of color, heavily influence this scene. These colliding stories, along with verbatim text spoken by two composite characters, make for a complicated scene. It captures the unnamed frustration and challenge that comes from teaching—especially with the merging intersections of race, gender, and teacher identity.

The excerpt picks up in the middle of the scene, with two people discussing parent–teacher conferences and which parents may or may not show. Theresa (a first-year teacher) mentions DeMarkus, an African American student currently in her class. Carter (a veteran African American teacher) has never been DeMarkus’s teacher, but he knows him from around school. Theresa asks whether DeMarkus’s parents will show up for parent–teacher conferences and expresses her disappointment in his performance so far. He is a promising student who has not revealed that potential in class.

Can you Talk to Him?

Carter (a ten-year veteran African American teacher who embodies enthusiasm for teaching, students, and collegiality) is in the staff room speaking with Theresa (a white, first-year, and nervous teacher). She is at the table looking at To Kill a Mockingbird. She has a three-inch binder open in front of her as well as her laptop and her phone. She types away furiously, consults the binder, flips through pages, scrolls on her phone looking for something specific, then looks at the novel and repeats this cycle.

Carter

I’m gonna kick his tail. That kid’s got more talent. . .

Theresa

Well I haven’t seen it yet.

Carter

It’s there.

Theresa

All I’ve seen is attitude.

Carter

Yeah, that’s there too. What’s he doing?

Theresa

Oh nothing. Just going absolutely ballistic and calling me a racist in class. You know, no biggie.

Carter

Well that sucks.

Theresa

We're preparing to start the **civil rights unit and we're reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*** for context. We're (*makes air quotes*) "making connections to literature".

Carter

(*Chuckles*)

Theresa

So, we're at the part in the book where Tom's called the N word, and DeMarkus just lost his mind.

Carter

What did he do?

Theresa

He flipped out. He was yelling at me saying I was racist for reading the book in class and that he shouldn't have to sit in a classroom and hear the N word.

Carter

What did you say?

Theresa

I told him what the book is and then I told him words only have power when you give them power.

Carter

Then what happened?

Theresa

He said he wasn't going to read any more of the book because it was racist.

Carter

So what did you do?

Theresa

Well, nothing at first. But then he started to imitate the way Tom speaks in the book and that was a big disruption. He kept talking to me like Tom and I had to send him out.

Carter

To the office?

Theresa

Yeah.

Carter

Why did you do that?

Theresa

Cause he was taking away our instructional time.

Carter

Which was to learn what?

Theresa

We barely have time to read the novel and cover the unit. I don't have time to deal with his nonsense. He crossed a line.

Carter

Was he out for the rest of the class?

Theresa

No. He came back eventually. But he kinda just sat there. Moping. (*Long beat*) Would you talk to him?

Carter

About?

Theresa

His behavior.

Carter

Behavior that was...?

Theresa

Out of control.

Carter

Why do you want me to talk to him?

Theresa

Because, I thought you might be able to... I don't know, reason with him?

Carter

Why's that?

Theresa

Because...

Carter

Because,,,?

Theresa

Just because...

Carter

Just because I'm black?

Theresa

No, I mean...

Carter

It's alright, tell me what you were thinking.

Theresa

I thought you might have some influence over him.

Carter

Why? He's not my student.

Theresa

Well he was, wasn't he?

Carter

Nope. I just know him.

Theresa

Because I don't think he respects me. I don't think I can get through to him.

Carter

But he respects me?

Theresa

More than me!

Carter

More than I.

Theresa

What?

Carter

Sorry, English teacher grammar reflex. You want me to talk to DeMarkus and tell him what? He's not allowed to have feelings about hearing the N word in an assigned book?

Theresa

No, it's just that...

Carter

Oh, he can have feelings, he just can't express them?

Theresa

No, that's not what I'm saying at all.

Carter

What then?

Theresa

Tell him.. tell him... that the book has good stuff to teach.

Carter

Like what? That racism exists in America and it sucks? I think he's learned that one.

Theresa

No, Carter! Jeeez. Tell him. I'm trying. That I am trying to reach out and do good stuff. That I thought like, if we read a novel for context, it might bring material to life more. Tell him I'm just trying to be a good teacher.

Carter

You tell him.

Theresa

I can't.

Carter

Can we have real talk here?

Theresa

Sure.

Carter

I b>I mean *real talk*?

Theresa

Yeah.

Carter

Okay, so first. . . just admit that you want me to talk with DeMarkus because I'm black.

Theresa

Okay. . . Yes.

Carter

You want me to use my secret black teacher code and get through to him. You want me to tell him not to get his feelings hurt when a white teacher pulls out a book with a white protagonist to introduce the civil rights movement? You want me to tell him to be cool with that?

