RAISING RACE QUESTIONS: WHITENESS, EDUCATION AND INQUIRY

IN SEVEN TEACHER CASE STUDIES

Ali Michael

A DISSERTATION

in

Education

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2012

Supervisor of Dissertation:

_____

Howard Stevenson, Associate Professor of Education

Graduate Group Chair:

_____

Stanton Wortham, Professor of Education

Dissertation Committee:

Howard Stevenson, Associate Professor of Education

Katherine Schultz, Professor of Education

Shaun Harper, Associate Professor of Education

RAISING RACE QUESTIONS: WHITENESS, EDUCATION AND INQUIRY IN

SEVEN TEACHER CASE STUDIES

COPYRIGHT

To my partner, Michael, with whom I share the joy and work of building a feminist family, an anti-racist community and an anti-oppressive lifestyle.

To my parents, Bonnie and Terry Michael, who have patiently taught me how to talk about race with White people.

To the seven White case study teachers in this study, who opened their lives, their classrooms and themselves to contribute to the lessons learned here.

And the foundation of allyship and friendship that we formed during that time has helped me feel supported and challenged to maintain my ideals in every aspect of my life.

I think of Chonika Coleman-King, with whom I worked very closely during the year I collected data. Many of the ideas that take root in this dissertation were planted by Chonika in the parking lot after meetings, as we continued to discuss racial dynamics well after our colleagues had moved on to other things.

I think of Dr. Howard Stevenson, who made it possible to think and talk about race in graduate school in ways that matter and lead to real change. Thank you for inviting me onto your research team, where I learned so many of the tools that I used to do this research and write this dissertation. I think, too, of all of the members of that team: Dr. Duane Thomas, Dr. Valerie Adams, Dr. Keisha Bentley, Dr. Chonika Coleman-King, Gwen Miller, Celine Thompson and Zehua Li. Thank you for including me, for trusting me and teaching me.

I think of Dr. Kathy Schultz, who never blinked an eye when I said I wanted to focus my doctoral work on Whiteness. Thank you for your thoughtful, thorough, critical feedback and your constant support. Your ideas contributed immeasurably to this dissertation and to all that came before it.

I think of Dr. Shaun Harper, who introduced me to Critical Race Theory and who constantly innovates new possibilities for anti-racism in higher education. Thank you for taking the time to help me design a dissertation that would have long-term applicability.

I think of Dr. Lesley Bartlett, who taught me how to be a good person, a feminist, a mother and a friend while being a researcher, an academic and a teacher.

ABSTRACT

RAISING RACE QUESTIONS: WHITENESS, EDUCATION AND INQUIRY

IN SEVEN TEACHER CASE STUDIES

Ali Michael

Howard Stevenson

Race matters in schools. In addition to the highly publicized racialized achievement gap, race has historically determined who can access education and what kind of education people receive. Additionally, teachers and students bring racial identities to school that impact how they relate to one another, to the school community and to the curriculum. Finally, schools are places where race gets constructed. This study uses qualitative and action research methods to do research *with* teachers—rather than *on* teachers—as they learn about how and why race matters in education—and what that means for their classrooms. Because 85% of the K-12 teaching force in the United States is White and middle-class (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010), this research focuses on seven White and middle-class teachers. Through in-depth case studies of each teacher, I explore the conflicts, questions and revelations that arise as they struggle to learn about race, and apply their learning in their classrooms. My findings show, first, that teachers can have a multicultural curriculum and still not have an anti-racist classroom. Race affects every aspect of what happens in classroom and thus can only be addressed through a comprehensive approach that looks beyond curriculum. Second, the questions we ask shape the answers we find. If we are not doing the necessary background work to be able to ask radical questions, we are not going to get radical answers. Furthermore,

teachers can only ask the questions they are ready to ask, all of which is shaped by their racial identity developmental stage and their knowledge base. The implication of this for inquiry work is that race-specific inquiries require outside input. Finally, teacher racial identity matters. Having and maintaining an autonomous racial identity is the most powerful tool that teachers can employ, and yet most teachers do not even realize that they have a racial identity, or that it can be developed. White teachers are part of the problem of racial inequity in schools today and therefore can—in fact, must—be part of the solution.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section I. Teachers can have a multicultural curriculum and still not have an anti-racist classroom

Section II. The questions we ask shape the answers we find

Section III. Teacher racial identity matters

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Educational statistics tell a particular story about racial inequality. Nationally

there is evidence of structural racism in the racialized achievement gap, in which White

students graduate from high school at a rate of 78%, while 72% of Asian students

graduate, 55% of African Americans graduate and 53% of Latino students graduate

(Greene and Winters, 2006). In math the male-female achievement gap ranges from 2-3

points while the Black-White achievement gap is 26-30 points and the Hispanic-White

achievement gap fluctuates between 21 and 23 points (NCES, 2009).   In reading the

male-female achievement gap is between 7 and 12 points while the Black-White

achievement gap is between 25 and 27 points and the Hispanic-White achievement gap

ranges from 24-27 points (NCES, 2009). The drop out rate for Black students is twice

that of White students and the drop out rate for Hispanic students is three times that of

White students (NCES, 2009). Educational disparities, which cause and are caused by

social, economic and political disparities, have always followed the contours of race in

the United States.

Colorblindness, the act of pretending that race does not exist or matter, is a

common American approach to racial politics and it can negatively influence student

outcomes when practiced by teachers and schools. Some teachers are making efforts to

overcome the dominant American racial ideology of colorblindness and acknowledge the

effect that race has on individual student identity, as well as students' life experiences,

with the goal of being more effective teachers. The purpose of this study was to follow

White teachers as they worked at "seeing race" in critical inquiry groups. I observed

their attempts to apply their theoretical learning on race to practical classroom work and

interaction. I tracked their accumulating knowledge set about race, what they were

confused about, what questions they asked when applying race learning to classroom

practice, what was hard about "seeing" and talking about race, and how their questions

changed as they developed a racial lens to apply to classroom practice.

Colorblindness hurts students because race is such a powerful part of the lives of

all students, in ways that are most visible in the lives of students of color. Two critical

ways in which race affects students' lives are through structural racism and the impact of

race on student identity. A lack of consciousness of structural racism and the privileging

of Whiteness weakens schools' and teachers' capacities to understand the needs of

students of color (Delpit, 2006), while allowing White students to grow up with a

distorted sense of reality and an inability to function optimally in a multiracial

environment (Tatum, 2007 and Kugler, 2002).

Acknowledging race also matters because children have complex lives outside of

school in which their race is one of the primary lenses through which they see

themselves, their families, the world and countless other aspects of their identities

(Tatum, 1999). When students come to school they bring that racialization into the

classroom with them. When teachers say they are colorblind they 1) pretend not to see

color, which is a practical impossibility and 2) deny a significant part of children's

identity and life experience (Bonilla Silva, 2006). Pretending that children are all the

same on the inside denies the fact that who we are on the inside is shaped by how we are

treated on the outside. Even if children only encounter discrimination outside of the

school building, they bring the impact of those encounters with them to school in the form of a racial identity. While racial identity development implies that students can either ignore race or see it as a meaningful lens to interpret their world as they develop into adults, teachers are expected to understand that both stances are stages in the process of racial identity development. Teachers need to understand that aspect of their students' lives in order to best support them. As teachers work at "not seeing race," students suffer the consequences of growing up in a racialized society without the tools and support they need to be successful.

Statement of problem and significance

This study emerges from my own questions about how using racial theory in practice can lead to a healthier multiracial society. It is rooted in my sympathies towards other White people who struggle, as I have, with the hurt of realizing that years of ignorance about race has caused harm to others. And it is influenced by my belief that most White people are capable of working towards a society in which race will not determine a person's life chances. As Pollock (2004) writes in *Colormute,* the challenge of knowing how to recognize and talk about race is not one that solely affects teachers in one particular study: "I want to make sure that readers see these dilemmas not as the fumblings and bumblings of strangers, but as dilemmas that belong to us all" (p. 17).

The purpose of this study is to better understand White teachers and their efforts to recognize race in the classroom in order to inform the ways in which we support teachers to meaningfully account for race in their practice. Such research is critically important for three reasons. First, racism is a permanent and pervasive part of education in the United States (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Dixson and Rousseau, 2005).

3

Ignorance does not diminish this fact; it perpetuates it. Second, the precedent of not talking about race in the U.S. makes it hard for teachers to engage the racism in education in any explicit manner. Third, in order to be to be effective, teachers need to understand the ways that race impacts their students' lives as well as their own teaching.

How "seeing race" can lead to student success

Though much of the racism in schools is a result of structural features of education that teachers cannot control, individual teachers are the agents through which education is conveyed to students. They can, as Ladson-Billings has demonstrated in her research on teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy (1995), teach in ways that minimize the impact of racism on students by altering the curricula, recognizing and practicing different communication styles, acknowledging and preparing students to counteract the racism that affects their lives and holding high expectations for the behavior and performance of all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Examples abound of educators who have been successful with students of color due to some form of culturally relevant practice.

In her study of excellent teachers of African American students, Gloria Ladson Billings developed a framework for describing effective education for African American students. After extensive observations of and interviews with African American and White teachers who were selected by the community and the principal as "exemplary," Ladson-Billings (1995) determined that their effectiveness was due to what she calls "culturally relevant pedagogy" (p. 469). The common feature of such pedagogy is a focus on "helping their students to be academically successful, culturally competent and socio-politically critical" (p. 477-478). "Culturally relevant" teachers do not share a

static culture with their students; they do not necessarily share language or music preferences, tradition or dress. Being "culturally relevant" is not about those things that are stereotypically seen as aspects of "culture." It is about how teachers think of themselves and others, how they structure social relations and how they conceive of knowledge. The concept of "culturally relevant pedagogy" is intended to steer teachers away from traditional understandings of culture toward an inquiry stance. It is "designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling and society" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 483). Ladson-Billings emphasizes that culturally relevant teachers do not necessarily share common strategies or techniques developed to target a particular conception of "culture," but rather a common approach to student-teacher relationships, classroom relationships and how they conceptualize knowledge (1995a). It is not a prescription or a list of strategies, it is a worldview.

Many theorists have built on the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy. Bondy, Ross, Galligane and Hambacher (2007) have shown how culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) was used in predominantly African American classrooms to foster community and resilience among the students. Tamara Beaubeoeuf Lafontant (1999) demonstrates the importance of "political clarity" (p. 702) to culturally relevant pedagogy. She highlights examples of African American teachers in the South during segregation who were effective with students not because of similar racial backgrounds, but because of "politically relevant teaching" (p. 702). Such teaching acknowledges the racism that exists as a barrier to learning for students of color and operates subversively to work against it (1999).

5

> If we consider that the successful education of poor students and students of color hinges on *political* congruence between teachers and students, rather than on cultural similarity, we become interested in helping teachers identify and reflect on their political convictions and their pedagogy as manifestations of their stance toward the positive struggle for democracy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, p. 719).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is important to this work because it is a theory of effective pedagogy for all students, which was developed in coordination with both teachers of color and White teachers. It is a way of teaching that is accessible to White teachers, with the requisite preparation. It demonstrates that one does not have to share a race with one's students in order to be effective. However, effectiveness does require a political and social cognizance of race.

Anti-racism in teacher education

Currently most of the research on anti-racism in teacher education is conducted with pre-service teachers and takes place in the midst of fast certification programs, during which new teachers learn multiple new theories, which they in turn begin to apply in their mentors' classrooms. By contrast, this study works with teachers who are already in the classroom. It will contribute to our knowledge of how theories of race are applied in classroom practice by experienced teachers with the time to conduct a focused inquiry on race and the autonomy to make changes in the classroom. This work will also contribute to Whiteness theory. Some scholars say that White people refuse to fully work against racism in order to preserve their "possessive investment in Whiteness" (Lipsitz, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This research explores that resistance in greater depth and attempts to locate other possible explanations for it, such as insufficient understanding, insufficient skills, questions about application and fear.

My research was designed to track teacher learning in inquiry groups on race. The work of self reflection that teachers did in groups and the ways in which they applied their thinking and work to classroom practice is critical to identifying and changing some of the subtle aspects of race and racism that disadvantage students of color and leave all students underprepared to be successful in a multicultural and multiracial world (Kugler, 2002). Teacher inquiry is considered particularly effective as a way for teachers to work towards social justice in their classrooms (Zeichner, 2009). Because issues like race are particularly charged, teacher inquiry on race can be effective because it can mitigate defensiveness or disputes, which, according to White racial identity theory, are common reactions to learning about race for the first time (Helms, 2008; Tatum, 1997). The emergent themes will support the development of resources for teachers in other schools.

Researcher positionality

My personal commitment, in doing this work, is to approach teachers as learners. In my work with White people, I am aware of how the process of learning about race can often be derailed by fears of being racist. These fears prevent White teachers from deeply reflecting upon the messages they have received about race during their lives, and the ways that those messages impact their teaching. My commitment to teachers as learners (both the case study teachers in this dissertation and the teachers who read this study) means that I want to step away from analyses that identify the ways in which teachers are racist. According to the tenets of critical race theory, and my own personal experiences as a White teacher, I already know to expect that teachers will have some racist impact on their classrooms. That teachers want to cover up their racism is to be

7

expected too; as professionals, as members of a society that shuns racism and as individuals, nobody wants to think that they are racist.

Focusing on racism also tends to evoke shame, which leads to a sense of victimization. Shame then often leads people to avoid responsibility for the impact of their actions because they are too focused on their own emotional turmoil. In the case of these teachers, I knew from the outset of the study that they would do and say racist things and, from the literature on anti-racism education, I could guess what those things would be (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Hyland, 2005). I did not design this study to judge whether teachers were racist and how, but to document the process they underwent in their goals of building anti-racist classrooms. This meant not evaluating their intention. Overwhelmingly they all had good intent, which is why they were in the group and this study to begin with. Instead, the focus of the study was centered on anti-racist practice. This required that teachers examine their teaching, their school contexts, the curriculum that they may have created or inherited and the school structures and traditions within which they taught. It required that we ask not whether teachers had good anti-racist intentions, but good anti-racist results.

Anthropologist of education Mica Pollock has shown that education law, according to the Office of Civil Rights, essentially demands that racist intentions be proved in order to discern whether racism has occurred. This focus on racist intention, rather than racist results or impact, in turn pits families and schools against one another rather than supporting both groups to collaborate. Pollock highlights how this differs from disability law, which simply requires the demonstration of the denial of services:

8

In complaints demanding disability services, questions of educators' intentions were often basically irrelevant: complaints alleged some denial of required services to a disabled student, matter-of-factly deemed this harm to be 'because of' disability, and set forth to get students those services. In contrast, the need to determine whether harm occurred 'on the ground' of race always involved dead-end debate over proving harm's racial causation rather than treating its harmful effects (Pollock, 2008, p. 50).

This blame game pervades most schools and districts, whereby racial harm cannot be recognized or reconciled without proving that somebody at the school had an intent to harm, as though harm is never an incidental or unintentional occurrence. In the effort to prove harm, somebody must be blamed. This then puts teachers and the school on the defensive and precludes cooperation between the school and the students and families.

This dissertation examines the way that teachers worked to make their classrooms more racially equitable, starting from the premise that good intent in a society that has been built on a racially unjust past is not enough to achieve racial justice. The teachers started from this premise in their classrooms and I worked from this premise in my analysis as well.

Dissertation organization

This dissertation is organized into three sections. Data chapters are distributed throughout the sections in the form of case studies and cross case analyses. The literature review has been distributed throughout the relevant cross case analysis chapters. In Section I, "Teachers can have a multicultural curriculum and still not have an anti-racist classroom," I explore the multifaceted ways that race affects schooling, such that it manifests even in the classrooms of teachers who are highly attuned to some of its effects. In addition to two case studies, this section includes a cross case analysis chapter

that explores the difference between simply talking about race with students and engaging in intentional racial socialization. In Section II, "The questions we ask shape the answers we find," I begin with a cross case analysis of the types of questions that teachers asked throughout this study. I present case studies of three teachers, cases that exemplify the importance of asking the questions we want to answer, rather than the questions we feel we can answer. Section II closes with a cross case analysis of the places where teachers got stuck as they tried to make changes in their classrooms, and the things that helped them move forward. In Section III, "Teacher racial identity matters," I present a cross case analysis chapter on the role that racial identity played for all of the teachers in this study, followed by the case studies of two teachers in which the critical importance of their racial identities is immediately apparent.

The seven case study chapters distributed throughout the dissertation demonstrate the ways that teachers found themselves requiring racial proficiency to be the teachers they wanted to be. Each case study chapter focuses on one teacher's classroom and a central dilemma of their teaching. What follows is a brief summary of each teacher's main case study dilemma:

> Laurie – STRIVING FOR AN ANTI-RACIST CLASSROOM - *Laurie taught kindergarten at a racially diverse, historically White Quaker independent school in which most of the families were middle-upper class. Though the school was historically White, recent efforts at diversifying had led to the lower school being extremely diverse. Laurie's classroom had a majority of children of color.* Laurie's case study looks at the question of the persistence of racism, even within a classroom that has multiculturalism on the agenda.

> Todd – HOLDING AND COMMUNICATION HIGH EXPECTATIONS - *Todd taught 7th grade science in an under-resourced k-8 school, in a predominantly low income Black neighborhood in an urban center.* Todd's case study focuses on the complex challenge of holding high expectations for all students.

Helene - WHEN HOME CULTURE AND SCHOOL CULTURE ARE INCONGRUENT *Helene taught 2ⁿᵈ grade at a racially diverse, historically White Quaker independent school in which most of the families were middle-upper class. Though the school was historically White, recent efforts at diversifying had led to the lower school, including Helene's classroom, being almost half children of color.* Helene's case study focuses on questions about home culture and school culture, specifically how to accommodate Black children who do not seem to fit in with the culture of the classroom.

Scott – RAISING GIFTED EDUCATION QUESTIONS - *Scott taught elementary gifted education within a predominantly White, middle to upper-middle class public suburban k-5 elementary school. Each gifted class he taught was almost all White, with the exception of one Asian American or biracial (Asian and White) student in each class.* Scott's case study focuses on questions about gifted education and the dynamic dance of working for racial justice from the position of a gifted education teacher.

Sam - GATEKEEPING AT THE HONORS AND AP LEVEL - *Sam taught high school English and History at a historically White and predominantly White Quaker independent school with a predominantly middle and upper middle class student body.* His case study focuses on race questions related to the disproportionate underrepresentation of Black students in honors and AP classes.

Cara – FIGHTING WHITENESS WITH WHITENESS - *Cara taught 5ᵗʰ grade at a predominantly Black Charter school in an urban center, which drew students from working and middle class neighborhoods all over the city.* Cara's case study focuses on the ways that learning about race can make White teachers feel overwhelmed by their own Whiteness, rather than empowered.

Ann - RACIAL MICROPROFICIENCIES and MICROPROGRESS: HOMEWORK CLUB - *Ann taught high school special education at a predominantly White suburban public high school, in a community in which there was a small but vocal Black community that had lived in the area for many generations.* Ann's case study illustrates a White teacher who had many racial microproficiencies that helped her to be an effective teacher across race.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW[1]

Schools today

As of 2009, White students made up only 54% of the public school population, while Black students were 15.3%, Hispanic students 22.3% and Asian students 3.7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). 21% of the students in public schools speak a language other than English at home (NCES, 2009). White, English speaking students make up less and less of the public school population while populations of students of color are increasing in public school systems in both urban and suburban areas.

