

5 QUESTIONS

WITH
LINDA
HOEKMAN

High school science teacher Linda Hoekman has over 20 years of experience developing curriculum to help all her students succeed. But when she returned to her classroom this fall, Linda was told she had to “address her unconscious bias” and change her curriculum because her lessons were teaching “white content.”



Describe the “culturally responsive training” you and your colleagues received at the beginning of the school year.

Our principal hired two African-American men from the Minneapolis Public Schools to present on “addressing unconscious bias.” The training focused on white privilege and indirectly associated us with the words “white supremacist.”

As they explained white privilege, they spoke to us “as our young black men speak,” which included frequent cursing. The cursing was supposed to help us better understand our students because “young black men don’t trust white teachers.” We were told our white privilege makes it harder for our nonwhite students to learn from us and that the achievement gap is because of what we as educators are doing in the classroom.

So, what did the presenters say you should be doing in the classroom?

It was suggested we accommodate behavior and language and change our curriculum because we are too focused on teaching “white curriculum.” The presenters even told students, whom they met with separately one morning, to “pushback at your teachers” and tell them “the curriculum is not for you.”

I teach physics. Physics is for everyone and doesn’t have a racial component. To restrict or diminish the curriculum a teacher uses cheats our students out of necessary education.

What was the staff environment like during this training?

This presentation completely divided the

staff. A couple of us pushed back, stating we care about our students and are offended to be told otherwise. Some of my peers then shouted at me and accused me of being “closed-minded.”

After the meeting, several colleagues came up and thanked me for saying what I did because they were afraid to speak up.

Did school leadership get involved?

I, along with a coworker, went to our principal with concerns over the training. We shared that the language used was inappropriate, and we also voiced concern over the false insinuation that we are all subconsciously racist.

The principal disagreed.

A group of teachers even went to their local union rep (who was present during the meeting) asking for help because they felt bullied throughout the training. Unfortunately, the union rep said there wasn’t anything the union could do about it. A group of 20 teachers or so even took a sick day for the next meeting so they wouldn’t have to attend but were later told there would be a replacement meeting.

What’s your hope moving forward?

I am not sure if we will have more of these meetings (we had one last year by these same presenters and two so far this year), but I hope to continue educating my students in ways that help them succeed. For me, it’s all about my kids. I’m supposed to be an educator, I’m supposed to be there to help them, but I’m being asked to do something that’s going to hurt them. And I just can’t. ★