Theresa

(The weight of what Carter is saying sinks in) Oh my God. Carter. When you say that out loud. . .

Carter

Right?

Theresa

Oh, I'm s--. . . I'm. . . sorry

Carter

It's not about being sorry.

Theresa

No, I know, but. . .

Carter

It's about paying attention. To yourself. You know? Self-awareness.

Theresa

I know. God it's a lot. . . It's so much.

Carter

What is?

Theresa

All of it. Teaching. Everything. **It's just a lot. The planning. The grading. The meetings. They never told me about all of the meetings.** We have meetings to plan meetings for crying out loud. The making the copies. **And then, you have to think about making sure kids are on grade-level. Who has accommodations? Did you make provisions for the accommodations? RTIs! Are you compliant? Will you get sued?**

I mean. . . you have to think about who had dinner, who had breakfast. Who is being neglected or abused? Who is being passed around from house to house. Who is trying to get to college. Who might shoot up the school. . . I mean. . . It's heavy.

In each class, you're trying to teach 25 tiny universes. They all have their own gravitational pulls and black holes. And you're trying to get them all in line. **And then you can't talk**

about *this* to *that* kid because their parents will get mad. You can't talk about *that* to *this* kid because *their* parents will get mad. And there's poverty and race. . . it's just a lot.

Carter

Are you done?

Theresa

What?

Carter

Are you done?

Theresa

Yeah. What? I can't talk to you about how hard teaching is?

Carter

Of course. Look, we all know it's hard. You knew that before you became a teacher. That's why only a slice of the population teaches. And it's why half of *them* are leaving.

Theresa

It's so much harder living it than just thinking about it.

Carter

No one expects you to be perfect.

Theresa

But I want to be.

Carter

You're going to have to get over that one cause perfectionism and public education are never spoken in the same breath. This is not about you being perfect. It's about *their* learning and *your* learning.

Theresa

Look Carter, I'm doing the best I can.

Carter

And that's why you broke out *To Kill a Mockingbird*? We need more than that. (*Theresa starts to get visibly upset*). This is deep and it's real. Let me break this **down**. **There was a situation here last year when a white, female student came into my classroom, and she didn't have her ID on. And because she didn't have her ID on, I was supposed to send her to the main office to get a temporary. So I did and she comes back without one. And then I got to call from the receptionist being like, "Oh, she's fine, just let her go".**

Two weeks later I have a black, female student who came to school without her ID and I didn't even get to approach her about it. As soon as she tries to even walk down the hall to come to my class, she's stopped by one of the administrators and he suspends her for a day because she didn't have her ID. I'm like, "You didn't tell her to go get a temporary or anything of that sort?" And I just felt there was a racial divide in a way. And the more certain things like that happen, the more evident it becomes to me. And I realized that there's nothing really I can do to try to change that.

Theresa

What does that have to do with DeMarkus?

Carter

Because it's stuff like that that makes him talk like Tom in your class. He sees this stuff all of the time. He feels this all the time. When you ask him to read a book to prepare him for a unit on the civil rights and he can't see one powerful person of color in it. . . and don't you tell me about the maid. . . I get why he lost it.

Theresa

Look, like, I have an easier time with girls, you have an easier time with kids of color. I just wanted some support.

Carter

What do you call this? Why do you think I am still here talking to you about this? I'm here because I support you. I see who you are and that you've got a teacher's heart. **But if you have a heart to teach, then you should teach everyone in school. We had a teacher who used to say, "The parents send their best. They send all the kids they have to school.**

They're not keeping the better kids at home and teaching them themselves. They're sending all that they have so that you can teach them". I love that because it really is true. And yes, some are so much harder to teach. But if you're going to teach something, then teach them all.

Theresa

I try. *(beat)* I hate this. I hate how hard this is for me and how easy it seems for you.

Carter

What is?

Theresa

Teaching all kids. That's easier for you.

Carter

Why?

Theresa

Because the white students respect you and so do the students of color. You just walk into a room and you're able to see all of your kids and meet them where they're at. I have to persevere over everything I say and everything I plan to do in class.