The teaching population, however, remains predominantly White and middle class. White teachers comprise over 85% of the k-12 teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). About 53% of teachers in 2008 had their bachelor's degree, and 40% had a master's degree, making an average of $49,000, with the majority of teachers making between $30,000 and $60,000 (NCES, 2010). "Middle-class" seems to be an appropriate categorization of most teachers.

This dissertation focuses on White teachers in particular because White people comprise such a great majority of the k-12 teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). And yet while the teaching force is predominantly comprised of White people, most teachers are no better able to understand the complex racial dynamics in education than any other White people in American society. Conversations about race in

---

[1] As stated in the introduction, the literature review has been distributed throughout the cross case analysis chapters. What remains in this chapter entitled "Literature Review" is the literature that lays the foundation for the methodological choices made in this study.

schools can be particularly difficult because the racial issues are not only systemic and historic, but localized, current and personal as well. Teachers are in the unique position of working one on one with individual children and their families, while acting as representatives and gatekeepers of the system.

Studies on teacher education around race

Researchers have taken many different approaches to the task of educating White teachers about issues of race. Sleeter (1995) has used a Freirian approach in which she rooted teachers' learning about racial oppression in their experiences of oppression as women and members of the working class. She used experiential games and personal narrative to make abstract concepts more tangible and memorable. Tatum's work, which was with White undergraduates, emphasized lessons about anti-racist White allies and the possibility of becoming White allies (1994). Other researchers have used discussion groups about privilege (Solomon et al., 2005), anti-racism seminars (Hyland, 2005), pre-service multiracial pedagogy/racism awareness classes (Marx, 2006) and multi-racial professional development classes for teachers (Kailin, 2002). In the early 1990s, Sleeter began recommending that teacher education change the barriers to teaching that keep it a predominantly White profession (Sleeter, 1993). While such a recommendation still resonates, the teaching force in the U.S. remains predominantly White. Consequently, the question of how to educate White teachers about race remains a central issue.

Since Sleeter's research began in the late 1980s, researchers and anti-racism instructors have been encountering many of the same areas of resistance, or what might more accurately be labeled obstacles, to learning about race. Adherence to a philosophy

of colorblindness has shown up in most studies as an obstacle to teacher learning (Sleeter, 1995; Marx, 2006; Kailin, 2002). Other persistent themes include the challenge of seeing multiple perspectives simultaneously as true (Sleeter, 1995 and Solomon et al., 2005), the invisibility of Whiteness and White capital (Solomon et al., 2005 and Marx, 2006), patronizing attitudes intended to be "helping" (Hyland, 2005 and Marx, 2006) and an awareness of racism which translates to lowering standards for students of color, particularly Black students (Kailin, 2002). Other obstacles include the desire to be "good" (Marx, 2006) and a lack of knowledge or competence in dealing with seemingly raced issues. "Often the 'liberal' response to discipline or behavior issues comes not from neglect or hostility, but out of genuine confusion about how to react to another's oppression" (Kailin, p. 190).

From a researcher's perspective, racist actions are often quite glaring. With the opportunity to slow conversations down through transcription, and reflect with the aid of theory, researchers are able to code for racism. Hyland's (2005) work on the "hidden racism" (p. 440) in teachers' uses of metaphors examines teachers' answers to "what makes a good teacher of students of color?" The "hidden racism" she uncovers is in the teachers' rhetoric of assimilation, helping, communication and the invisibility of Whiteness. While making plain the racism in teacher language can be useful, this type of research places a strong emphasis on talk without focusing on classroom implications. Beyond that, it silences teachers by giving the impression that "hidden racism" is everywhere. In response to Hyland's study, I would ask what else is "hidden" in the rhetoric of the teachers? What confusions, uncertainties and questions do teachers have

14

when they are not asked to be the expert, when they are not asserting their response to the question, "What makes a "good teacher of students of color?" (Hyland, p. 443).

Furthermore, teachers are often able to recognize racism in the same way that researchers do, when they have the same opportunity to slow down the conversation. Marx (2006) showed teachers transcripts of things they had said and the teachers, not previously bothered by their own comments, showed deep distress at their own, self-evident racism. Teachers in Marx's study uncovered racism that they had not previously recognized, including deficit perspectives on children and families of color, unconsciously maintaining a distance from children of color, and equating condescending charity work with anti-racism. Their desire to not be racist is common and it underlies many of the obstacles to teachers learning about race. In trying so hard not to appear racist (and not to be racist) teachers can have trouble seeing the ways in which their actions or attitudes are, in fact, racist. Many White teachers, like many White people, want to be good and associate anti-racism with "goodness" (Marx, 2006, p. 142).

Much of the research on teacher education around race has been conducted with pre-service teachers. This happens because pre-service teachers are easily accessible to researchers as a subject group, as well as because teacher education programs across the country are constantly seeking effective ways to teach pre-service teachers about race. Such research is limited because student teachers have not yet built a repertoire of questions about race as it applies to classroom practice in the same way that experienced teachers have. Many pre-service teachers do not even believe that race will matter in their teaching. Much of the literature on pre-service teacher education on race could be

about any graduate program with a required race component. Experienced teachers often have much more specific questions about race, as it relates to schools and to their classrooms in particular. In Kailin's (2002) anti-racism workshop with experienced teachers, she found teachers confronting dilemmas about interactions with Black students in the hallway (notably similar to the persistent dilemma for teachers in Pollock's research), Black student disengagement and the perceptions and treatment of parents of color. Because Kailin's work focused primarily on teacher personal transformation, the list of challenges that teachers faced in applying their learning to the classroom is unfortunately not longer than these few examples. However, her work with classroom teachers demonstrates the potential richness of the questions and dilemmas that teachers face when thinking about race as teachers.

Accounting for race in the classroom and in teacher education programs, as well as teacher professional development, can have profound effects on the "common knowledge" that gets used to make decisions about education. In *Other People's Children* (2006), Lisa Delpit demonstrates how educational systems do not value the voices of Black adults in decision making processes about Black students. To illustrate this, she gives the example of the debate occurring in schools and teacher education programs between teaching reading via basic skills methods and process learning methods. Delpit labels this debate a "silenced dialogue" because it is in fact coded and influenced by race in ways that many refuse to recognize. "The dilemma is not really in the debate over instructional methodology, but rather in communicating across cultures and in addressing the more fundamental issue of power, of whose voice gets to be heard

in determining what is best for poor children and children of color" (p. 46). White

educators and researchers tend to dominate this debate with little regard to what Black

teachers and Black students of education assert, failing to recognize that racial and

cultural background may give Black teachers, who have cultural commonalities with their

students, a particular vantage point on Black children that is critical to the debate on

reading. Delpit (2006) writes, "appropriate education for poor children and children of

color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture….Good

liberal intentions are not enough" (p. 45).

Teacher learning through inquiry groups

Inquiry groups have traditionally been used to support the development of

teachers in their classrooms. The concept is based on the premise that teachers are

experts in their own classrooms, and that by following areas of interest in their own

practice through research, they are more likely to develop their practice in positive ways

than if academics or superiors evaluated them and encouraged change. As teachers

engage their own practice alongside the literature on race and education, they may choose

to change their own practice in response to their findings. This process of change is

wholly different from responding to negative criticism or district requirements. Marilyn

Cochran-Smith (2004) writes that an inquiry stance makes it possible for teachers to

balance the requirements of their employment with the goal of working towards social

justice. It is, as she calls it, a "generative way" (p. 46) for teachers to recognize and

reconsider their own biases in ways that lead to the creation of pedagogy that is more

relevant to all students. Cochran-Smith asserts that knowing oneself, how one's own life

and experience have been raced and classed, is critical to the process of inquiry around race in the classroom. The work of developing an effective anti-racist pedagogy requires teachers to be able to make hundreds of decisions on any given day. The work requires challenging oneself, one's environment and often, one's superiors. It requires each individual teacher to be critically engaged in thinking about her or his own classroom as well as the larger context of school and society:

> If we are going to prepare teachers to work intelligently and responsibly in a society that is increasingly diverse in race, language and culture, then we need more teachers who are actively willing to challenge the taken for granted texts, practices and arrangements of schooling through participation in systematic and critical inquiry (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 63).

The experiences of the White teachers in this study raise important questions regarding the critical components of anti-racist professional development for teachers and anti-racism education for White people more broadly.

 Creating race research that teaches

This study has been shaped primarily by two different seminal studies on race: Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters* and Mica Pollock's *Colormute*. Both books are based on qualitative data and both books help illuminate stumbling blocks to learning about and speaking clearly about race and racism.

Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters* is an analysis of interviews with 30 White women about race. Frankenberg argues the simple premise that "race shapes women's lives" (p. 1). Although her interviews are about race, her analysis manages to identify the ways that race shaped women's lives in ways that the women themselves

18

could not even recognize. And though she overrepresented in her sample for women who identified as anti-racist, feminist or as part of an interracial relationship (and therefore already had a robust personal analysis of racism), Frankenberg's analysis of the words of her interviewees demonstrated how race affected women's lives even more than the women themselves were aware. She writes, "I did not discourage apparent digressions of any kind, in part because of my commitment to place race in the context of White women's other interests and concerns" (p. 29). Similarly, within this dissertation, I sought to understand the role that race plays in classrooms, both when it is on the classroom agenda, as well as when it was not.

Frankenberg's in-depth analysis of individual stories, as well as her comparative analysis across stories creates a story of how Whiteness is constructed in the lives of White women, of the ways that they successfully challenged Whiteness and transformed its meaning, as well as the "deeply rooted" ways that it shaped their lives with and without their knowledge, with and without their consent. Cumulatively it paints a picture of how Whiteness works and the book is both a research document, as well as an instructional tool for learning about Whiteness more broadly.

Similarly Mica Pollock's (2004) *Colormute* is an account of her ethnographic research of race talk conducted at a large urban public high school in California. But it is also a tool for understanding the contradictions in race talk more broadly in education, and in the U.S. as a whole. Pollock takes talk and silence as her units of analysis in *Colormute*. She demonstrates that it is possible to do research on race in a school in a way that the members of the school community could learn from, rather than feeling

19

condemned by. She does this, in part, by examining social trends and racialization rather than individual culpability.

Pollock integrates herself into her research site, not only in her observations, but in her writing. She analyzes race talk reflexively, aware that she is a part of the same society that she is critiquing. This means that she does not place blame. She is self conscious and self-aware and points out her own tendencies as much as anyone else's. She quotes Spindler, who writes, "It should be clear that I am not castigating teachers. They are the agents of their culture" (p. 17). Her book is truly a critique of culture, not of the school itself. She wants to address dilemmas that affect a much broader population: "We all must negotiate a world in which our very confusion over when to talk as if race matters helps recreate a world in which it does" (p. 17).

Pollock's use of talk as her unit of analysis is particularly skillful and innovative. She essentially labels each conversation, each quote as demonstrative of one of these six dilemmas, each one a component of the phenomenon of colormuteness:

- We don't belong to simple race groups, but we do
- Race doesn't matter but it does
- The de-raced words we use when discussing plans for racial equality can actually keep us from discussing ways to make opportunities racially equal
- The more complex inequality seems to get, the more simplistic inequality analysis seems to become
- The questions we ask most about race are the very questions we most suppress
- Although talking in racial terms can make race matter, not talking in racial terms can make race matter too

These six dilemmas illustrate the many dilemmas, Catch-22s and contradictions that teachers face when trying to talk about race in school.

In this dissertation I focus specifically on the experiences of White teachers and their application of race learning to their classrooms and schools. The final product is meant to be a resource for teachers to better understand why race matters in their classroom and how to navigate the many questions and dilemmas that arise because it does. Like Frankenberg, I hope to show the ways that race matters above and beyond the concerns explicitly cited by the teachers in my study. And like Pollock, I hope to do so in a way that demonstrates how race matters more broadly in our society, not simply in the individual classrooms that I observed.

Chapter 3: METHODS

For this project, I spent one year with seven White teachers, using ethnographic and action research methods to understand their learning processes, as they engaged in teacher inquiry groups focused on race and education. I used qualitative research methods because I wanted an in-depth look at teachers' internal processes; these methods helped me to get to know each teacher individually and understand their questions and their classrooms in detail. I chose action research methods because I wanted to do research *with* teachers, not simply *on* teachers (Reason and Bradbury, 2006). Action research is a philosophy as much as it is a methodology, requiring both researcher and teacher expertise. As researcher and inquiry group facilitator, I brought a particular expertise on race, education and inquiry research. The teachers brought a particular expertise on their students and their families, the curriculum that they were working with, their school contexts and, of course, themselves.

Action research, which is popular among feminist researchers, assumes that the researcher, as well as the process of engaging in data collection, has knowledge to lend to the participants (or people affected by them) that should not be hidden from them. In my study, the case study teachers and I were jointly trying to change their classrooms to meet the goals they had set for themselves.

> These projects attempt directly to change people's behavior while
> gathering data in traditional or innovative ways. They intervene and study
> in a continuous series of feedback loops (Reinharz, 1992).

Because all of the teachers volunteered to be a part of my study so that they could engage more deeply in the questions they were already asking about their classrooms, I openly

shared with teachers the thoughts and suggestions that eventually became a part of this dissertation.

My role as an inquiry group facilitator and an anti-racism educator ultimately played a prominent role in the research process and in this dissertation. While I had initially intended not to focus on my role, it quickly became apparent that my interactions with teachers became pivotal moments for their learning and application. This happened in part because of how our interactions created the space and time for teachers to focus on their questions and the application of their learning. It was also always a generative time, when we would cycle through the inquiry process together, often taking questions one level deeper. I was able to direct teachers to resources that helped them continue to pursue their questions without stagnating. For all of these reasons, my interactions with teachers became an important focal point for study in this research, which will be explored in the final data chapter of this dissertation.

Case Study Teachers

The teachers in my study were from three different professional development groups focusing on race. One group was from a small independent school located in the suburbs of a major metropolitan area on the northeastern seaboard. One group was for teachers who taught in the urban center of that metropolitan area in the city's public schools. The third group was from a large suburban public school district with an upper-middle class population.

The teachers in my study were all White, but they were otherwise a diverse group. They were in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. They taught in private schools, public urban

schools and public suburban schools. They were Republican and Democrat, men and women, gay and straight, Christian and Jewish, secular and religious. They taught kindergarten, second grade, fifth grade, middle school science, high school English, elementary gifted education and high school special education. Some had classrooms that were 100% Black, some that were 100% White; most had classes that were predominantly White, with a few children of color. The teachers themselves had two things in common: They all self-identified racially as White. And they all wanted to improve their teaching practice by learning more about race.

Research Questions

My research design was oriented by the following questions:

1) How do teachers translate race learning into classroom practice?

    1a) Where do they get stuck?

    1b) What helps them move forward?

2) How are teachers using their conversations on race and racism to make pedagogic and curricular decisions?

3) What questions do teachers ask about race and racism?

Rationale

"Raising Race Questions" focuses on teachers' questions for three reasons. First, one of the most effective ways of breaking the culture of colormuteness in schools is to encourage questioning. Second, through the nature of the questions teachers ask, they reveal more than curiosities. Often their biases, assumptions, values and priorities come through as well. Finally, as a former teacher (and a White teacher at that), I know how

desperately most White teachers want to learn about race and how few opportunities they have to do so. I constructed my research observations and interviews as dialogic so that teachers could use me as a resource and a sounding board. I tried to help them find answers to and paths for exploring their questions, and in turn they continuously shared their questions with me as they arose. Inevitably, the research or ideas that I shared with them led to more questions.

Linguist Margaret Wetherell suggests studying sticking places because those are often the places where the common sense of a culture emerges to explain contradictions and confusion. "Meaning coagulates in a culture and becomes temporarily stuck or jammed. The study of ideological practices involves investigating what these sticking points look like and how they occur, along with the social and political consequences" (Wetherell, p. 11).

Teacher inquiry

My research for "Raising Race Questions" began by focusing on the work of teacher inquiry groups because of the unique ways that inquiry into their own teaching enables teachers to be open to change that they might otherwise perceive as threatening (Landes, 1965; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Zeichner, 2009). Cochran-Smith writes that teacher research is designed specifically to draw on the strengths of teachers, while helping them explore particular topics related to their teaching. Cochran-Smith asserts that knowing oneself, how one's own life and experience have been raced and classed, is critical to the process of inquiry around race in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 63). However, because I also intentionally sought a variety of teachers from different

types of schools, the structure of the race learning in the different groups did not follow the exact same patterns.

Research sites

At Friends Independent School, the faculty was engaged in a two year inquiry project on race which involved 25 teachers (broken up into 4 smaller inquiry groups) conducting inquiry research on their own classroom practice. This was the purest form of inquiry research within my study. And even this group was not solely inquiry based. They had an average of four outside speakers or professional development sessions on race (some of which were led by me as a consultant to the project) throughout the year. The entire project was funded by a grant, which provided computers for all the teachers in the group as well as food for meetings. It was an inquiry group, but the teachers were constantly aware that they were being funded by an outside grant and that they were going to be accountable to the administration at the end of the project. The administration constantly tried to alleviate the image that they were controlling it, to let leadership come from teachers, to free up their time so that they could work on the project, to give them resources on how to conduct inquiry and to use the consultants as much as possible. But it was ultimately a project organized and driven by the administration. This does not change the fact that it was an inquiry group, but it means that it was different in tone and structure from an inquiry group formed independently by teachers for the sake of their own learning. One advantage to this structure was that teachers knew they had the administration's support. The disadvantage was that teachers who were unhappy with the process did not have an easy way to opt out.

26

The Philadelphia Urban Public School District inquiry group was a group that I started so that I could find teachers from the urban public school district who would be involved in my research. We structured it on an inquiry group design, but teachers did not undertake individual inquiry projects the way they were required to do at the independent school as a stipulation of their participation in the school-wide project. Instead, teachers came to the group each month with questions and the facilitators recommended research articles and books that attempted to address their questions. Each month we would read articles and discuss them in reference to the earlier questions, and then we would proceed by examining new questions that arose from classroom circumstances, or from the responses to the readings.

The third group, in St. Clair Suburban Public School District, was the least like an inquiry group. Teachers gathered monthly for this optional district-wide professional development on what they called "cultural competency" with a Black facilitator who was an expert on both professional development for teachers and race issues in education. The facilitator invited me to be her assistant and as such I took notes during the meetings and participated in all of the meetings. This group focused heavily on sharing personal stories among teachers of different races, discussing aspects of cultural competency and applying those aspects to education. Although the teachers were not asked to develop inquiry projects, as they did at the independent school, they were constantly encouraged to think about how this work applied to their classrooms, and many of the teachers had projects that they were working on throughout the year.

Methods

Research questions

1. How do teachers translate race learning into classroom practice?

2. How do teachers use their conversations on race and racism to make pedagogic and curricular decisions?

3. What questions do teachers ask about race and racism as they try to apply their learning to their classrooms?

I addressed all three of my research questions through close ethnographic fieldwork with seven case study teachers, which consisted of two formal interviews, four classroom observations, observations of inquiry group participation and informal interviews. In the tradition of action research, both the observations and the interviews were co-constructed, based on the questions teachers were asking about their practice. From the very first interview, I worked with the teachers to find out what were their questions on race and racism and then we tracked those and how they were changing throughout the year. In sticking to an action research model, I wanted my observations to be based on these questions, so that the observations would be oriented around the teachers' concerns. The only complication to this collaboration was the fact that the teachers also seemed to be aware of the fact that they couldn't know what they didn't know. They all shared their questions, but then asked me to share what I saw in the classroom, giving me free reign to focus the observations on whatever caught my eye. This shifted my framework for observations, which was still based on teachers' questions, but also was shaped by all that I have learned from the academic literature on

race and education over the past seven years. In informal follow up interviews, I asked

what information, knowledge or skills were helpful to them as they tried to apply their

learning.

To answer my second question, I also asked teachers to tell me about the different

pedagogic and curricular choices they made throughout the year and to explain changes

they made. Curriculum and pedagogy cannot be decoupled from questions of culture. As

anthropologist of education Ruth Landes has written,

> Since cultural considerations are intrinsic to human processes of
> communication and learning, educators must choose materials, modes and
> paces of instruction in accordance with pupils' backgrounds (Landes, p.
> 51).

To answer my third question, I continuously pushed teachers to vocalize the

questions that they had. To contextualize the questions that the case study teachers

asked, I also gathered questions from all of the teachers in the three inquiry groups. I

gathered these questions via a number of methods. First, I attended all of the meetings of

each of three inquiry groups as a participant observer, audio-recording and manually

recording the questions that teachers asked about race and racism. Each group met

monthly and I attended each of three groups every month of the school year, which meant

that I attended one meeting per week, on average. Second, I tracked the questions that

emerged during interviews and observations with the case study teachers. Third, I used

an online survey site to distribute two questionnaires to all inquiry group participants

(about 40 teachers total from all four inquiry groups), asking them about their emergent

questions throughout the school year.

Timeline and Entry

My dissertation committee approved my proposal in early October, 2009 and I received IRB approval to begin research by the end of November, 2009, pending permission from the school leadership at my potential research sites. At that time, I had already begun working as a consultant to the large group inquiry project at Friends Independent School in August, 2009 when they hired Dr. Chonika Coleman-King and me to consult on the process and leadership of the groups, provide professional development on race, and provide resources on race learning and inquiry group support. I petitioned the Head of School for permission to use the site as a part of my dissertation within weeks of starting this position and received permission immediately. I begin recruiting case study teachers at that site immediately after receiving IRB approval.

Similarly, my work in the St. Clair Suburban Public School District began with my relationship to the facilitator of their cultural competency group, an expert in both teacher professional development and race issues in education. She and I had met previously at a conference and we had been trying to develop a working relationship for about two years. She very willingly invited me to collaborate in the group and introduced me to the superintendent of schools to petition for permission to use the district as a site for my dissertation. This permission was granted in December, 2009 with the caveat that the district be unrecognizable in my research.

Finally, I started the inquiry group for teachers in the Philadelphia Urban Public School District in December, 2009. I had many contacts with teachers in the district through research I had done on Dr. Kathy Schultz's *Learning to Teach* project and

through my students in the graduate seminar *School and Society* that I taught for TFA teachers. I emailed all of the teachers I knew in the district and asked them to forward information about my group widely. My research in the Philadelphia Public Schools fell under the IRB approval for Dr. Kathy Schultz's research, on which I had been a research assistant for three years. I invited any teachers involved in this group to participate as case study teachers in my study. Because there were only two teachers who were able to regularly attend our meetings, I initially thought that I would not use any members of the Philadelphia group for my research. But both teachers were so eager to be involved in the dissertation, to have me observe them in their classrooms and to meet regularly with the inquiry group, that I simply included those two teachers as case study teachers, even though they were essentially the only two teachers in the group. The Philadelphia Urban Public School inquiry group ultimately chose to meet every two weeks, whereas the other groups met once a month throughout the year.

My data collection took place between December, 2009 and June, 2010, although I had been attending inquiry group meetings at Friends and St. Clair since August, 2009 and October, 2009 respectively. This lag time allowed me to meet people and establish myself as a member of the community before inviting volunteers for case study participants. The first of the seven case study teacher initial interviews took place in December, 2009 and the seventh took place in March, 2010 after Sam and I met at the White Privilege Conference in Wisconsin, and he excitedly volunteered to be a part of the dissertation. All of the final interviews took place in June, 2010. For the bulk of my

data collection I was visibly pregnant. My daughter, Tina, was born July 24th, 2010. I

analyzed the data and wrote the dissertation from October, 2010 until November, 2011.

Table 3.1 Schools, Inquiry Groups and Teachers

Friends Independent School	St. Clair Suburban School District	Philadelphia Urban School District
Race Inquiry Project for 25 Teachers	Cultural Proficiency Training for Multiple Cohorts of 20 Teachers	Race Inquiry Group for District Teachers
Researcher role: consultant to project	Researcher role: Assistant to facilitator	Researcher role: group organizer and co-facilitator
• Laurie - Kindergarten • Helene - 2nd grade • Sam - HS English	• Ann - HS Special Education • Scott - Elementary Gifted Support	• Cara - 5th grade Charter School • Todd -7th grade science at a city middle school

Analysis and interpretation

I analyzed my data inductively as I collected it, staying close to the developing

case studies by taking notes immediately after interviewing teachers and rereading field

notes from observations on a weekly basis. Each week, I wrote brief memos reflecting

on the data gathered that week, examining the theoretical connections to my data and the

literature, and keeping my research from "getting cold" (Marshall, 1999).

My primary analysis of the data was a thematic analysis using three categories of analysis laid out by Maxwell (2005): "organizational, substantive and theoretical" (p. 97). Each teacher's case constitutes an "organizational" bin. I reread all of the data for each individual case, one teacher at a time. As I read each case, I observed common "substantive" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97) categories that emerged for each teacher, which included pre-determined categories, such as individual history with race learning, successful classroom implementations, challenging classroom implementations and emergent questions. I compiled all of the data for each teacher within seven individual case studies.

After each case study was written, I looked across the cases for prominent "theoretical" category themes and used them to develop a broad descriptive framework (Yin, 2009) of how teachers translate race learning into classroom practice and what questions emerge as they do so. I began to cull each case study for themes that arose across cases, which I extracted from the individual case studies and included in cross case analysis chapters. These themes were based on the types of questions, challenges and revelations that emerged for teachers in their process of applying theory to practice. My "theoretical" (Maxwell, 2005) categories are informed by theories of White Racial Identity Development, Critical Race Theory, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Such themes include talking about race with students, White teachers providing forms of racial socialization for Black students, social justice movements such as the Civil Rights Movement or using one's experience of marginalization (as a Jew, for example) to better understand the experience of marginalization of one's students.

I then examined each case study to determine the specific theme that emerged for each individual teacher. Having already extracted the data that was relevant for comparison in the cross case analysis chapters, I rewrote the case studies based around each teacher's theme. Sometimes the case study theme was based on the questions an individual teacher asked, such as Cara, who persistently wondered how her Whiteness affected her teaching. Sometimes the case theme focused on a subset of a teacher's questions, as with Helene, who asked many questions about curriculum and instruction, particularly in the inquiry group, but whose case study focuses on questions of culture. Although questions about culture were not the first questions she asked, as our relationship developed, she seemed better able to ask harder questions that focused on how to address the differences between some of her Black students' home cultures and the school's culture, which was heavily influenced by the predominantly White middle and upper class population. Sometimes the case focused on a theme that emerged for a particular teacher that was unrelated to their questions. Todd, for example, did not ask questions about expectations, and yet, through our conversations and my observations, it became clear that learning how to hold high expectations was an important part of his teaching. Each case study highlights a dilemma that was particularly salient for that individual teacher, as well as a typical dilemma for a White teacher thinking about race.

Generalizability

The final compilation of seven case studies represents an in-depth and personalized exploration of seven typical race dilemmas for White teachers. It is neither generalizable to a large population of White teachers, nor is it the final word on the

teachers who participated in this study. Each theme would play out differently in another classroom with another teacher, other students, a different school context and another city. The themes played themselves out in ways that were peculiar to these particular actors and the historical moment they occupied.

These themes were also particular to these teachers only for the short time that I worked with them. The first year after my research ended, I continued to work with three of the teachers in a different context, and was struck by how many more answers they were finding, and how much more I could learn if I kept going. But this study is not actually about each teacher as an individual. It is about the questions and answers that came up for them and a framework for thinking about those questions in other contexts. The discussion is not necessarily for the case study teachers (although I want it to be useful for them), but for all teachers who, at different times and in different places, find themselves in these very situations, asking these very questions. I am hopeful that White teachers will be able to see some of themselves and their own questions within each of these different cases.

Questions of researcher involvement

The extent to which a researcher "deploys the self" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999) in qualitative research varies depending on the research design. Researchers must consider the degree of "participantness," "revealedness" and "intensiveness" that is appropriate for their design (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). In the case of this study, I chose to be a participant observer working in collaboration with teachers to understand their process of learning and applying knowledge of race and education. As a participant

35

in the process of change and learning that the teachers in this study were going through, I did not hesitate to share my opinion when teachers asked. I was not interested in recording teachers' beliefs as they were, but in recording the process of change that the teachers themselves were going through. And so I frequently added ideas and resources that I felt would support them in reaching their goals; and in the meantime, that gave them more to work with in their change process, which gave me more to watch. The partnerships were mutually beneficial in this way as the teachers really sought time with me to find more resources and ideas. And each time we met was an opportunity for me to have greater insight into their individual processes.

The role of the interviewer has become less rigid in the last twenty years as discourse analysts have begun to see the impartial interviewer as an unrealistic specter of a bygone social science. Mary Weatherell (2003) writes that although interviews have traditionally been "a series of monologues in response to questions rather than a dialogue" (p. 27), "subsequent work has made it very clear that the interviewer's orientation is unavoidably a factor in the unfolding interaction" (p. 27). Interviews are not a product of the interviewee, but rather they are a co-construction of the interviewer and the interviewee, in which both are responsible for what gets said and how it gets said.

The interviews that I conducted with teachers were loosely structured by a general list of questions that I tailored to each individual teacher, based on the different questions they were asking in their classrooms. We co-constructed both the interviews and the observations through our conversations, building on what one another said. I knew that to have a conversation that broke local norms of colorblindness, I would have to share my

own thoughts and experiences as a White person. As a facilitator, it has been my experience that when I model vulnerability and self-reflection, it makes it possible for others to open up as well. This hypothesis seemed to be supported by the ways that teachers continuously opened up, sharing increasingly more risky questions as the year went on.

Throughout our work together, I tried to be completely transparent with the case study teachers. I did not want them to be surprised by any of the critiques that I thought I might present in the final dissertation. I hoped that they could read the final product and feel that my analysis of their situation was both fair and helpful. And yet I wanted to be honest and incisive so as to honor their desire to improve. I felt it would not be respectful of their hard work and their commitment to anti-racism if I did not fully analyze the racial dynamics of their classroom, both one-on-one with them, but also here in this dissertation.

To accomplish these intentions, I gave teachers feedback throughout our process of working together. During interviews, I would respond if they asked me what I thought and after observations I usually emailed them or called to discuss my reflections. I also frequently shared stories of my own questions and confusion about race.

After observations, teachers often wanted feedback in person, but I found that I usually had very little to say. While sitting in the classroom, everything that happened seemed to be a normal and integral part of the whole. Cause and effect seemed clear and I could provide an explanation for every thing that I saw. Rather than analyze, I spent my time in classrooms simply writing down every single thing that I saw, describing rather

37

than interpreting, and trying to note the races of the students as I wrote. At the end of an observation, I had very little to say and, in fact, I often feared that I would have no feedback for the teachers, and no material for my dissertation.

However, in proper ethnographic style, I usually spent many hours fleshing out my skeletal field notes within a day or two of each observation. And as I did so, I began to see patterns and questions that did not arise for me while I was in the classroom. This phenomenon was so consistent that I regularly shared with teachers that one of the best ways to think about racial dynamics in the classroom might be to journal about them at night, when they are away from the specious logic of the intact environment and they can focus on just one scenario, or one child, more thoughtfully.

Researcher positionality

When I designed this study, I wanted the teachers who participated to be collaborators, rather than subjects. This is an approach that requires not only a specific orientation on the part of the researcher, but also an openness on the part of the participants. I believe that as White people, and as teachers in a racist society, we constantly have room to improve our practice. There will never be a time when we know so much about race, and have done so much self-examination as White people that we can allow our critical consciousness to rest. We need to constantly question the racial dynamics in our classrooms, and we must continuously seek help from others to help us see what we cannot see ourselves. The teachers who participated in this study approached their work with the same orientation. Each of them invited me into their

38

classrooms because they wanted a second set of eyes for examining racial dynamics. They wanted a colleague with whom to discuss their race questions.

Researcher role

I played a big role in these case studies. First, I am present via my role in each of the different inquiry groups. The independent school hired me as a consultant to work with the race inquiry groups and to support individual teachers in forming and researching their questions. At the suburban public school cultural proficiency group, I was an assistant to the facilitator, and I took notes on all of the meetings. In the urban inquiry group, I acted as both coordinator and facilitator. Because I wanted to be present in the group as a researcher, I recruited two other graduate students (one Black and one White) to help lead the group. However, because it was a relatively small group, I always participated and I often led the discussions. Because of these varied roles I played, each individual teacher in the study likely saw me as both a researcher and a facilitator, both a colleague and a teacher. Second, all of the teachers invited me into their classrooms because they wanted support in seeing what they did not or could not see. And so whenever I made a critical analysis of their teaching or their classroom, I usually shared it. I did not want the findings from this dissertation to surprise the individual teachers. I knew they would recognize themselves in these stories and I wanted my suggestions and critiques to feel true to their experiences. Subsequently, my work with teachers became iterative, as we exchanged ideas and interpretations of classroom events. This generally led to rich exchanges that ultimately deepened my analysis. But because I was committed to sharing my interpretations, I sometimes stopped short of possible

instructive analyses that I felt would be too miniscule to bring up to teachers. I feared

that if I focused to narrowly on small details, teachers would become distracted from, or

disillusioned with the big picture of anti-racist change.

Sharing feedback

After I had time to write and think about what I saw in the classroom, I usually

composed an email to the teachers in which I shared my thoughts, sometimes directly

pasting whole paragraphs from my field notes. In giving feedback, I tried to use the

effective methods that my teaching mentors had used with me. I remembered how in my

first teaching job, my middle school principal would observe me every two weeks. After

each observation, we would meet in her office for a half hour and she would give me

gentle feedback on observations. She gave lots of positives accompanied by just one or

two things to work on that she often reflected back to me from my own critical evaluation

of my teaching. This remains one of my most positive experiences of professional

development, yielding the most growth and self-confidence for me as a teacher. Later, as

an adult educator, I had the privilege of being observed by a highly talented staff

developer, who was also a friend. He only observed me once and, at the end of the

observation, he gave me a long list of things I should do differently, many of which were

impossible to do given my experience and skill level. The evaluation left me feeling

defensive and angry because so many of his suggestions weren't even things I was

capable of at that time; it required too much personal change which, as teacher educators

know, happens slowly. In giving feedback to my case study teachers, I tried to mirror the

strategies of my middle school principal.

In spite of the teachers' genuine requests for critical feedback, I understood that it is still very hard to hear feedback about one's teaching, particularly when it is about race. It can feel like nitpicking. It can be embarrassing and feel shameful. We all want so badly to be anti-racist that feedback that says otherwise can feel devastating. And though they joined the study in order to get feedback, and though they tended to be very self-critical, I knew they would receive my feedback more openly if I used my skills for delivering effective feedback. First, I asked a lot of questions. I wanted to acknowledge that although I know a lot about race, I was also in the process of learning how this knowledge gets applied to education. I tried to remember that I was not an expert on the developmental stages of their students, while they were. Second, I gave them lots of positive feedback on all of the things that I felt were effective in their classrooms. I usually sandwiched any critical feedback within layers of affirmation, all of which was genuine. Indeed all of these teachers were probably more critical of themselves than I could ever be. And yet our critiques did not always match; there were times that I felt they were spending energy on one topic while neglecting one that might matter more.

I usually emailed teachers within a few days of my observations and these emails were usually accompanied by articles that I thought might be of interest to them, given the questions they were asking. I maintained this direct communication with teachers for a few reasons. First, I did not want them to be surprised by what ended up in my final dissertation. Second, my study was designed to look at how teachers continually moved forward on issues of race and where they got stuck. My feedback was a way of helping them continue to move forward, giving them more to read and more to think about so that

their journeys could be deeper and richer, thereby deepening and enriching my data as well. Third, I wanted to have a written record of our communications that I could look back upon. I knew that in trying to deliver my feedback in a way that felt supportive, the message of what I was saying might get lost. By writing the feedback, I could look back on how direct or indirect I was when I shared it. But I could also, in the moment, ensure that the main messages were communicated.

Conveying feedback by email had benefits and drawbacks. It was much easier than setting up even more meetings with teachers, which was important because the design of this dissertation already demanded a lot of time from the teachers, and left me with very little extra time myself. It meant that teachers could receive the feedback when they were ready to think about it, rather than in the middle of the school day, which is often when I saw them. It meant that they had time to respond, which many of them usually did. However, it also meant that sometimes teachers didn't read it or they read it quickly or they didn't understand exactly what I was saying. Sometimes, by the time I saw them again, they seemed to have forgotten what I said. At other times, I couldn't get a sense of what they thought or whether that had read my note at all.

In giving feedback, I also tried to keep in mind what I knew about giving White people critical feedback about race. One strategy I used was "support/confront," which means I try to support the person and confront the comment or the behavior. In this way, people can minimize their self-protective defensive reactions and open themselves up to hear the feedback. It also avoids the dynamic of labeling people "racist" and just focuses on their developing and honing anti-racist skills. I tried to remember a particularly

traumatic interaction with another White woman who once lectured me on an issue of race. She was so didactic that I just wanted to resist what she was saying. After the conversation, I had high levels of anxiety in connection with her and I tried to avoid her if I could. In giving feedback, I tried to avoid creating the same kind of anxious, self-defensive reactions in the teachers in my study. I also tried to relate to the teachers' questions and situations, and to share the difficult moments in my life when I received critical feedback related to race. I found that by making myself vulnerable in this way, teachers were more open to sharing their own vulnerabilities and difficult questions, as well as more receptive to what I had to say.

It takes a lot of practice to hear things about race that feel contrary to our own experiences and not resist them, not feel defensive. Some of the teachers did this better than others. I am not sure what made the difference in how the teachers responded to my feedback as there seemed to be many contributing factors. One was likely the individual teacher's experience with race inquiry, and their practice with analyzing their behaviors around race. Teachers who had been given critical feedback about racial issues before, and had experienced the difference when they changed their practice, were much more open to feedback than teachers who were newer to it. Taking feedback around race, even if one is already proficient at taking feedback in other areas, seems to be a skill that one can develop. A second factor was the individual teachers' White racial identity development. Teachers who were still in some of the more fragile stages of identity development were less open to feedback than teachers who were further along in their development. Sometimes the more invested an individual teacher's ego was in being an

"anti-racist," the more difficult it was for them to hear critical feedback. It's quite an advanced level of identity development to realize that being an anti-racist means acknowledging one must constantly be soliciting and accepting critical feedback. As White people, we constantly absorb racist messaging from our society about the supremacy and decency of White people, and the inferiority and degradation of people of color. Teachers who seemed more constantly aware of this reality seemed more open to feedback about how I saw it coming up in their classrooms. A third factor in teachers' receptivity to my feedback seemed to be our relationship. Some of the younger female teachers, for example, were extremely receptive, and I suspected that might be related to our closeness in age and experience, having attended similar undergraduate or graduate programs, and having learned to think and talk about race in similar ways. Some of the teachers who were about ten years older than me referred to me multiple times as their therapist. They seemed so grateful to have somebody to connect with in these conversations about race. Other teachers seemed to be trying to be open to my feedback, but often seemed to ignore it or forget it, which made me wonder whether they were resisting it or if perhaps I was not being clear.