Carter

Are you serious? It's easier for me? Let me set the record straight. **I always have to be on my game. I have to be better than most to get the recognition sometimes of just being good. Because I'm African American and because of the perception of people of color in this country, I have got to be sharp. I have got to have my stuff together, because I have to squelch the negative connotation of people of my race that we are not hardworking.** When you teach, do you have to prove that all women everywhere are even moderately competent? That's how I have to teach, but just for people of color. **These sorts of stereotypes that have persisted for way too long make me feel like I have to do better. And I can't just be an okay teacher; I have to be a role model. It's like for me, me being a positive representation of a black male helps a lot of black kids here. They say, "Woah, I don't have to "be a rapper or a basketball player to make a lot of money, or to be successful, to live a decent life". Okay! "I can be a doctor, I can be an author, or I can pursue my heart and possibly make it. I can do these things". So I'm literally a walking source of positive representation and inspiration for a lot of them. Yeah, it's easier for me. *(Long Silence)***

I've got a class coming in soon. I've gotta go. Sorry to unload on you like that. I guess you just touched a nerve.

Theresa

It's okay.

Carter

Angry black man out *(Gives a 'peace out' sign, turns and leaves. Beat. Enters again)* On second thought, I'm not sorry.

Theresa

You have nothing to be sorry about.

Carter

I know.

Theresa

I'm gonna figure this out.

Carter

I know that too. You've got a heart to teach.

Theresa

Thanks.

Carter

Want some unsolicited advice? Apologize to DeMarkus.

Theresa

Apologize?

Carter

Yeah.

Theresa

I'm not sure I can.

Carter

(Quietly laughs to himself) Your call. *(Turns to leave)* Don't forget to pack yourself an extra lunch for parent teacher conferences. *(Carter exits. Theresa crumples in her chair).*

End of Scene

In this scene, Theresa is so confident in her ability to work with students of color, it does not even occur to her that DeMarkus could have a point. She represents the teachers in the surveys who believe that schools, in general, are not meeting the needs of students of color and that her colleagues need some help in that regard. She, most likely, would feel like she is one of the 'good ones', showing up for all students. This overlay of the quantitative data within the scene, while not explicit, heightens its tension and drives Theresa's actions. Positioning her as a teacher who wants to do the right thing and then behaves so blindly underlines the very point of the analysis. Her need to have the lesson go well and to be appreciated for her efforts superseded a student's need to not be confronted by traumatic language and imagery in a book. Theresa did not immediately see race as a factor after DeMarkus went "absolutely ballistic and call[ed] me a racist in class". She just saw a child acting out (and most likely blaming race) and did not understand the larger structural conflict that was playing out between them [31]. By belittling the impact of race, Theresa has the option to punish the student and send the child to the school authorities because of what DeMarkus *did* to the teacher. The child caused a scene. The teacher tried to teach. The child made a choice. So goes the narrative of some teachers. The white teacher has the option to not include race as part of the conflict, thus blaming an individual child for responding to a structurally racist paradigm [31]. The denial of race (being colorblind) removes awareness of the impact that structural racism can have on interpersonal conflicts. The concepts that are in the scenes, color blindness, a teacher's lack of reflectiveness, a belief in one's ability to effectively reach all children—these were introduced through the quantitative data and lived in the scene.

Data and Dramaturgy

In the theatre, dramaturgy is a function often situated between the director and the script. Conventionally, the dramaturg coordinates the understanding of the play text and ensures that the meaning and context surrounding the text is consistent across design elements, directing and acting choices. Stalpaert [38] discusses binaries that exist within dramaturgy (text versus embodiment, thinking versus feeling, the body versus the mind) and wonders how contemporary practice can unify those binaries. Currently, a dramaturg may wonder as much about the translation of text and context to the audience as the translation of feelings. The dramaturg is no longer a midwife of text to an embodied interpretation but is a central participant, bringing clarity and focus to a production that is as much intellectual and physical as emotional.

In his 2013 *Coding Manual*, Saldaña [39] describes dramaturgical coding as an approach to coding that treats interview transcripts as a dramatic script. Interview data become monologues, scenes, dialogues that have tension, rising action, conflict, and denouement.

Dramaturgical coding attunes the researcher to the qualities, perspectives, and drives of the participant. It also provides a deep understanding of how humans in social interaction interpret and manage conflict (p. 123).

In other words, researchers see participants as characters in their own stories who take action to achieve a goal. Transcripts are not simply a collection of ideas to assemble into neat categories of significance but are a deeper assemblage of embodied and phenomenological meanings within a social context. This interpretive lens activates the data as well as the participants emotions and intentions such that the contradictions, tensions, or agreements among the various interviews coalesce into constellations of meaning. A dramaturgical

reading of these constellations of meaning transforms text into dialogue and wants into conflict. The scene's emotional subtext (the unspoken desires of the characters) is a vital component of the data. Drama-based research provides a method of representation where the emotional, aspirational, and conflicted desires of the participants exist alongside of the more conventionally analyzed data.