Sometimes I would email teachers my feedback and they would not reply before the next observation. This left me feeling uncertain about where I stood in their estimation. The following is a story that demonstrates how a teacher's reaction to me could shape my confidence in our relationship with one another. During one observation day, when I planned to visit two teachers in the same school (teacher #1 and teacher #2), I felt particularly insecure. It was late in the year, and I had been observing both of them

for many months. After my last visit with them I had sent them both long emails detailing many of the critical things that I had observed with each of them since the observations began. I hadn't heard back from either of them.

On my way to and from Teacher #1's classroom, I passed the windows to Teacher #2's classroom and each time, I thought she saw me, but she did not wave. I projected that she must be mad at me, or anxious, or otherwise unwilling to see me. Teacher #1 acted normal in her class, but I was anxious about broaching the topic of the email. I wrote in my notes:

> *I was really impressed that she contacted me to set up this observation after I had sent that long email. She had also been to a local conference in which I presented research on forms of teacher resistance to learning about race. Perhaps that gave her the added impetus she needed to keep going because she didn't want to end up like a teacher in that study! But that might not be giving her enough credit. She has repeatedly expressed interest in this work – I shouldn't question it.*

When we were on the playground during recess I said to Teacher #1, "I sent you a long email with lots of different parts and I just wanted to get a sense of what you thought and whether it was helpful." I stuttered when I asked her about the email. I was nervous because I did not want to turn her off by giving her so much input/feedback. I also knew that in my own experience, if feedback is inconsistent with what I think is going on, or if someone has a different interpretation of race than the one that I have, it often feels uncomfortable enough that I want to distance myself from that person. I did not want that to happen with any of my case study teachers, and yet I really wanted to share what I was thinking so that they wouldn't read my dissertation and be surprised.

During this particular observation, I decided to take Teacher #1's willingness to invite me back as a sign of her engagement and her commitment. But we never did get to discuss the email. She repeatedly moved away from me physically on the playground and, when we came back together, she told me stories about different children. I have no idea whether she was consciously avoiding the conversation, if she was covering up for not having read the email, or if she was so focused on the students in her care that she thought little of moving away from what she perceived to be small talk. For whatever reason, we never really got back to it.

In the meantime, as I was preparing to leave the school, Teacher #2 saw me and ran out of her classroom to tell me how grateful she had been for everything I wrote in an email to her, and how she kept meaning to respond, but didn't ever have enough time to write all of the things that she wanted to write. She apologized and said she would try to write me back before her next observation. This interaction with Teacher #2 helped me realize how self conscious I had been about sending them critical feedback, and how so much of what I perceived from Teacher #1 to be possible resistance might actually have just been projection of my own insecurities. When Teacher #2 had not waved at me earlier in the morning, it must have been because she was pre-occupied with students, not because she was avoiding me. Might the same be true for Teacher #1? Thus is the labyrinth of qualitative work and of White people researching other White people's responses to race work. There are so many different emotions involved on both sides of the situation, and we are all dealing with the unconventional work of breaking the racial contract separately and together.

46

Another challenging aspect of sharing ongoing feedback was that I did not feel like I had the right answers. The teachers knew their students better than I did and they knew more about the developmental age group that they were teaching. They knew the many other classroom balls that they were juggling and the administrative constraints that were put on them above and beyond the work of teaching. Rarely did I know any of this. Sometimes I felt that this limited exposure to the classrooms should disqualify me from drawing conclusions about what I saw there. And yet I spent more time in classrooms than any of the teachers' supervisors or administrators did all year. I spent more time in their classrooms observing than the school counselor at the private school would have spent doing a diagnosis for special education or psychological evaluation. Such observations, that have very real implications for students' lives, do not seem to warrant extensive time. And so, while that does not justify the limited time I had in classrooms (an average of 12-15 hours in each classroom spread out over three-five visits), it simply contextualizes that time.

Saying race words and learning the race game

In using the standard five racial categories (Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, White) to describe and categorize people, I have not endeavored to undermine the social construction of race by demonstrating its internal contradictions and its failures of description. This was not only a dilemma for me, but for some of the case study teachers including Laurie, who asked, " Isn't race socially constructed? Isn't it not real? If so, then how do we incorporate that into what we're doing here (referring to the inquiry group on race)." While every academic racial project must ask how it continues to

perpetuate notions of race as biological or fixed, the fact that race is socially constructed

does not mean that it is not real. As Anthropologist Troy Duster has written in "the

Making and Unmaking of Whiteness," race—and Whiteness—is constantly morphing.

Just as water changes form, from gas to liquid to solid, so too does race have features that

are "fluid…and ever-changing," while simultaneously being "deeply embedded,

structural, hard, enduring" (p. 113). While there may be moments in which race seems to

have little salience in the classroom, there is no time when racial dynamics (both current

and historical) do not shape the relationships, curriculum, resources, speech patterns,

group dynamics and personal histories of all the members of that classroom. That race is

a social construction matters in a broad social analysis. But this study focuses on

individual classrooms and individual relationships between teachers, who self identify as

White, and their students, who already had racial identities both assigned to them by

society and assumed by them, each in their own individual and developmental way.

Within each classroom, the teachers and their students were already working with the

very real playing cards and game pieces distributed to them from the game of race. It

was my goal to support them in being able to see the landscape of the playing board and

the unwritten rules that were already beginning to determine who won and who lost so

that they could take consistent action over the long term to challenge the ways that

inequitable racial patterns continuously played out in their classrooms without their

consent.[2] As most White teachers in classrooms today were raised in an era of

---

[2] This is an analogy that I developed during my analysis. It is not, unfortunately, one that I used in talking with teachers.

colorblindness, it is this work—the work of seeing the very real ways that race impacts classrooms—that most teachers must do.

Case study teacher commitment

At times I have struggled with what to include in this dissertation because I felt that the teachers were willing to be so completely open with me and so honest, I did not want to abuse their trust. And at the same time I was not sure to what extent they even thought of their confidences as trust and how much I just felt to them like a colleague and a friend. Race work is incredibly contextual and the same comment shared in the privacy of an empty classroom or a quiet coffee shop might seem outrageous in a faculty meeting or a public forum. Similarly, questions and vulnerabilities shared with a White anti-racist colleague[3] might never come out in a multiracial group. Because so much of race learning for White people is like starting to piece together a puzzle without a picture of the whole, it can be very difficult to engage in sustained dialogue beyond our questions and sporadic observations because we feel our grasp on the topic is too tenuous.

All of this is to say that I had empathy for the White teachers in my study who agreed to speak their incomplete thoughts, to share their doubts, to admit to practices that even they saw as problematic but did not know how to change, and to allow me to analyze their talk (and their silences). I am acutely aware of my own positioning on the threshold of public exposure, where I take those very same words expressed in privacy

---

[3] When I delineate White anti-racists from other Whites, this is not to say that White anti-racists do not sometimes act in racist and ignorant ways. Simply declaring oneself an anti-racist does not change one's habits of being that are shaped by a lifetime of racial privilege and access. However, I use the term to denote a White person with a demonstrated commitment to anti-racism, one who thinks and speaks of racism with the intention of excavating and diminishing racism in their lives and in their practice rather than perpetuating it.

and safety and write them down to be read and judged by a general public. Sometimes it seems that the words that were spoken in the quiet of an interview actually change before my eyes when I realize they will be spoken to an audience that extends far beyond my office door. I know that when the teachers who participated in this work read the study, they too will see their words and experiences transformed by analysis and by the changed context in which they appear. This is the same disorienting feeling that we can have when we look through a race lens for the first time. Sometimes the world we see on the other side of that lens does not even approximate the world we saw even just moments before. Given that, I hope that the case study teachers will see the portraits painted here as bigger than themselves and their individual classrooms. And I hope that any teacher reading this text will see the way that each case study is not just about the teacher that it portrays, but how it applies to his or her own classroom as well.

I hope that my work here reflects the profound honor and respect I have for these teachers. I wrote this dissertation in the spirit of our mutual goal of creating models for how White teachers can be anti-racist in their classrooms. I deeply respect the teachers in this study for choosing to do race work in the first place, and then for volunteering for their process to be looked at in this incredibly risky and vulnerable way. When the Institutional Review Board approved my project, they demanded that I inform each teacher that complete anonymity is impossible in a case study design. Though the names of the teachers in this study have been changed, they may be recognizable by their friends and colleagues, and they bravely agreed to participate in this study with that knowledge.

Section I. Teachers can have a multicultural curriculum and still not have an anti-racist classroom

Chapter 4: WHY DOES RACE MATTER IN SCHOOLS?

History

Race has always mattered in American education. Structurally, race historically

determined the level and quality of education that was available to a person. The earliest

slave codes in the 1680s said that enslaved Blacks were not allowed to be educated

(Harris, 1993). People given the racial classification "White," on the contrary, were not

only allowed to be educated, but were entitled to free education provided by the

government. Once slavery officially ended in 1865 with the ratification of the 13th

Amendment, Blacks were legally allowed to attend schools. But schools for Whites and

Blacks remained segregated and unequal. The Civil Rights Movement and Brown vs. the

Board of Education brought an end to the de jure practice of separate and unequal

schools. However, de facto segregation persists in 2011 within cities, communities,

schools and even classrooms.

Ian Haney Lopez's (2006) work on the legal construction of race demonstrates

that according to the constitution, only those people classified as "White" were

historically entitled to access the full rights of U.S. citizenship. Because Whiteness was

constructed as a legal identity, being classified as White meant that those early White

Americans were designated "citizens," whereas non-White others were construed as

"aliens." Naturalization rights were tied to land ownership and marriage rights which led

to personal safety, economic advantage and prestige, making it possible for Whites to be

(and be seen as) productive citizens without the same obstacles and limited opportunities

of non-Whites (Haney-Lopez, 2006). Whites came to be seen as "industrious,

knowledgeable, virtuous and law abiding," while "Blacks were constructed as lazy, ignorant, lascivious, and criminal" (Haney-Lopez, p. 20). Cheryl Harris (1993) has theorized the ways that these early constitutional privileges translated into personal gain, such that Whiteness itself came to be akin to a form of property. According to her theory, Whiteness was protected by the constitution in the same ways that property was: Whiteness conferred protection (it was a shield from slavery and deportation), it entitled one to own property and land, it ensured access (including to public facilities, voting booths and schools), it determined all legal rights and it carried rights to reputation (Harris, 1993). Both Haney-Lopez and Harris demonstrate the profound and undeniable ways in which Whiteness has been both solidly codified in law and therefore part of the very foundation of the institutions that structure American society.

Gloria Ladson Billings and William Tate (1995) have translated Harris' theory of Whiteness as property in the U.S. political context into a theory of Whiteness as property in the educational context. They propose that the property rights of Whiteness (the right of disposition, right to use and enjoyment, the right to reputation and status, and the right to exclude) all pertain to education. According to their theory, the right to disposition in education occurs when students are rewarded for conforming to perceived "White norms" or sanctioned cultural practices. Whiteness confers the property right to use and enjoy schools, as White students have access to schools in White neighborhoods, which tend to be the highest performing schools; as White students tend to occupy centralized spaces in the physical layout of school buildings, as well as in the social life of schools; and as White students can access most mainstream curricula, which portray people who look

53

like them and viewpoints that affirm their history and belonging. Whiteness confers the

property right of reputation and status in the way that identifying a school as majority

non-White automatically diminishes its status, in the way that students in bilingual

education tend to have lower status in schools and in the way that "suburban" is a term

that has come to be associated with excellence and Whiteness, while "urban" has come to

be associated with failure and Blackness. Finally, the property right of Whiteness to

exclude has been demonstrated historically in education through legalized segregation

and the prohibition against education for Blacks. More recently, it appears in the form of

segregation through academic tracking, gifted and honors programs that are

predominantly White and special education programs that are predominantly Black.

Because Whiteness is defined as "the absence of Blackness" the right to exclude is an

implicit part of the definition of Whiteness (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). The long

and complicated history of racism in the U.S. ensures that race continues to play a central

role in structuring opportunities and interactions, particularly within education.

Racialized inequality exists today precisely because the U.S. government

historically gave different opportunities to people based on race. And yet, we work hard

at not seeing and not talking about these differences. As Pollock (2004) writes, "In a

society that already thinks racially but hates to do so, as we have seen, people often resist

mentioning the very racial patterns they seem most trained to reproduce" (p. 171).

How does race affect students in classrooms?

Critical race theory (CRT) is premised on the idea that racism is a normal and

permanent (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001) part of life in the US. In other words, rather

than seeing it as exceptional and surprising, CRT expects that racism will be everywhere, in part because of the unique history of the United States, which was founded on principles of racial inequality. Schools must deal with both the racism of the broader social context that comes into the building as part of students' lives, as well as the racism that is reproduced within the school. All situations in schools are contextualized within a larger racialized system (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005, p. 16).

Racism permeates every aspect of schooling, including curriculum, testing, teacher-student relationships and the distribution of resources (Ladson Billings and Tate, 1995). School curricula and children's literature serve as vehicles for perpetuating racism, in the ways in which people of color are depicted, or excluded all together in the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2005). Teachers ask for a list of strategies for successfully teaching African American students (p. 19), without acknowledging the critical and influential ways in which racism interferes with instruction and learning (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Assessments, in terms of biased testing and intelligence testing are normed on Whites (Ladson-Billings, 1998). All of these factors of schooling are "a function of institutional and structural racism" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 20). Ladson-Billings and Tate, write that the racism that affects students in schools is not the overt racism typical of segregated education in the Jim Crow South:

> Most prospective teachers are not racist in the sense that they overtly discriminate and oppress people of color. Rather the kind of racism that students face from teachers is more tied to Wellman's (1977) definition of racism as "culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities." (p. xviii in Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 225).

55

Multiple studies have demonstrated what this type of racism in education looks like in schools. In a controlled experiment, Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson and Bridgest demonstrated that teachers tend to interpret culturally Black styles of African American youth as an indication that African American students are "lower in achievement, higher in aggression and more likely to need special education services than students with standard movement styles" (Neal et al., 2003). In this way, a difference in cultural style that is unrelated to student academic performance may likely lead to negative outcomes for students. Similarly, research has shown that teachers often hold lower expectations for students of color than for White students (Ferguson, 2004 and Diamond, 2004). Given the impact of teacher expectation on student achievement, low expectations and racist interpretations of Black students' expressions can have profound effects.

The term "disproportionality" has been used to describe the all too common national phenomenon of the disproportionate placement of students of color in classes of special education, and of White students in honors classes (Blanchett, 2006). Any time that a racial group is overrepresented or underrepresented in an education program in relation to their population proportion within the overall student population, disproportionality is occurring. Teachers are often responsible for determining whether a child is placed in honors classes or special education, and they therefore have a significant impact on "disproportionality." That a Black student may be more likely to be recommended for special education because he demonstrates Black cultural styles at school (Neal et al., 2003) is a reason that teachers must have a critical consciousness about race in their classrooms.

Another way that race affects students is through "stereotype threat" (Steele, 1998), which affects standardized test scores and other school performance measures. Stereotype threat is the result of exposure to stereotypes about a student's racial group, particularly with regard to the widespread false notion that Blacks are less intelligent than Whites. Nobody is immune to stereotype threat: it affects women with regard to gender stereotypes and it affects White people with regard to stereotypes that assert that Asians are better than Whites at math (Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, Steele, and Brown, 1999). However, because intelligence stereotypes are more widespread for Black Americans (see *The Bell Curve,* Hernstein and Murray, 1996), stereotype threat tends to have greater consequences for Black Americans. There are effective methods for combating stereotype threat, but their implementation require that teachers understand the ways in which race and racism affect their students as a result of living in a racialized society. Understanding concepts like stereotype threat can help teachers support their students in strategic and meaningful ways.

Racial microaggressions

Racial microaggressions also have a profound effect on the experience of students in schools. Sue's (2007) theory of microaggressions describes how racism can often take a form so small, that the perpetrator rarely even realizes they have done or said something offensive. Although they are individual actions, microaggressions get their power from their pervasiveness in the larger social structure. As a result, microaggressions occur in formulaic and predictable ways. An example of a microaggression is when an Asian American person is told, "You speak English so well." The speaker may actually intend

57

the statement as a compliment and may not mean to be hurtful. However, if the person receiving the comment was born in the U.S. and English was her first language, the comment would imply that she seems foreign and that, judging from how she looks, she must not speak as her first language. The comment seems harmless to the speaker because the racial social structure of the U.S. deems it permissible to assume Asian American are not native to the U.S. And yet the effect on the individual Asian American, especially after hearing such a comment repeatedly from several different people, is "You are not a true American."

The cumulative effect of microaggressions is to alienate and demoralize people of color (Sue, 2007). Again, because microaggressions are not obvious to individuals who commit them, it is possible for those individuals to believe they have no racist intent, while saying and doing things that have a racist impact. Furthermore, because microaggressions are often intended to be complimentary or innocuous, most people who commit them do not recognize their racist undertones. People who receive microaggressions struggle with how to combat them without seeming reactionary. Often the racial slights that students of color and their families experience in predominantly White schools are not overtly racist things that would be obvious to all involved. Often they are microaggressions, which have a profound effect on the person of color receiving them while bystanders may not even recognize they have occurred. This is one explanation for why White people and people of color often have different perceptions of the racial dynamics of the same institution.

School as a site where race is constructed

Children bring culture to school with them and that culture is informed by their race and their experiences with racism, among many other factors. But school is also a place where race is socially constructed. It is one of the places where children learn what it means to be the race that they are. Tracking, for example, is a phenomenon in which students are divided by skill level into high, medium and low level classes and given different curricula, instructional techniques and peer groups based on the level that is determined to be appropriate for them. However, Black students are disproportionately placed in low classes while White students are disproportionately placed in high classes (Oakes, 2002). This can lead to a perception among students that the high classes are where White students belong to the exclusion of Black students (Tyson, 2011). In Karolyn Tyson's (2011) research, Black students in predominantly *White* schools endured much more identity conflict over being in advanced classes. They tended to feel like they did not belong there and they received pushback from their Black peers who felt they were "being uppity" or "acting White" (Tyson, p. 17). In contrast, in predominantly *Black* schools in which the advanced classes were full of Black students, there was no such construction of honors placement as the domain of Whiteness. Thus race can be constructed within a localized school experience in ways that impact students' identities as scholars.

Similarly, the marginalization of English Language Learners in entirely separate classes from the mainstream population of students who speak English as a first language does not merely impact students' instructional experiences, but it determines the

59

opportunities available to them as well as the peer groups they are exposed to. Because there are rarely opportunities for honors, gifted or AP instruction in languages other than English, English Language Learners are restricted from developing their academic skills until they develop proficiency in English. This constructs English Language Learners as permanently remedial students (Nieto, 2009).

In short, students bring culture to school with them (culture that is often, though not always, informed by their race), which impacts how they experience schools. And simultaneously schools socially construct race, they give meaning to Whiteness and Blackness and Asianness (and more), by how they are structured, what they value, and how they do or do not accommodate the cultures that students bring with them. Race has always shaped a student's experience in school. Historically it determined whether and where one could go to school. Today, it also influences how their teacher might respond to them when they get there, whether people who look like them occupy seats in AP classes or in special education and whether their home culture, which is a fundamental part of who they are, is valued and respected by the school. White teachers need to understand race and the role they play in the classroom as White teachers teaching students of color if we are ever going to achieve educational equity.

How race mattered in this study

Different teachers in my study were called on to do the following things, their work within their race inquiry groups offering them more clarity of mind and commitment of purpose in accomplishing these tasks:

- Look closely at how they set and communicated expectations.

60

- Realize that they are White people who are seen by students of color and their families as a White person in a country with a legacy of racism.