That was the goal in the above scene. The tensions of a white teacher trying to do well by her students and her inability to see her shortcomings, collided with a black teacher's goals. He had different burdens connected to being a teacher. His vigilance about his students' needs and hers concerning what she needs from her students live beside each other, unarticulated but expressed onstage. He needed his students to thrive and to find their futures, while she needed her students to be appreciative of her efforts and of her desire to be a good teacher. These conflicting desires exist in stark contrast. Dramaturgically, those tensions lived within the interview and survey data. Reading the data with a dramaturgical lens unearths possibilities for data representation onstage that supports the research and dissolves the dramaturgical dualism of the intellectual and emotional into a more wholistic depiction. The coded data are not the only data re-presented—so are the nuanced meanings gathered from the quantitative data that show a disconnect between a white teacher's intentions and actions. The blindness of the white teacher when it comes to issues of race (can you speak to DeMarkus for me?; using white-hero narratives; inappropriately disciplining a student who has sincere and hurt reactions to the teacher-chosen curriculum) is supported by many examples from the data. The quantitative data showed what that disconnect of understanding from white teachers does to students and peers of color.

There are consequences to 53% of white teachers either strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement, *I don't see race, I see children*, where 27% of teachers of color feel the same way. There are consequences to feeling like, as a white teacher, you do not need professional development to improve your classroom practice. Those opinions might not live explicitly stated within a scene, but the outcomes of those opinions can be experienced within this scene. That background information heightens the verbatim text used within the scene to provide greater context to the data. Both the emotional and intellectual live within the scene, which comes from the breadth of data used within the research. Drama-based research contains all of that in a way that allows for the data to be known and felt.

7. Concluding Thoughts

This scene attempts to complicate the lived realities of these two teachers. Carter carries the historicism of being a black teacher with him in every interaction he has at school. Theresa carries the weight of expectation (internalized and externalized) as well as her misguided notions of what culturally relevant pedagogies look like. This scene is not meant to be a fixed interpretation of these people but to leave possibility for further exploration of the characters and the circumstances surrounding the conflict. Lea, Belliveau, Wagner, and Beck [40] cite Goldstein [41]: "the theatrical performance of ethnographic playwriting and the reciprocity of meaning making that occurs between the performance of a play and its audience discourages the fixed, unchanging ethnographic representations of research subjects" (para 13). The quantitative data reflected tensions in self-perception and the perceptions of others as well as the sense that students of color are not adequately seen and taught in schools. The scene roils in unrest. But it is an unrest that comes from a labor of love and effort—even when it is at times misguided. The data demand that we hold one teacher's intention to be a positive adult in the lives of all of her students, along with data that say schools just do not want to see poor kids or kids of color. One respondent who self-identified as "biracial" maintained, "Our urban students are being shoved to the back and their needs ignored. Our government is treating our students of color living mostly in poverty as if they would be happy to make them just disappear". Both tensions are true. There are forces that want to make certain students disappear from schools. Also, there are teachers who show up every day to help those students become visible and engaged.

The stage is the place to have those tensions live and breathe next to each other—in the uncomfortable and necessary space that is our collective audience imagination.

Renowned theatre scholar and ethnographer Kathleen Gallagher [17] describes the representation of research-based theatre this way.

“This attempt to use theatre—rather than present these research stories in a more traditional qualitative narrative or reportage form—is to draw from theatre’s potency, its economy of expression, and its embodied character in order to serve the creativity, the performativity, and the reflective engagement that is at the center of critical ethnographic research (p. 106).”

All research representation is a form of storytelling (what happens to this dynamic under these conditions and with these variables?). Research-based theatre embraces conventional drama structures to situate and complicate research findings. It invites the social into social science research. Research-based theatre amplifies the silenced and centers the marginalized. It creates a space where uncomfortable and complicated ideas exist alongside each other. It is a space that embraces the messy ungainliness of all research—whether it is positivistic, constructivist, post-qualitative, or post-humanist. They all have a place within a research script.

Inclusion of quantitative data complicates the multi-vocal nature of the interviews—meaning that there is great complexity within the qualitative data because, well, people are complicated. Although participants speak from the same position (as teachers, for example), it is understood that opinions will be largely divergent. Even in the entangled-nature and messiness of qualitative data, quantitative data can provide new lenses to view and understand themes found from the participants’ words. Complimenting the interviews with quantitative frameworks layers our understanding of the themes and trends within the data. It helps researchers focus on the emergent aspects of the data and view them from multiple points of view. It is complicated. It is challenging. But without it, I might not have understood the depth of the issues of race and white silencing that were present in the data corpus. Whenever possible, my research will continue to call upon quantitative methodologies to support and challenge the qualitative nature of my research.

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