- Respond when Black students talk about their hair or say that they cannot participate in something because of their hair. Realize that hair issues are different for Black students than for White students, but maintain the presence of mind to determine what the student needs in the moment. Sometimes this meant pushing the student beyond their discomfort, but sometimes it meant letting them sit out.

- Recognize and name racial trends: ask what it might mean if multiple families of color are leaving the school, or that the advanced classes have only White students.

- Recognize stereotypes, not only in literature, but in their own evaluations of students, as well as those of counselors and administrators. Interrogate one's judgments of students for common stereotypes and determine whether those evaluations are true to the student.

- Intervene when students insult one another using race-based insults.

- Accommodate and incorporate student differences, specifically when related to home culture

- Recommend which students get tested for gifted education, which for special education and which for behavioral problems with an awareness of how racism often comes into play when these decisions are made.

- Respond to and participate in the conversations about race that the students are already having. Like any other conversation among students – join/intervene/ignore when appropriate.

- Be willing to bring race or an analysis of racism into the conversation when it is appropriate. Break the norm of colormuteness.

The teachers who participated in this study all had their own reasons for believing that it was important for them to learn about race:

Ali: Why do you think it's important, particularly for a White teacher, to know about race or to think about race?

61

Todd:… I guess the best way to put it is like to me, like in my class we were talking about being colorblind and I think it's really impossible. Like it's kind of, kids are gonna tell right away if you're a White teacher coming in and you're just like pretending just like that you fit in.

Ann said that it is important for teachers to think about race because it is a part of who students are:

Ali: …Why do you think it's important for teachers to think about race?

Ann: As a teacher you strive to be child-centered. Knowing what I know about race you cannot be child-centered if you ignore that. For many of the kids that is the first label that they have.

The chapters in this section demonstrate the ways that race matters in schools in ways that can be difficult to locate from the perspective of the teacher. Chapter 5 describes the way that racial exclusion seemed to occur in a kindergarten classroom, in spite of the fact that the teacher was carefully attuned to racial issues, particularly regarding curriculum and literature. Chapter 6 illustrates the importance of learning to apply concepts from the literature on race and education to classroom practice. The teacher, Todd Valenti, was familiar with the idea of expectations as a racial issue, but was unable to diagnose it as an issue in his classroom, because he thought he already had high expectations. Finally, chapter 7 explores the difference between talking about race in the classroom and consciously practicing racial socialization. Racial socialization is instruction that enables children to negotiate contexts defined by high levels of social, ethnic and cultural diversity. It is not just teaching facts about race – it addresses attitudinal, social and emotional development as well. Collectively these three chapters illustrate a few of the complex and under-recognized ways in which race matters in the classroom.

Chapter 5: STRIVING FOR AN ANTI-RACIST CLASSROOM

*What is the foundation? What are the roots of their behavior? ...I haven't
spent the time that I want to and that I need to, to understand the roots of
prejudice and racism even in our society and I know it has gone on since
the beginning of time but just to understand more of the roots of that.*
- Laurie

– Laurie Mendoza taught kindergarten at a racially diverse, historically White Quaker
independent school in which most of the families were middle-upper class. Though the
school was historically White, recent efforts at diversifying had led to the lower school
being extremely racially diverse. Laurie's classroom had a majority of children of color.

Laurie Mendoza is a White woman who took her husband's El Salvadoran

surname (he is Latino American). From the first day I met her, she talked about her

biracial children and her concerns about racism. She grew up in a working class White

family in a rural area nearby and she went to a local college. She said that she never

thought much about race until she got to college. In one of her small group meetings,

during a discussion of names, Laurie said her name used to be Lauren Marie Smith and

imitated her kids' response to her name, "Like c'mon mom, could you get any more

plain?" Another group member, an Asian American man, said, "Wow, I think I would

look at you differently if I knew you were Lauren Marie Smith." Laurie said, "In fact I

was really different back then."

Laurie taught kindergarten during the year that we worked together. In her

classroom she had 14 five year olds, five of whom were White, nine of whom were of

color. The kids of color included one Indian American, five African Americans, one

Afro-Caribbean and two biracial students. She was a teacher in a rapidly diversifying

lower school led by a woman of color who worked in anti-racism organizations at the

national level, in addition to her job as principal. Laurie was the cohort facilitator for her inquiry group, which meant that she had received extra training, above and beyond the rest of the group, about facilitation as well as about race. She also seemed to feel extra pressure to demonstrate competence as an anti-racist teacher because she had had access to this training.

In her initial interview, Laurie told me about her introduction to thinking about race through friends of color she met in college. She said, "I wanted to get in touch with this rhythm that sometimes comes out of me, but it never comes out of me with my rock and roll White friends, but it comes out with like jazz… they spurred something in my being that wasn't spurred with my… homogenous upbringing perhaps." Laurie appreciated the music and "culture" that her friends of other races brought into her life.

Laurie was engaged in learning about racism on many fronts. She told me that she did not just want to learn about it as a teacher, but as a wife, a mother and a sister. Each time she learned something new about race, she shared it with her three sisters. She talked with her husband about race and, the more she talked about it, the more he shared things he had never shared before.

When I met her, Laurie was already engaged in her action research project on multicultural literature. Her questions for her own research were these:

- *How does a young child begin to define beauty?*

- *How do we as adults/teachers form/guide/stereotype what is beauty by our comments? ex. You look so pretty today! I love your hair style!*

- *How do young children notice/understand differences, particularly skin color/shades.*

- *How can I create a curriculum to support a healthy development of self and diffuse the impact of bias and stereotypes?*

- *What actions can I take to improve my teaching re the understanding of beauty in a healthy non-biased way?*

- *What cultural and economic aspects influence the development of these ideas?*

At the time of my research in her classroom, Laurie had been teaching for about 20 years, 10 of which had been at Friends Independent. Her kindergarten classroom was filled with experiential learning through play. Students had at least an hour a day when their time was not structured. Throughout the rest of the day, students were encouraged to follow their interests and to find their own unique path into the learning at hand. In other words, there were multiple ways to be successful in Laurie's classroom; there was rarely one right answer.

Laurie also seemed to be immersed in the imaginary worlds that the children created. One day the students had created a Rita's Water Ice stand in the block corner and they had created a sign that said "Petas is coost," which Laurie explained meant "Rita's is closed." The students and Laurie were frequently involved in a game of pretend, involving things like child writing that I could not understand. On any given day that I was in her classroom, she was noticing many more and different things than I was noticing, in part because she was so intimately involved with what each student was doing or thinking. Where my observations became useful to her—and when I saw things that she did not—it was simply because we came to the classroom with different lenses. She was focused on the classroom as a whole, while I was able to look exclusively at race.

Chapter Theme: STRIVING FOR AN ANTI-RACIST CLASSROOM

Laurie's kindergarten classroom seemed to be an incredible place for children. She had a great mix of exploration and instruction. She was loving to all of her students. The class size was small. She infused the curriculum with great multicultural literature and she led interesting conversations about that literature. When the topic of race came up, she did not shy away, rather she engaged students fully.

Given Laurie's intentional work in creating an anti-racist curriculum, both of us were baffled by some of the ways in which certain Black students seemed to struggle in her classroom. There were two Black students who seemed to be excluded or demonized by their classmates at different times throughout the day. Additionally, within the first semester of school, three different Black families had told Laurie that they were going to transfer their children to a different school the following year. What was going on that created these racially disparate levels of satisfaction and comfort in her classroom?

As a researcher, I wanted to help Laurie understand this dynamic. How and why does racism still manifest itself in the classroom of a racially conscious teacher?

I started to think about it in the context of other scenarios in which unintentional actions lead to racist outcomes. The year before, Harvard professor Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. had been arrested at his own house when a neighbor suspected him of being a burglar. In this incident, Dr. Gates was returning from a trip. He and his driver were trying to open the door to his house, which was stuck. A neighbor called the police when she saw two Black men trying to break down the door to his house. When the policeman arrived at the house, he treated the two men as burglars. Gates had very little patience for

being an assumed burglar in his own home and did not cooperate with the police. The police, in turn, became physically aggressive, handcuffing and arresting Dr. Gates.

In this scenario, there does not seem to be any clear evidence of racism. The neighbor reported what she thought was suspicious activity to the police. Gates has said in retrospect that he was glad the neighbor called the police and hoped she would do so again if she thought someone was breaking into his house. The police did their job and responded to a specific call. Gates had every right to be angry at and resist the police. It is not clear who was at fault for the whole scenario. And yet, it is clear that the person who bore the brunt of the trauma, disrespect and alienation was the Black man, Dr. Gates. This case has enormous repercussions as it demonstrates the overwhelming challenge that Black men face in the US, as they are perpetually seen as Black (and therefore dangerous) before they are seen as individuals.

This scenario seems instructive as it exemplifies how racism can manifest in a way that punishes people of color (in this case Blacks, in particular) even when nobody is acting in an overtly racist way. This could help me to understand why there might be racist outcomes in the classroom of a thoughtful teacher like Laurie.

There seemed to be a group dynamic that was punishing or excluding certain students in Laurie's loosely structured, experiential learning based kindergarten classroom, one that Laurie did not seem to be causing. The group dynamic seemed to be reflecting our society at large. The lack of guidelines around free play in the classroom allowed unhealthy aspects of the group dynamic to persist unchecked. In other words, the group dynamic was not racist, but in order to make it anti-racist, Laurie would have to

approach it as consciously as she did her literature curriculum. Since we live in a racist

society, something as simple as free play can be a place where racism manifests itself.

Laurie understood the notion of active and conscious anti-racism when it came to

literature. She demonstrated the belief that as teachers, it is not enough to avoid being

racist, but we have to act in ways that are intentionally anti-racist in order to explicitly

eliminate the racist *impact* on students. But applying this belief to the classroom

dynamics was difficult, especially because her classroom was already structured

according to a particular philosophy, one that valued free and unstructured time for

kindergarteners. The challenge for Laurie was how to continue to have a kindergarten

classroom that was based on an experiential learning model yet still had enough rules and

guidance to help students feel safety and belonging.

Classroom vignette

At 8:00 am there were only a few students in the classroom and Laurie was talking with a Black parent about her daughter's medication. She later told me that she had a good relationship with this mother because the mother checked in everyday, but only for a minute or two, so it never felt like a big imposition.

The eight kids that were present at 8:15 were gathered around a marble game. Laurie knelt with them briefly to show them the game and they all began playing together.

After a short stint in which they all played with the marble game, one student broke away from the group to build a tower out of blocks.

Laurie began asking students one by one to join her at the craft table where they were supposed to complete an arts and crafts project (their "morning job") that they had started the day before.

Between 8:00 am and 9:00 am was "Choice time" and the kids were supposed to finish projects from the day before, but they also had the freedom to do what they wanted during this time. If the students were not working on their morning jobs, they could choose to play with anything in the room. A few boys played with blocks in the block corner. Three girls laid down with blankets in the dollhouse corner and talked. Three

68

more kids continued to play marbles. Three boys played with spaceships and talked. They also had the choice of a second craft project, which involved creating beaded hands ("Hamsa"). This project was being led by a White grandparent volunteer who was there for the duration of the free time to work with any students who chose to. There was no announcement about that option. Two girls worked on their three dimensional Hamsa projects with the grandmother volunteer.

At 8:35, Franklin, a Black boy, entered the room and looked around at all the students. He briefly wandered over to the where the girls were lying down, but quickly got up to look at other options. He asked loudly no one in particular, "Can I play at playhouse now?" Laurie said, "First come over here." Franklin had not yet started the moon craft project while most of the students in the room were already finished. Franklin asked Laurie, "Was I late?" She responded, "Yes you were." He looked down at the table in front of him.

Another Black student, Celine, came into the classroom shortly after Franklin and lingered at the doorway, seemingly unsure where to go or what do.

The girls in the house corner went up to Laurie to tell her there was a stink bug in the corner. Laurie looked at me and said, "Stink bug attack," and then captured it and flushed it in the toilet. "Most insects we release out the window, but not the invasive species."

Laurie saw Celine and asked her to go to the crafts table to work on her moon project with Franklin. At 8:50 both students finished their "morning jobs" and left the crafts table. Franklin seemed to be frantically trying to find somebody to play with, darting from one group to another, while Celine seemed to wander around the edges of the classroom, unsure what to do.

Mitchell, who was biracial, invited Franklin to play with spaceships. Celine finally found her way to the crafts table where she chatted with the three girls who were working on their "Hamsa" bead projects.

A Black student named Ava turned off the light. Laurie said, "Please freeze. Time to clean up and put everything back where it belongs. When you are finished, please meet me on the rug for morning meeting."

Rather than begin to clean up, Franklin picked up a space ship and flew it over the tower that another student had built. Laurie told him not to frustrate the girl who built the tower and to find something else to do. He said he didn't want to play alone. She said maybe if he went into the playhouse corner, someone would join him. The rest of the students were putting away the toys and games they had been playing with since they arrived a few minutes after 8:00. Franklin started to cry as the other students tore down the structures they had built.

69

Laurie sat on the rug waiting for the students to finish clean up. As students finished, they could join her for a game of "I spy." Someone said, "I spy something brown." Franklin shouted, "Xavier's skin color." The other students ignored him.

In order to get their attention, Laurie sang a short song with the words "5 4 3 2 1." At the end of it, she said "shhh" and Mitchell said, "blast off!"

During announcements, Laurie applauded the Hamsa projects that some of the students did with the grandmother volunteer. Multiple students said they didn't get to do it. Laurie reminded them that it's a choice and they can do it if they want to. The students who did participate shared the stories behind their projects. Twice Laurie asked Franklin not to touch the art projects. Franklin continued talking and touching the projects. She said, "Please do not touch, I asked you two times."

Laurie read the agenda for the day aloud. When she said, "Spanish with Magdalena," Franklin said, "Woo hoo!"

The agenda, written on a dry erase board, said the following:

Today is Thursday

8:00 choice time
9:00 morning meeting
9:45 snack/recess
10:15 art/science
11:15 Spanish
11:40 math
12:15 lunch/recess
1:30 story/rest
2:30 show and tell
2:50 dismissal

Laurie surveyed the class and said, "Please if you are sitting like Carl, Ava, Mitchell… give yourself a thumbs up. Franklin said, "I give myself a thumbs down."

Laurie's efforts to build an anti-racist classroom

      Before I entered the picture, Laurie was already doing many things in the

classroom that indicated her commitment to a heightened level of consciousness about

her own teaching and about the racial dynamics in her classroom. She shared, for

example, that she was noting who she called "sweetie" and "honey." She said that she called White boys "buddy" and that she was trying to check that and just call children by their names. This is an example of a practice that is so hard to notice about oneself and so hard to change. It was particularly striking that she realized she called White boys "buddy." If she was not tracking her interactions with students according to race (in other words, if she was trying to take a colorblind approach), she may never have realized this racial patterning. This is one of the many reasons that seeing race is useful: if we try to treat all children the same, we end up missing key ways in which our racial patterning favors some children over others. Laurie helped me to clarify the importance of being actively anti-racist as a teacher.

Whenever I was in Laurie's classroom, she demonstrated other ways that she was already taking an actively anti-racist approach to her classroom. She was constantly thinking about the books that she was reading to students and looking to see what race the author was, often telling the students about the author and naming the race of the author. She was especially careful to name race when the author was White because this was a learning edge for her: learning to name Whiteness and talk about it openly.

During my observations, when I asked Laurie if there was anything in particular she wanted me to look at for her or notice, she answered, "Anything that stands out or that comes up for you would be really helpful…I want to be able to make sure I'm not missing something. I want to be able to make sure that I'm not presenting something…because I'm so used to it, that is racist or biased. I want to learn how to, you know, just pay attention better." Laurie's openness was incredibly inviting to me as a

71

White ally and as a researcher, and it enabled me to be able to look beyond her questions

of multicultural curriculum and focus on group dynamics in the classroom as well.

From the beginning of our work together Laurie asked questions about how to

support some of her African American students:

> *How to gain more knowledge to support a situation where perhaps a handful of my children of color, primarily African American/inner-city students, how the culture that they experience in their home and neighborhood may be different…. I've heard from some of these individuals, …mostly colleagues, who say, "I live two lives. When I leave my neighborhood, you know, I put on this (Friends Independent School) face, identity and when I go home to my family I talk different and I walk different and I have two identities."*

In this first question, Laurie seemed to express that she knew something was

different for some of her students, and she knew that the difference was rooted in race

and culture, but she didn't quite know how; she wasn't even sure how to phrase the

question, much less find answers to it. How she even got to the point of asking the

question is revealed in the last sentence, when she shares that the reason she asks this

question in the first place is because she had heard colleagues of color share their

experiences. She was able to realize that her students of color might feel a particular way

by listening to adults of color that she worked with talk about their experiences. What

she wanted to know was how their home lives were different from their school lives, and

how she, as a teacher, should respond in order to support students who felt they had two

identities in that same way.

At the time that we worked together, I only had a vague sense of how to help

Laurie think about these questions so that she could get closer to finding answers for

herself. To the extent that I could articulate my ideas, I shared them with Laurie. But

72

many of the ideas that are present in this chapter were only developed months after our research relationship ended, and I had time to mull over all the different data from her classroom. These include first, the idea that explicit instruction about school and expectations may help ease the transition for families unfamiliar with the school's culture. This might be particularly important for students in Laurie's care because they were in kindergarten and therefore had never experienced the school's culture before. Second, I wondered how personal disposition (influenced by a cultural congruence or incongruence with the classroom) might contribute to the success of some students and the failure of others. Third, Laurie demonstrated what it looks like to intervene with students around group dynamics issues with gender. I wondered how she might use that skill to stage similar interventions around race with students. In conclusion, given that so much of this chapter is about how cultural congruence impacts a child's experience of a school, it seems important to question whether a teacher's job is to help a child to assimilate to the school's culture, or to help the school and her own classroom culture be changed by the children and their families.

Instruction is always informed by culture

Independent schools tend to have a long history of traditions and ways of being that are both explicit and covert, both articulated to the school community, and unnamed as part of "how we do things." There are often ways of doing things that the entire staff and faculty understand, that is never stated explicitly as a rule or expectation, leaving families to rely on social networks with other families and with teachers to learn how things are done. In Laurie's classroom, one step towards better accommodating her

students might be to state explicitly what the expectations were so that students and parents would be able to comply.

Formal instruction in Laurie's classroom began at 9:00 am when the students cleaned up from their informal playtime and the group convened as an entire class for the first time of the day. As the vignette at the beginning of this chapter shows, students started to arrive at 8am and they had time to play freely with whatever or whomever they chose until 9:00am. During free time, Laurie called them over to the worktable one or two at a time so that they could finish projects that they started the day before. Students tended to trickle in slowly between 8 and 8:15, and almost all of them arrived by 8:15. Many days, two students came in after 8:30 and sometimes closer to 8:50, leaving them only 10 minutes to play. These two students were both Black and they were the darkest skinned children in the classroom. When they arrived, they often skirted the edges of the playgroups that formed in the first 30 minutes of free play before they arrived, and whatever they ultimately chose to do was cut short by the need for them to finish their work, as the other students had already done earlier in the hour.

Technically the students were not "late," but they missed out on important time with their peers, time to finish their projects, and playing and relaxing before the day began. This may be one of the reasons that these two particular students didn't fit into the class socially the way the other students did. They tended to bounce from playgroup to playgroup and they often got reprimanded by the other children, who told them that their behavior was not appropriate. They also missed out on the time meant to help them catch up on work. Part of the culture of the school seemed to be that the school did not

strictly enforce an arrival time. However, these particular children seemed to suffer big consequences as a result of their tardiness. Not having a hard and clear rule about what it meant to be on time was hurting the children that did not get to school by 8:15.

In addition to not being explicit about the classroom expectations, it seemed that Laurie tended to give instructions in a way that minimized her authority in the classroom. Lisa Delpit writes about how Black students in White teachers' classrooms can misinterpret directions because they may be more accustomed to direct, authoritative instruction. A White teacher, who believes that her authority is derived from her role as a teacher, may give directives in the form of a question such as, "Do you think it's time to start working now?" rather than giving direct instruction such as "It's time to start working now." This may make it difficult to communicate actual intentions to students who are accustomed to direct instruction. An example of this can be seen when Laurie asked, "How about if everyone sits right?" The other students in the classroom crossed their legs and Franklin lay down on the ground. At this point, Laurie could have clarified what she wanted, but she didn't say anything about the fact that he was lying on the ground when what she actually wanted was for all of them to sit cross-legged on the floor. She almost always asked her students "nicely" (or rather, in a way that is commonly seen by White people as nice, but is actually passive and indirect) not to do something, rather than giving direct instruction and then enforcing consequences when they did not do it. With Franklin, whom she called her "greatest challenge," she once asked him to "sit right" three times during a 20 minute lesson. After the third time, she did not enforce it. Laurie also frequently told students that she would not call on them if

they called out without raising their hands, but then, once their concerns were voiced (regardless of whether they called out), she would address them, giving student incentive to bypass the hand-raising protocol.

This strategy stood out in stark contrast with the health teacher, who came into Laurie's room once a week to teach wellness for an hour. Craig was an African American man, who made his expectations clear. As soon as he came into the room, students scrambled for his attention and he said, "Oh no, we're not calling out, we are not going to do that today, raise your hand if you want to speak." Students would sit cross-legged and upright on the carpet, hands raised, waiting for him to call on them. He would then go on to demand specific behavior from students. He said, "I'm looking for students who are sitting quietly. I don't see everyone's eyes. Now I have a group where everyone's ready." He would then begin his lesson with a whisper. He stopped talking when Mitchell called out and Mitchell put a hand over his mouth. He would not continue the lesson if all of the children were not following the rules.

Laurie worked hard to build affinity with all of her students, and was aware that having a relationship with her helped her students build social capital; at that age, students want to be seen as having approval from the teacher. But she did not seem to realize that the inverse could also be true, that when she disciplined students, she helped them fit into the social expectations of the classroom so that they could feel more comfortable, and other students could feel more comfortable with them. This became clear to me as I watched the children begin to discipline one another. When Laurie did not discipline students, students took it upon themselves to enforce the rules, which in

turn pitted students against one another rather than building community. When she

disciplined students, they did not have to take on the role of policing one another, which

they frequently did, by telling on one another or simply by giving direct instruction to one

another. The following example shows how students tended to enforce rules with one

another in the absence of a strict structure from teachers.

At snack time one day, the teacher's aide announced the snack for the day, "Take three
nilla wafers a piece and a big handful of pretzels. Bon Appétit!" Franklin reached out
and touched each of the nilla wafers on the plate. The other students had to tell him,
"Just 3."   He took three nilla wafers. Next he proceeded to put a pretzel on his face.

Another student told him "It's old." (Meaning that's an old trick/joke.) *Franklin told the*
teacher's aide and instead of reprimanding him for putting his pretzel on his face, she
said to the offending student, "Well is that nice? If you make a joke and I tell you,
"That's old," wouldn't that make you feel bad?" A few minutes later, Franklin flicked a
piece of pretzel across the room. She said to him, "Franklin, it's not time to play with
food, it's time to eat it." He answered her, " I'm going to put on another pair of glasses"
and he proceeded to put pretzels in his eye sockets as if they were glasses.   At this point,
even though he had been told it wasn't time to play with his food, he continued to play
with his food without any comment from the adults.

Laurie had been concerned for Franklin since the beginning of the year. She said

that she felt the other students quickly labeled him as bad and that she was trying to

interrupt that dynamic by insisting that he was not bad. But I question whether she

should have taken a different approach and actually reprimanded him, with

consequences, when he was indeed being "bad." Instead, he was further alienated from

his peers as they attempted to ensure that he behaved appropriately. This seemed to

happen mostly during snack and free choice time.

Here is another snack time scenario:

Franklin got the cookies first and took them one at a time, but then put one back and took
a different one. The students at the table got mad, but they were already mad because he

took the cookies first. Laurie had already told them that he could take cookies first. She said, "There's no reason why he shouldn't be able to take the cookies first."

Celine took five cookies and the other girls told her she couldn't take five. She put two cookies back and then the other girls told her people are going to get her germs. Bria, a Black peer, told her to throw the extra cookies away. Celine was clearly unsure what to do. She looked at me, she looked at the other girls. They said she had to throw them away because she already touched them but she was not allowed to have five. She threw two away. She continued to stand throughout snack, not sitting down at the table with the other children. I wondered to myself how it must have felt for a child who came from limited economic means to be told by her wealthier classmates that she had to throw a cookie in the garbage because she touched it.

Snack was nilla wafers and tortilla chips. Halfway through snack, some of the kids got up from the table, went to the refrigerator, and found salsa in the refrigerator to eat with their chips.

It was striking to me that they went to the refrigerator to find salsa, after Laurie already told them there wasn't any. When they found it, Laurie put out salsa for all the kids on individual plates. Their action struck me as a sign of privilege, although it was not only the White kids doing it.

In this example, the actions of the two children who were most excluded in the classroom were highlighted and derided by their peers. They both got in trouble for touching too many cookies and they both seemed alienated and alone during the rest of snack time, as a result of their interactions with peers. Three students, two White students and one Black student, went to the refrigerator and found salsa there. The teacher not only allowed them to get out the salsa once they had located it, but proceeded to pour it onto their plates for them in spite of the fact that the snack had been set out for them and she had already told them that there was no salsa. It was not clear what was and was not permissible. In Franklin's case, a teacher reprimanded the students for correcting him. But no adult noticed when the girls corrected Celine. How did this scenario help her understand what was right and wrong, or whether she belonged, in the classroom?

78

Because the rules were not clear and the classroom was generally permissive, both Franklin and Celine were heavily monitored by their peers. Whenever I visited, they would either get told on by their peers for a minor infraction, or they would be yelled at by their peers. I wondered how the flexible rules of the classroom exacerbated their marginalization. Again, there is nothing that Laurie was doing to purposefully exclude them; if anything she was going out of her way not to reprimand them in order to minimize their alienation. However, the lack of explicit boundaries and expectations seemed to lend power to certain students over others. I wondered Laurie's defense of Franklin ultimately meant that the students felt like they needed to watch him with more scrutiny.

When personal disposition complements behavioral expectations

The previous example demonstrated how a lack of explicitly stated expectations, combined with a possible home/school cultural incongruity, can position students as deviant or outsiders, without intention from any of the involved actors. The next example demonstrates how a congruity of personal disposition (possibly influenced by home culture) might position other students as successful, without conscious effort.

Most of the students of color in Laurie's class were Black, White or biracial (Black and another race). She had one Indian American student, Aya. Aya seemed to follow the other girls around and stick very close to them, both physically and emotionally. She did not play independently, nor did she play with boys, nor did she reach out to the students who did not fit in. Laurie said that she only played with girls

because she was shy and she felt safe with the girls. Laurie's perception was that she was protecting herself.

During one group discussion, Aya was called on to share her opinion three times. She was one of only a few students raising her hand, so Laurie kept calling on her. She would say, "Franklin, Bria, Virginia – if you call out again, you're going to the semi circle table. You need to stop interrupting. It's my turn to speak and I'm calling on Aya next, because she's raising her hand." I silently applauded Laurie for being firm about not interrupting, although she did not follow through by sending them to the semi circle table as she said she would. For the rest of this time, Aya got to talk the most because she consistently raised her hand. Multiple times, Laurie called on her and said, "Aya, thank you for raising your hand." I wondered whether culture played into this dynamic and to her own sense of herself as a model student. Aya's personal disposition seemed to tend toward the quiet side, at least in the school context. When she spoke, Aya's voice so soft, it was hard to hear what she said. Her quietness was highly valued in Laurie's classroom. I wondered how it made the other students feel, particularly those that had a tendency to want to call out, or for whom it was harder to raise hands. It's not that I think all the students shouldn't be expected to raise their hands; as I stated above, I think it is a critical part of clear expectations. But I wondered how it changed a student's experience of the class to be so quiet and shy that following certain rules came to her more easily. How then does this tendency to fit easily into the rules of behavior, because, perhaps, of a personal or cultural congruence, then influence her self-perception as a student as she gets older?

Contrast this to the very end of the vignette when Laurie said, "Please if you are sitting like Carl, Ava, Virginia… give yourself a thumbs up. "Franklin said out loud, "I give myself a thumbs down." In kindergarten, he was already starting to indentify as the bad student, while Aya was learning to see herself as a good student. How might personal disposition and culture have been pre-determining their actions and their response to the classroom environment, which in turn influenced the teachers' interpretations of their actions and their self perceptions as students?

Intervening with group dynamics

During one of my observations, Laurie provided an example of what an intentional group dynamics intervention with kindergarteners looks like. To set the context for the intervention, it is important to understand how much the students in this classroom tended to segregate by gender.

In general, boys and girls both used the blocks and the kitchen, but not at the same time. When the girls were in the kitchen, they would sometimes cook, sometimes just hang out and talk or lay down. When the boys were in the kitchen, in addition to pretending to fry eggs and roll dough, they pretended to vomit into the sink. One day, as I sat next to some thin pieces of leather string and differently shaped blocks, I observed girls making necklaces. A few minutes later, once the girls had become bored and moved on to something else, I noticed two boys playing with the same toys. Instead of jewelry, they were making machines from the same materials. Another day I saw the boys playing in a store they had built and I asked, "Is this still Rita's Water Ice"? One African

81

American boy answered me, "No, it's haircut." The boys had created a play space called haircut.

Boys and girls did not exclusively participate in games that aligned stereotypically with their identified sexes, but they did tend to play in gender segregated, mixed race groups. The exceptions were two of the Black children who didn't seem to fit in with either group, and one White girl. The White girl seemed to confidently play with either group, as well as by herself. Overall, the classroom seemed highly gender segregated. At snack, there was often a girl table, a boy table and a mixed gender table of leftover children. To control noise levels, students were only allowed to talk to the others at their same table.

One week many of the girl students began competing for the attention of Amber, the most popular girl in the class. As a result, Amber was overwhelmed and other children felt left out. Laurie suggested to the students that they needed to problem solve about leaving people out. She said, "What I have noticed is that people are following certain friends and I think some people are feeling left out. Let's make it clear – there's no leaving people out. We're not going to do girl table, boy table, girl club, big person, little person, dark hair and light hair. We're all going to be included. How about we have some suggestions about what we can do so people aren't left out?" Carl, the only White boy in the class, suggested that they move all the tables together. Up until that point, there had been two large rectangular tables and one smaller semi-circular table where the students ate their snack and their lunch. At his suggestion, both Laurie and the other students were extremely excited and affirming. The students pushed all the tables

together collaboratively and then sat themselves boy girl boy girl. Two of the girls did not catch on and continued to try to sit next to Amber. However, most of the kids were visibly excited by the idea. One student remarked, "Now we can talk to everybody!" A few minutes into snack, the students decided to play telephone and, in doing so, created a game that involved everybody around the table. Laurie said, "Snack time was the quietest it's ever been."

This scenario was an excellent example of how to actively work against exclusion in the classroom. The students were working together across gender and race, they were not fighting and they were problem solving collectively. This example gives a window onto what it might look like to conduct an intervention around other forms of exclusion and segregation in the classroom. For a brief moment, all of the students were a part of the whole. A few days later, the tables were moved back to their original position for ease of project completion.

Making space for families of color everywhere – not just in the curriculum

Working with and learning from Laurie helped me to see how multiculturalism extends beyond the curriculum and into the ways that we integrate all of the cultures that teachers, students and their families bring to school. Laurie also had questions about the different expectations that some of her families of color expressed for their students.

- *I have some, tends to be more families of color, not just African American - Asian, Native American - who have an expectation of more academic rigor in my kindergarten classroom… and it might look, it's very different than the way I teach. It might look like more homework, more worksheets, things that this school as a progressive school in approaching education doesn't go to.*

- *Yeah I have my two families… who have reported that their children are visiting other schools for next year. …So what I've tried to do is… seek help about why is this happening and what can we do for these families who might be seeking a school with a different reputation for the sake of their children who are minorities to have better chance of succeeding.*

- *I feel bad, like I feel that there are some of my families that actually leave because for a minority to achieve what a White person can achieve they need to work a lot harder and they need to have a different resume perhaps… They need that different kind of an academic experience and they need that… ivy league college after their name for them to be able to succeed in the world and that's what their parents experience and I understand that or would like to understand that.*

In these questions, Laurie seemed to be acknowledging that there were ways in which she did not understand all of the dynamics that affected the experiences of some of her families of color. She recognized, for example, that she did not actually understand this phenomenon of Black families having a different academic expectation than that provided at her progressive, experiential private school, and she wanted to understand this.

What could Laurie do, not only to find out the answers to these questions, but to begin to change things in her classroom to make things better for her students and their families?

For a school that was actively trying to recruit families of color, and a teacher who wanted so badly for students of color to be successful in her classroom, it is worth asking in this situation, "What would it look like to honor the requests of families who want the classroom and the school work to be more structured? How much would it compromise our progressive values to capitulate to their requests? Is there a way in

which it is in line with our values of inclusion to sacrifice certain teaching methods in order to accommodate methods preferred by some families of color?" For progressive schools in particular, it seems critical to ask, "To what extent is the school open to changing in order to accommodate the values and beliefs of the families that comprise the school?"

Laurie felt that Black parents' requests for worksheets and homework, in particular, were contrary to the educational philosophy of the school and that they were emblematic of a bad match. I suggest that the educational philosophy of the school has to be a synthesis of the school's resources and the parent's expectations. Certainly many White middle class parents made demands on this school regularly. Teachers frequently shared examples of how White parents got what they wanted from the school. It may be useful to question why it is that when White parents complain, they often get what they want, while when Black parents complain, the school assumes it is a bad match, rather than working with them to honor their requests. Finally, as discussed earlier in this chapter, families need support adjusting to a new school culture. When a given family does not seem to fit in with the school culture, this may be an indication of a communication breakdown (including confusing or unstated rules) rather than an inherent mismatch. The more explicit a school can be with school and classroom philosophies, expectations and procedures, the easier it will be for families and children to make informed decisions about how to participate

Holidays and heroes multiculturalism

Throughout the year, Laurie's inquiry project focused on student conceptions of beauty and on multicultural literature, working to ensure her students had "windows" onto other peoples' lives and "mirrors" of their own lives (Sims Bishop, 1990) and that they were aware of the race of the authors they read. With respect to multicultural literature, Laurie was conscientious and thorough. Her action research question and her project were both very carefully developed and refined, and they contributed to her own racial identity development, as well as to a classroom that was more supportive to her students of color and that expanded the horizons of her White students.

When we first started working together, I labeled Laurie's multicultural curriculum questions as "holidays and heroes" multiculturalism, which is an academic term for an approach to multiculturalism that is superficial, focused only on celebration, and misses some of the more complex and real aspects of having many different cultures together, including the differences in power. Teachers often focus on diversifying their curriculum while overlooking the very real relational needs of individual students of color. I felt that Laurie's emphasis on multicultural literature would distract her from thinking about the important issues of group dynamics that clearly mattered to her students' experiences in her classroom even more than the literature they read. In spite of these reservations, I continued to support her thinking about multicultural literature and tried to offer different ways of analyzing and evaluating the images projected by that literature. Laurie attended a workshop that I led on evaluating racism in media images

and in children's literature and she followed up, reading articles that I sent her and working to apply critical frameworks to the literature she chose to read with her students.

What I noticed in our correspondences together was that she generally seemed to respond best to my comments regarding literature and multiculturalism. This seemed much more accessible to her than the comments I made on group dynamics. The main lesson for me after this year of work was that what helped her move forward the most seemed to be my comments and observations that were rooted in her own original questions. Those were not necessarily the comments that would make everything better for everyone in her classroom, but they were the ones that kept her teaching and asking questions. And even though she asked me to comment on anything that I noticed, she did not seem particularly responsive to the comments I made that were not related to her questions.

In the year following my research in her classroom we sat in her cohort group, and I listened carefully to her questions about multiculturalism. At first I felt frustrated by the fact that she continued to pursue what I considered a "holidays and heroes" multicultural approach in her classroom. But as she spoke, I realized that in some ways the "holidays and heroes" approach might be right for who she was, and for the age level that she taught. The "holidays and heroes" method helped her students to be proud of who they were and get to know one another better. The following is an example of how it helped her students bring their full selves to her classroom.

One of Laurie's projects was for all the students bring in their favorite song for the class to listen to. When students shared songs, Laurie remarked how happy she was

that the students did not tend to bring in music that was stereotypical of their groups. The children's selections were unpredictable. But sometimes they did bring music that seemed to be deeply connected to their families' cultures. When Aya brought in Indian music, Laurie noticed that it was one of the first times she willingly and independently shared her Indian culture with the class in this way. Laurie described how she asked Aya whether it was a listening song or a dancing song. Aya said "dancing," but then she waited until the other children danced before she began to dance as well. Laurie felt that she could see Aya was waiting to be validated before showing how much joy she took in the music.

Laurie was giving the children multiple opportunities to demonstrate their differences, to share their home cultures and to express their own individual preferences. In these ways, I came to see that perhaps the kind of multiculturalism that celebrates music and tradition (the "holidays and heroes" approach) was appropriate for kindergarteners. And because it was also one of the primary reasons that Laurie cared about race, it acted as an anchor for her in this work as well.

As a consultant to the Race Inquiry Community at FIS, part of my job was to help teachers develop their questions. Rather than discourage Laurie from continuing on this road, I suggested to her that she look into the "holidays and heroes" approach and the ways in which it is developmentally appropriate, as well as how to avoid the pitfalls of the critiques that have been made of it. Other next steps for Laurie might involve expanding her definition of culture to include how racial microaggressions affect her

students' experiences in the classroom and how giving and receiving instructions are

influenced by her own culture.

Chapter 6: HOLDING AND COMMUNICATING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

(A)s much as I want to be like… "I can relate to what you're going through," I really can't and I don't know what I would be like if I had to deal with what they have to deal with. So sometimes I don't even know like how to talk to them. I don't know what's appropriate, I don't know like what will be helpful to them. And so sometimes I feel like it's better not to address things at all and I think when that happens it also contributes to not having high enough expectations.

<div align="right">-Todd Valenti, 7th Grade Science</div>

Todd taught 7th grade science at a K-8 public school in Philadelphia where almost 100% of the student body was Black. Most of his students came from poor and working class families and lived in the neighborhood around the school.

Todd grew up going to a racially diverse Catholic school in a post-industrial working class neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. When White flight changed the racial composition of his neighborhood, his middle class White parents decided to stay. Though he had many friends of different races as a child, he did not feel that his school experience prepared him in any way for his teaching. "You were not allowed to misbehave there, whereas in public school there's nowhere to kick students out… Things just never were out of control…And I have asked myself lately…is that because they were a better teacher than I am or is that because the environment was just different? I don't know."

Todd entered teaching through Teach For America (TFA) right after graduating from college. He had been looking for service-oriented work and he wanted to stay in the U.S. He was an African American History/Africana Protest Studies major in college and, when he applied to teach through TFA, he was assigned by the Philadelphia School District to teach seventh grade science. He assumed he would find opportunities to connect with his students around African American history, but found that his students

were not passionate about it, in part because they did not know much about it and in part because when he was with them, they were focused on science.

The school where Todd taught seventh grade science was a predominantly Black K-8 middle school located in a predominantly Black, poor and working class section of downtown. It was close enough to some of the major universities in the city to be threatened with gentrification, but far enough away that, for the most part, the children who attended the school lived within walking distance of the school. Todd had chosen to buy a house in the neighborhood, a few blocks away from the school. At the time of the study, Todd had been teaching there for four years.

To get to Todd's classroom on the fourth floor, I had to go through a set of metal detectors, sign in at the security desk and then again in the main office, where I would wait while they called Todd out of his classroom to escort me to the 4th floor. We took a freight elevator upstairs and passed a security guard in the hallway just outside his classroom before going into room 409.

When Todd first started coming to the inquiry group, he taught six classes a day of seventh grade science. According to his self-report, he had varying, but significant levels of success with each of his classes. The hardest group of students that he had all day was his homeroom: fifteen boys and four girls. Over the winter break, his principal changed the middle school schedule to make all classrooms self-contained classrooms, with each homeroom teacher teaching their homeroom students for the entire day. Instead of teaching science to all of the seventh graders in the school, Todd would now be responsible for teaching reading and math to his homeroom every day until they had

completed the state standardized test in April. He did not know this at the time the decision was made, but the principal would ultimately decide to keep his homeroom self-contained in this manner even after the standardized tests, until school let out in late June.

In December, at the very beginning of our work together, Todd had questions about his homeroom, but his questions were limited because he only saw them for two periods a day, for science and homeroom. His questions focused more broadly on all of his classes. By our second inquiry group meeting in January, however, the students in his homeroom were all he talked about. From that point forward, all of Todd's questions revolved around his homeroom students, how to teach an inclusion class (including transitions and differentiation) and how to teach reading and math, two subjects that he had not yet learned to teach, as he had spent the previous three years developing his science pedagogy. "It's one thing to motivate them for 90 minutes, but six and a half hours I'm not very good at." In addition to teaching the same students all day, Todd had to differentiate his lessons for students who had a range of reading levels from second to eleventh grade.

Todd called them the "misunderstood class." The previous school year, they had gone six months without having a permanent teacher. The students in the other homeroom, who had had a permanent teacher for the previous school year, were all doing well because, according to Todd, their learning had not been interrupted. Multiple students in his homeroom were repeating the seventh grade. After one observation, I pointed out a group of exceptionally small and seemingly immature boys, who all sat at the same table group. I asked if they were supposed to be in a lower grade. Todd said

92

that they were some of the only kids in the class who were in the right grade. Many of the other students had been held back; two or three of the boys in this seventh grade classroom were upwards of six feet tall. This class had enough students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that, by law, they were supposed to have two teachers in the classroom at all times, one of whom should have been certified in special education. However, Todd was the only teacher in the classroom, and he was not certified in special education.

Chapter Theme: HOLDING AND COMMUNICATING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

When Todd first joined the inquiry group, all of his inquiry questions revolved around addressing race-based insults in the classroom. Like Laurie, he had a particular conception of what it meant to ask questions about race, and this involved the most explicit ways that he saw race mattering in the classroom: the times when students used race to insult one another.

The subject of expectations did not become a topic of my conversations with Todd until, after a few months of working together, I brought it up as a result of my interpretation of what was happening in his classroom. Expectations emerged as the theme for Todd's chapter when it became clear that expectations were at the root of many of his other questions, and that he had very few resources to help him develop a culture of high expectations in his classroom.

Low expectations are an often-unrecognized factor in student success or failure, and yet they can be highly influential (Good and Brophy, 2002). Some educators have posited that low expectations are both a form of racism, which limits the opportunities of

93

the children for whom the low expectations are held, as well as the result of the unconscious racism that teachers have not had the opportunity to disprove, confront or examine (Landsman, 2004; Holbrook, 2006). This chapter will use Todd's experience to demonstrate the obstacles that some teachers confront in trying to have and communicate high expectations. Unconscious racism likely played a role in how Todd calibrated his expectations (indeed exploring his unconscious racism was one of the motivating factors for him to join the inquiry group), but it was more complicated than that. Todd wanted to have high expectations for his students because he knew that is what good teachers do. In fact, he thought he did have high expectations for his students, but he knew his students were not responding as if he did.

This chapter will explore Todd's relationship to expectations in four parts. First, he let his understanding of student circumstances overwhelm his expectations so that he made excuses for their failure and allowed the inertia of their difficult lives weigh down the bar until it was so low it would seem silly for them to try to hurdle. Second, he did not really know what his students were capable of, so he did not know how high to set the bar. Third, he never learned (and was not taught) how to communicate high expectations in a way that would evoke student response. Fourth, he saw his students as victims, but they were also agents, and he needed to treat them as both simultaneously at all times. Throughout these sections, this chapter will explore how Todd's racial positioning as a White man meant that he had a different relationship to hard work and the concept of meritocracy than his students, all of which positioned them differently in relationship to expectations. Somehow Todd constantly felt he should be able to do better if he worked

harder, if he knew more and if he put in more time. But he did not have the same

expectation of his students. Is that racial? Does it matter?

Classroom vignette

As the students started to fill the classroom after lunch, five minutes after the bell had rung, only six students were seated, three were still walking around the classroom, about six more had not returned yet and another six were not in school that day. One seemingly focused student, Malik, was coming and going with small Dixie cups of water, setting up for the experiment. Todd was standing in the doorway trying to get students from the hallway to come inside and Jenae, the only girl in the room, was dancing in and out of the doorway. Todd said to her: "Excuse me, have a seat now. Have a seat." She came in and sat down.

The students' chairs were attached to their desks and were arranged in small groups of three or four. The windows were open, but they only opened three inches, and there was a heavy metal screen covering the open area, presumably so that nothing could go in or out. Todd worked from a large teacher's desk at the front of the classroom, and I usually sat at a similar desk in the back of the classroom, which was empty, aside from the worksheets he had laid out in preparation for the lessons he would teach that day.

Todd was always impeccably dressed when I visited his classroom. He tended to dress in business casual, with a button down shirt (sleeves rolled up), brown corduroys and nice brown shoes. His students seemed to comply, in part, with a dress code. At least half of the students wore nice polo shirts and khakis. A few kids wore t-shirts and jeans or cargo pants. On their feet, they wore Keds, sneakers and Adidas flip flops with socks. Todd told the class that to prepare for the science fair, they were going to review the scientific method. He asked a student to hand out a sheet called "Drops on a Penny Lab." A student asked if he could sharpen his pencil, and Todd gave him 30 seconds to do so. Because they didn't have a pencil sharpener in the classroom, the student left the room. As Todd explained the lab, 13 of the 16 students paid attention, two students were talking and Malik, who set up the lab, was listening to headphones.

Todd: How many drops of water can you fit on a penny? Khalid, I'm going to ask you this question. What do you do before you make your hypothesis? What do you have to do with your question? Starts with an r. Think about it. If you don't know, what do you do?

Khalid: Research!

Todd: Today, instead of doing your own research, we're going to do this together. That first word is cohesion. Any idea what that means? It's on your paper, but if you can't find it, "cohesion" looks like this: (writes it on the board). There are blanks in that

paragraph – it says water molecules are _____ to other water molecules. If we think back to the beginning of the year.

Student: Different?
Todd: Remember how we said at the beginning of the year?
Student: Attracted.
Other student: How do you spell that?

Coming back with a newly sharpened pencil after a few minutes (not the allotted 30 seconds), the student who had left pressed the tip of his pencil into another boy's neck. The other boy didn't react.

Todd: What does it mean to be attracted to something?
Student: You like it.
Todd: Right. Water molecules like to stick together. The _____ of water has _____ charge. That sounds kind of confusing. So write that in, "the oxygen end has a negative charge, and the hydrogen end has a positive charge."

As Todd proceeded to set up the experiment, students interrupted him to ask to use the bathroom, to complain that they didn't have anything to write with, to open the locked door to let students in from the hallway and to talk to other students. Todd told the students, "If you don't have a pencil, borrow one from a friend," and he then interrupted himself to arrange for students to lend one another pencils and to get a pen from his own desk to share with a student. A few minutes later another student returned from a trip to the bathroom with multiple pencils, which Todd distributed to students around the room.

As students began to struggle with the answers, Todd pointed out that he had written all of the answers on the board in a vertical list. All they had to do was copy the answers onto the worksheets. The experiment they were about to conduct involved testing the surface tension of water by seeing how many drops of water would fit on the head of a penny. As Todd tried to give the final directions before they began, students seemed to begin to ignore him. At one table, the boys were talking. Todd looked over and said, "Gentlemen?" but he didn't intervene beyond that. To another table, he said, "Gentleman in the back, you're not going to participate if you're not listening. Hassan, close your mouth." They stopped momentarily. A minute later they were talking again. At the table to my left, boys were laughing, kicking each other and playfully pinching one boy under the table.

Todd completed the instruction, "Drop water on the penny until some water runs off. Once any water goes off, you're done. Any questions?" At the back table, four boys were playing rock paper scissors. Next to me, three boys were taking turns slapping a bigger boy in the face. They were all, including the bigger boy, giggling.   When I asked Todd about this later, he said that this is the table of boys where all of them are actually the right age for 7th grade. He said the material was easy for them, so they often took turns

hitting or kicking each other. He also pointed out that one of the students in this group worked each night from 3pm to 11pm. "This is their playtime," he said as he finished his second caffeinated soft drink since lunch.

Expectations

Parker Palmer (1999) wrote in *The Courage to Teach* that often our greatest strengths as teachers are also our greatest weaknesses. This seemed to be true for Todd. He was compassionate and sympathetic, and he wanted to build strong relationships with his students in which mutual trust and respect were reciprocated. He had spent four years in college learning about African American history and he had a keen understanding of the history and current reality of systemic racism in the U.S. He was drawn to teaching by his desire for social justice and he stayed motivated by his love and concern for his students. Todd had extremely high expectations for his own performance as a teacher. He refused to blame the circumstances of his school for the shortcomings in his classroom and insisted on finding out what he could do better. He sought out professional development where he could find it, joined our inquiry group to gain new skills and invited me to observe his classroom even in the last few months of school when, as he said, many of the other teachers he knew had already given up. And yet all of this seemed to make it harder for him to hold high expectations for his students.

Todd repeatedly excused student failure and misbehavior because he felt that students were given so few emotional, academic and material resources with which to attempt to succeed. In this case, suggesting that Todd's low expectations were a result of his unconscious racism undermines the complexity of his situation. Ironically, Todd's extensive knowledge of systemic racism may have made it hard for him to hold high

expectations. And yet the concept that low expectations can create racial injustice by limiting the opportunities and the internal resources of those from whom little is expected, seems to hold. To prevent this, Todd seemed to need more support in connecting his practice to his ideals. Knowledge of systemic racism, which is critical for teachers to have, is of limited use if decoupled from the skills of holding students to high expectations *in spite of* their circumstances.

Todd did not bring up the question of expectations himself. This may be because it is not immediately apparent that expectations are a racial issue and we were focused, both in our interviews and in our inquiry group, on race. It may also be because he believed he held high expectations for his students. It was not until I brought it up that Todd began to consider whether his struggle to communicate high expectations could be related to the fact that he did not really believe his students were capable of more, given their circumstances:

> *I feel terrible, but like I think with some kids I didn't set high expectations for them because I didn't think they could do it maybe. Maybe like with Jake, before…I had like a turnaround with him and we started to have a better relationship, I don't think I…conveyed to him that I had high expectations because I don't think I did. It sounds terrible but like I really did kind of think like, "Well, that's what he can do." And I feel like that's terrible to be that way, but I think I was kind of that way with him.*

By the end of the semester, Todd had a sense that he was taking on too much responsibility for his students. He said, "Since we've been doing this, I feel like I baby the kids too and that goes along with making excuses for them and letting them slide sometimes. I feel like it's got to be more of them next year and less on me." Through the inquiry group work and through our work together during interviews and observations, he

began to do the work of linking his awareness of structural racism to a need to hold high

expectations for the individuals in his classroom.

> *Ali: Yeah. So how does your teaching differ because you have an understanding of (systemic racism) than if you didn't?*
>
> *Todd: …I mean that gets back to then the whole like where…you should be maintaining like those high expectations. Like we talked about a couple of weeks ago, you should be maintaining, like somehow messaging to the kids that like hard work brings results without telling them, "Well you're going to have to work twice as hard," even though I might think that. Preparing them in a way that's like respectful and not like hitting them over the head with like depressing, your-life's-gonna-suck type of way. Does that make sense? But then also think there's value in just straight up acknowledging that like there are these differences and that is the world we live in right now.*

Structural racism

Michelle Fine and Jessica Ruglis (2009) have written about the ways that Black

and Brown students internalize and embody the failure that has been scaffolded and

constructed specifically fror them by a racialized society. These sites of failure, together

with the privatization of education, shifts the discourse from one of universal human

rights, in which educational opportunity should be available for all, to one of individual

achievement or failure, which shifts the blame of failure to individual classrooms,

students and teachers - rather than the system. Todd and his students were operating

within such a site of failure. Todd, his students and their classroom, cannot be viewed

apart from the context of the school district and historical moment in which they found

themselves. This section will examine the ways tat structural racism influenced what

happened within Todd's classroom, and hob Todd's awareness of this influence

unexpectedly made it more difficult for him to hold high expectations.

99

Two systemic aspects of structural racism in urban education shaped Todd's teaching experience before he even walked into the classroom. First, Todd got his start in teaching with Teach for America (TFA), a program that places young, inexperienced teachers in some of the most underfunded classrooms in the country. TFA places over 200 new teachers in Philadelphia classrooms each year, all of whom have committed to teaching for a minimum of two years. Many TFA teachers (about 60%), like Todd, stay beyond their two year commitment and 15% stay longer than five years (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). They receive mentorship from within the organization and they are required to pursue teaching certification and masters degrees while they are in their first years of teaching. The critiques of TFA, both racial and otherwise, are many, and will not be explored here. The primary critique for our purposes is that the private school in this study and the suburban public school district, would not have accepted teachers from TFA. They had the opportunity to hire teachers from a pool of qualified candidates and they rarely hired teachers with no experience. Todd's start in teaching took place in the political and economic context that placed 200 inexperienced (predominantly White) recent college graduates in classrooms with students who were routinely taught by young and inexperienced teachers.

The second factor is not necessarily a function of racism, but of a disorganized and failing school district that served predominantly Black and Brown students. Todd was assigned to teach science, in spite of his background in African American history. This may have been the first indication that his employers were not organized enough to have his best interest, or his students' best interests in mind. He was teaching in a school

district that required all tenth graders to take African American History, in which most of

the teachers teaching it (many of whom were White) were not qualified to do so. One

would assume that Todd would have been an ideal candidate for such a position.

Nonetheless, not necessarily qualified to teach science, Todd quickly familiarized himself

with the seventh grade curriculum.

Once Todd finally arrived in his science classroom, the structural barriers to

success were seemingly endless. Instead of gym class, the students watched movies in

another classroom. Because the gym performed double duty as the cafeteria, and because

the 7th and 8th grade gym periods were all scheduled during the three periods in which

lunch was served, and because so many students were on free and reduced lunch, which

required them by law to be served food prepared in the school cafeteria (and thus

prevented them from eating in their classrooms), there was nowhere for 7th and 8th grade

to have gym, and therefore no time for them to run around and get out their energy.

His school was under-resourced, had poor leadership, employed security guards

and metal detectors to intimidate the students (the school housed students in grades K-8),

and was controlled by standardized tests. When the principal thought the kids were too

noisy, he blew the bullhorn alarm at them, like the police. When it came time to sign up

for a field trip, permission slips were given on a first-come, first-served basis. There

were only 45 slots for the whole 7th grade, which had more than 60 students. Throughout

the school, the system that synced the old analog clocks was broken, so all of the clocks

in the building permanently read 9:45. There were signs posted in all the bathrooms,

saying the water was not safe to drink. The drinking fountain button was broken off, so

the students had to get water out of it by leveraging a pencil through the hole left by the missing button.

In Todd's classroom, it was difficult to hear what he was saying. He felt he had to shout in order to be heard, but acoustics were such that the louder he spoke, the harder it was to understand his words clearly. It sounded like the acoustics of an indoor swimming pool.

Todd had support from his administration to the extent that they left him alone. In four years, he had only been observed twice, and never received feedback, in spite of the fact that he was a novice teacher. Some of his best classroom interventions, such as partnering with a kindergarten classroom to send students to be assistants, were done without the administration's knowledge. Todd felt that this lenience (or negligence) was likely related to the fact that he was White and well-educated such that his predominantly Black colleagues and administration seemed to believe that he knew what he was doing. In spite of the legal mandate that there be two teachers in his classroom for special education students, there was only one. Todd said repeatedly that he expected parents to complain about the inclusion classroom structure, but that they never did; they trusted the school to do what was right.

Todd's students and their families also had problems of their own. The year that I worked with him, some of his students had been arrested, particularly in relation to the flash mob phenomenon[4] that was prominent throughout the city that year. One student

---

[4] That year in Philadelphia, students from the city schools organized via text messages and emails to meet en masse in different parts of the city. These largely peaceful meetings by large groups of black and brown youth were terrifying to the White residents of the city and sometimes invoked an outsized police response.

violated probation, and Todd had to testify. He also had two families who wanted to give up custody of their kids because they thought their children would be placed in a boarding school if they did so. He was called in to testify for those cases too, but he knew that if the parents gave up custody, the children would end up in foster care. It was not his job to be involved because he was not the counselor, but he said the kids wanted him to get involved because he knew them better.

Most people at Todd's school had low expectations for his students; the whole school expected them to perform poorly. After the PSSAs[5] (Pennsylvania System of School Assessments), all of the other homerooms went back to moving classrooms for a couple of different classes. His was the only homeroom that stayed in inclusion. "They see other kids switching classes, watching movies. It's ineffective. It's clear that there are different expectations for this class than others." At an assembly later that spring, the homerooms were called to the auditorium in order of their performance on the PSSAs. His class was called second to last. On one of my later visits, I rode the elevator with the security guard, and he told me he didn't know how Todd did it. Shaking his head, he said, "I don't know how he keeps from ringing their little necks." Throughout the school, they were called stupid, the low class and the special class by other students and teachers alike. Todd said, "Then they act out even more because if we're going to get called that, we might as well be that."

---

[5] The PSSAs are high stakes tests that all students must take. The school-wide results of the PSSAs determine whether or not a school will be deemed to be "failing."

Todd understood how his own racial and economic circumstances shaped his success and he knew that his students' backgrounds would similarly influence theirs. He took systemic racism into account when thinking about his students' opportunities:

> *It's just like a social justice thing… I've been thinking about like my own background. Like there are reasons why like I was able to do what I was able to do, and like not all of those reasons were because of my work ethic or something. It is tied to my race. Like the opportunities I had and like unfortunately for my students there will be opportunities they won't have because of their race and like what their station is right now… I want them to have those opportunities, but like historically… there's systems that still support racism and to not acknowledge them I feel like is disrespectful. It's disrespectful to pretend like they don't exist and kind of lying, if that makes sense.*

Systemic racism did more than shape the opportunity structures of Todd and his students. It also influenced their very relationships with meritocracy, which connects to expectations. While Todd did not hold his students to high expectations, he had very high expectations for himself. This may not be entirely explained by race, but his high expectations for himself were related to his location within a meritocratic society that routinely rewarded him for hard work, time and knowledge. That is an experience that is particular to, though not exclusive of, Whiteness. He had agency. He knew he was capable. These too may not be a result of his Whiteness only, but they are related to it.

Todd didn't believe that his students were capable, not necessarily because they were Black, but because they didn't believe themselves to be capable. They often weren't willing to try and they didn't necessarily believe that hard work would yield rewards. This too is likely not the direct result of being Black, but rather of their position within the same meritocracy, which is related to being Black. They did not experience reward as being proportionate to hard work. That experience of meritocracy is not exclusive to

104

Black people (a meritocratic system also fails many Whites and other people of color), nor is it the only experience of meritocracy that Black people in the U.S. have. But in a system that has historically privileged Whites in schooling, employment, health care and housing, Blacks have been deeply disenfranchised from opportunities in ways that suggest effort might not be connected to reward. To answer our question, therefore, Todd's high expectations for himself and his low expectations for his students may indeed be connected to race and racial privilege in complex ways.

How high is high?

When I asked Todd about his expectations, he shared his insecurity that he didn't even know how to calibrate expectations: what would be high? What would be low? He didn't know how to establish the bar in the first place, in part because his students had such a vast range of skill levels, but also because he had never taught reading or math before. He hesitated to set expectations that were too high because his students were especially sensitive to failure. Finally, he did not know what high expectations for the students in this particular school community meant. When I asked him, "What do you think it means to have high expectations for students' behavior?," this is how he responded:

> *Like my background is different than my students so I like, my experience*
> *of a classroom is like much different than the classroom I teach in now*
> *and like sometimes I feel like my expectation is like what I experienced so*
> *I have really unreasonable… for example like I feel like there's things that*
> *I jump on that I don't need to, and then there's other things that I don't*
> *correct that I should... I feel like I am constantly putting out little fires, but*
> *if I was just like had a much higher like bar and had very clear*
> *consequences… it would get rid of all of that, instead of doing all this little*
> *stuff and trying to call parents constantly.*

Todd recognized that he should have high expectations, but he also recognized that he couldn't just expect his students to be the same kinds of students that he and his peers were. He didn't know how much they were capable of and he had not administered any diagnostic tests himself.

> *Todd: There are a couple of kids in the class, and this is also the other thing with like being an advocate for them, I feel like the bar has consistently been set so low for them that it's hard to even gauge… There's a couple of kids in class that are M.R. (Mentally Retarded). Like I don't think anyone in my class is M.R., but… I don't have a degree in it. But sometimes we have kids that are already labeled so I just like go with it like…"Oh well you're M.R., ok I guess I'll photocopy 2nd grade stuff." That's like an exaggeration, but I feel like that's sometimes what's messaged to the kids.*
>
> *Ali: And sometimes you don't bother to do your own diagnosis when you hear it.*
>
> *Todd: Exactly. I mean it's weird with science because like there's no way to tell what someone's science grade level is. There is a way for reading and math levels. So a lot of times I will just ask the reading teacher like what's so and so's reading level because that's the way we did it this year. I didn't assess them on their reading level at all… It's not the total answer, but it's like another thing I could do.*

One of the things that got in the way of Todd having high expectations was his concern that setting the bar high would simply create more opportunities for his students to fail, and that the support structures that would be required for them to meet such high expectations, simply were not there.

> *We had goals this year like 85% was mastery and they all knew that, but at a certain point like if you were never getting 85's, who cares what mastery is? You're gonna feel bad about yourself. So like by the end of the year I'd slack off too…there's got to be like a way that makes sense to a kid to improve their academics that gives them confidence.*

Todd was also aware that his expectations for behavior and academics had to be linked. His students' behavior was likely a result of a lack of confidence with academics:

> *I wonder sometimes if like with some of the kids that are like behavior problems if they were more confident with their academics if they would even be so…so I feel like it's clearly consequences for behavior but then it's also like thinking about why kids are acting the way they are. Like why are you acting that way? And then maybe addressing that more in the future instead of like punitive being like more like goal-setting.*

The Catch-22 is that in order to begin having higher expectations, he needed to know what his students were capable of. But nobody, probably not even they, seemed to know what might be possible for them. A challenge of holding high expectations is that a teacher has to believe that it is possible and convince the student to prove it, even though they may have very little evidence for it.

Communicating high expectations

> *It's harder at the end of the year because I have these expectations and like I articulate them to kids when I speak to them, but just like looking at the class you would have no idea that that's an expectation… You would think I never did because they act like I don't.*

Todd felt that he had high expectations, but he was aware that his students did not act as though he did. He thought that perhaps his communication was not clear enough or his consequences were not compelling enough to evoke responsiveness in his students. On a theoretical level, Todd did have high expectations for his students. He knew they were capable of more. He knew they could do great work, that they could be kind to one another. He had seen this before. He also knew that so much of their frustration and misbehavior was due to the inferior treatment that had been given in their already under-resourced school. Like most teachers, he believed he had high expectations. He believed

107

that expectations were words explicitly uttered by teachers regarding a student's

potential. And he regularly told students, "You can do this" or "I expect more from you."

But expectations are usually not so explicit. Expectations are what get expressed

in the repetitive, minute actions that students witness all day every day: only calling on

certain students for challenging questions, insisting on a particular standard of behavior

or demonstrating dissatisfaction with even good grades, insisting that students can and

should be superior.

Todd manifested low expectations in different ways. Sometimes he would state

high expectations, but contradict himself with actions. He would tell all of the students

that they had to be responsible for bringing their own pens and pencils to class, and then

he would interrupt himself in the middle of a lesson to distribute pens and pencils.

Sometimes he would set a firm expectation, but it would be so permissive of

disrespectful behavior to seem irrelevant. One day he had saved a pile of extra purple

scrap paper for a student who loved purple. By the end of the day, the paper was all over

the floor. He said, "That's so disrespectful. I don't mind if they make fans with it, or

whatever, but don't throw it all over the floor." In my notes, I questioned, "Why is it

okay if they make fans with it? Why not say, 'It's disrespectful – she should have put it

in her backpack and left it there'?"

During one observation, Todd told me that he had been sick the previous Monday,

and there had been a substitute for him. It was Thursday, and he was still cleaning up

from it. He pointed to the place on the wall behind me where "Bitch" had been written.

He said he came in Tuesday and desks were overturned. His whole roll book had been

glued shut, page by page. He also pointed out that the roll book is actually a legal document, making it especially egregious to vandalize.

When I asked him what he did about it, he said that he knew who did it, but he felt like they didn't mean to be bad, so he didn't suspend them. He said he knew that when a substitute came in, they all just sat at their desks, bored. What were they supposed to do? He said they probably weren't even thinking about what they were doing because they were just bored, sitting at the teacher's desk, and there was some glue. It just happened.

Todd also said that he wanted to have higher expectations, but he felt like he had no consequences for enforcing them. If his students did not do their homework or they interrupted class, or they talked while he was talking, or they got up out of their seats, or they chased each other around the room, or they left the room and went into the hallway without permission, he did not feel that he had much recourse. And as students continued to test him, he started to shift what he considered appropriate or respectful behavior until he had reached the bare minimum.

A sign in the back of the room listed the consequences for bad behavior. It read:

Room 410 consequences:
- *verbal warning*
- *change seat*
- *removal from lab group*
- *loss of lab privileges*
- *after school lab/detention*
- *parent call/contact*
- *behavior conference*

I did not feel like it was obvious when Todd progressed through the consequences with individual students, but he said that he usually followed the list in order out of the

sight of the class so as not to provoke a defensive reaction from the student being disciplined. However, since different consequences were effective with different students, he often just tried whatever seemed effective for a particular student, rather than following the list in order. Ultimately, he felt like if he just ran down the list with all the students everyday, he would have to do the whole thing with each student and would have no time for anything else. So he sometimes did not react at all.

When a student called him a fag, Todd asked him to go into the hall, saying, "Wait! Jessie, get out here." Jessie responded, "What you want? What the fuck you want?" Todd ultimately called Jessie's mom. When she got to the office where Jessie was waiting for her, she started hitting him as soon as she heard he had insulted his teacher. Todd cited that as a more successful intervention because at least there were consequences that intimidated the student (even though he was sorry that Jessie was hit). For many of his students, if he threatened to call home they offered to dial the phone for him. It was not a meaningful consequence for them.

Sometimes his low expectations related to academics. As he watched students give up on a worksheet, he said, "You guys are just going to get zeroes? Why? This is easy." He meant to motivate but he didn't realize how de-motivating it is to accomplish something that is declared "easy." Similarly, in an attempt to accommodate the wide range of readers in his classroom (from 2nd grade to 10th grade reading levels), he listed all of the answers on the board so that students simply had to fill them in on their sheets.

Todd struggled to connect his expectations with student performance. "What I struggle with is having that expectation is fine and then the follow through is lacking."

He would try different things but would not be consistent. He noted that when he only had class for ninety minutes, this usually worked better. He wanted to believe he had high expectations, but realized that may not have been apparent to an outside observer because the students didn't respond to his expectations. I would argue that if the students are not responding to high expectations, it may mean that he does not have high expectations, or that he is not conveying them. To have high expectations means, in part, not to tolerate anything less than what you expect. Todd not only tolerated less, he tried to push, cajole and drag kids towards the low end of achievement and behavior. Trying to get students to finish a worksheet by pointing out how easy it is and that all the answers are on the board or excusing a student's vandalism of the attendance book as a result of boredom are examples of having arrived at certifiably low expectations. Communicating high expectations means first having them and second, communicating through actions as well as words that nothing less is acceptable.

Students as agents vs. students as victims

As a way of framing the conflict around expectations, I told Todd about the paradox that one of my graduate students (another TFA teacher) wrote about: the paradox between students as agents and students as victims. How do we hold students accountable for their actions (as agents) when we know that so much of what they're doing is a response to their environments (as victims)?[6]

This paradox became especially apparent on the day that Todd told me he had been assaulted by a student. While telling me about the assault, Todd said that it was

---

[6] Colin Marlowe is the graduate student who first described this paradox.

especially bad because it was in the hallways, so other teachers saw it, and it was on videotape. I was unsure why that made it worse. He said that if it had happened in his classroom, he could have covered it up. But since there were witnesses, he was forced to press charges.

I could see Todd balancing this paradox of *students as agents* vs. *students as victims* throughout the course of the fallout from this assault. He knew the child who hit him. He knew the child didn't want to be bad. He knew that he had a difficult life. And he wanted to support him to get the resources that he needed, rather than opt into the endless types of punishments that were available to him as a teacher.

Because the incident had been caught on camera, Todd had to file charges against the student. Todd actually attended the meeting together with the student and his mother, not as adversaries.

> *I actually went with him and his mother to like a little meeting at the school district office, and it ended up that he's going to go to a behavioral school where they'll set like behavioral goals for him…The goal is by high school he will go to a charter, like be back in the system where I hope he will get some anger management help and kind of address some of the issues, I'm hoping. So I mean it was fine, I was pushing his mom in the wheelchair to the meeting. I wished him the best of luck. He shook my hand.*

Todd was happy with the outcome, but he felt like more should have been done for this student before he went so far as to hit a teacher. Todd could see that he needed help earlier, but there were no resources for getting it. Todd could see the ways his students were trapped in the "racialized circuits of dispossession" (Fine and Ruglis, 2009); it was not until they became criminals that they finally counted, and the state finally spent

112

money on them. But before that time, there was no support available to help them have agency in their lives.

In our inquiry group, we read work by Stevenson, Davis, Herrero-Taylor and Morris (2003) who demonstrate the ways that depression has been misread in Black adolescent boys as aggression. Stevenson et al. write, "Most of the aggression we see in Black youth is accompanied by depression symptoms, fear of annihilation, loss of family support and psychological distress…Approaches that attempt to understand and address the depression rather than control the aggression are more likely to be successful" (Stevenson et al., p. 10). This theory resonated with Todd, and he felt he could see the depression in many of his students, just lurking behind their seemingly aggressive actions.

Stevenson's theory on depression seemed to be a key part of Todd's understanding of his students that year. But again, he did not know what to do with it in application. Because he saw it as depression, rather than aggression, he felt his students should be treated for it, rather than punished. But he had no mechanism for supporting them through treatment: he was not a therapist, there was no available school counselor, and he had no other way to get them treatment. As a result, he often ended up covering for them and essentially trying to absorb the shock waves that they were putting out, a strategy that undermined his authority and ultimately made it harder to be an advocate for them.

> *What do kids need from me to know like that… I'm gonna be like an advocate for them? Not even like to the administration or whatever, but like in the classroom?...There were a couple of times today where there were like situations that got out of control, and by the time I intervened,*

113

*it's hard to tell who started what, who said what and like often times I pick
out the wrong person to like separate and then I'm like trying to…where
like if you just avoid the situation all together it wouldn't happen, you
know. It's like what would I have to do differently?*

Todd tried to be an advocate for all of his students at all times. He wanted to
protect them from being picked on by one another. And he wanted to protect those that
were doing the picking from getting in trouble. He did not want any of them to get in
trouble because he believed that their circumstances in his classroom alone were so
outrageous that it was unreasonable to expect better behavior from them. But is it
possible to advocate for all the students all the time? If one hits the other, can you defend
the hitter and still support the one who was hit?

 I shared my interpretation of events with Todd. I said, "I think your students
know that you have a conflict over getting them in trouble because you take their
extenuating circumstances so much into account. And they see you as a nice person, but
as a result, they feel like they can get away with things." Todd agreed.

The assault incident was a wake-up call for Todd, helping him realize that he had
to convey a different message to his students. At the meeting with the district, they asked
the student, "Why did you hit your teacher?" The student answered, "I know it wasn't
okay, but I knew he wasn't going to hit me back." Todd was baffled. He was glad his
students knew that he wouldn't hit them, but what did he have to do to convey the fact
that it was not okay for them to hit him?

How did Todd's identity as a White person play into this paradox? His Black
colleagues at the school told him he was "too nice." At the same time, he knew enough
about race to know that he could not talk to or about his students in the same ways that

his colleagues did, because he was White, and, perhaps more importantly, because he was not Black. As Todd learned how to become a better teacher in his particular school context, he was left to navigate strategies for discipline and strictness on his own. Successful teachers in his school were Black teachers. He did not have successful White male colleagues who could model for him what it looked like to discipline Black students as a White male, and how it differed from the strategies modeled by the predominantly Black female teaching faculty.

> *Ali: Do you have colleagues of color who you could ask these questions of?*
>
> *Todd: That's another specific question I ask all the time.... The way my colleagues who are from Philadelphia interact with the kids is much different than the way I interact with the kids. It's much more physical. It's much more at times verbally, I think, abusive. And things that my colleagues say, if I said them like I feel like I would lose my job…By violent I mean really race-based and derogatory. And even like it's funny, even like confronting them is a little strange because they don't really see it that way. They don't really see it as A. being racist or B. as really being out of line. But they know if I did it, it would be. I mean, they do know that.*

There *are* double standards for White teachers and that is not by accident. Todd's colleagues could say things that he could not. And while it may be debatable whether his colleagues should say those things to begin with, the point for this context is that Todd could not say those things. And, furthermore, that he needed to learn how to not be "too nice" in a way that was also not inappropriate for him as a White male.

The dilemma of holding high expectations in the context of overwhelming structural inequality that is a result of racism, may be particularly challenging for White teachers. Though there are many examples of teachers who do this well, such as those

White teachers showcased by Gloria Ladson Billings (2009), there are likely many more teachers like Todd, who want to hold high expectations, but need extra support around learning how to do so in his particular role as a White male.

As this final example of the assault demonstrated vividly, Todd really did, as he described it, "baby" his students. The other paradox particular to middle schoolers is that they want and need to be babied one day and then they expect to be treated like adults the next. This Janus-faced aspect of middle schoolers may be even more complicated with Black boys, who, as Stevenson has written, are perceived and treated as men well before they grow out of adolescence. Todd's responsibility was to help his students walk the line between boyhood and manhood, realizing that they did not yet know how to navigate their manhood, and yet help them understand that they would no longer be perceived by society as little boys. Beyond that, Todd had a strong and perceptive instinct to protect his students from a system that sought to punish them, rather than understand and counsel them. But in the meantime, it meant that his students did not respect him. Without their respect, he may have been just as ineffective as the system in which he was working. Having high expectations is not just about academic performance or behavior, but about relationships. It's about conveying to students in many subtle ways that one will not allow themselves to be teased, abused or disrespected. This too is a fine line for teachers to walk, but it is a critical line to draw if teachers want to have authority and influence with students.

Trust

> *What good does it do to say that I'm gay? Is it dishonest not to come out?*
> *What good does it do not to share it?*

116

It was not until our very last interview that Todd came out to me and talked about the ways that being gay affected his relationship with his students. He pointed out the ways that his students used accusations of being gay and used the term "gay" as an insult, to trigger him. And it was effective.

> *I get really heated about it so then the kids are like, "Why do you care so much? Like why wouldn't you just say it too because it is that way?" Or they'll say things like, "Well no one in this room..." like so, "Why can't we say it?" So I mean we've gone through all that and I'm like, "Well first of all how well do you know everyone in this room? Like you don't know who you're talking to or who you're sitting next to or maybe their best friend is and you don't know that and you're really hurting them when you're saying those things.*

He tried to stop students from saying homophobic slurs for their own sake. And he tried to do what was right for his classroom of middle school students:

> *My thing with the kids is always like I feel like it's kind of inappropriate to be too personal with kids. It just is…I still think it's none of their business. Like at a certain point it's like, okay, you're twelve.*

Todd also had very little support from his colleagues, who sometimes used homophobic slurs as a way of talking about students. According to Todd, his administrators essentially told him, "*We don't care about anything as long as it doesn't become a problem for us.*"

Todd wanted to be honest with his students but felt unsure. He thought they might stop pushing the issue so much if he just told them. But he also feared maybe he would lose all control of the class, thus making it worse. He did not want to think he did not trust them, but when I suggested that was the reason he had not come out to them, he reluctantly confirmed it.

117

Whether Todd came out to his students is not necessarily relevant. Many teachers trust their students but choose not to come out for other reasons. Throughout the course of this conversation, however, Todd began to admit—to me and to himself—that his decision not to come out to his students was an indication to himself that did not trust this class. He had come out to students in the past and he did not feel comfortable doing so this year. This lack of trust may be the final piece of what stopped Todd from being able to hold and communicate high expectations for them. Trust is a foundational part of a strong teacher-student relationship. Without trust, it becomes almost impossible to be able to challenge students to push past their own self-imposed limitations to meet high expectations. Students need to know that the challenge is coming from a teacher who cares for them, and not one who is simply trying to make their lives difficult. Teachers need to know that students trust them enough to be vulnerable with them and to invest themselves in their work. High expectations require both teachers and students to take a chance on one another, a choice that would be nearly impossible without trust.

Conclusion

Todd's expectations for his students were not the result of unconscious racism that he held toward Black students, as the literature on expectations would suggest. They were the result of his, and their, positioning within a racialized society and their relationships to the concept of meritocracy, and thus to a sense of self efficacy. They were also the result of Todd's not knowing, of never learning, the mechanism through which expectations get conveyed, that it is a matter of what behaviors and performance he will or will not tolerate, not a matter of the words he says to students. It is a matter of

118

walking the fine line between expecting students to be agents while accounting for the

ways that they have been victimized by their school and their society. It is matter of

seeing his students' aggression as the depression it really is, yet refusing to become a

victim of that aggression, such that they will continue to respect and accept his authority,

and therefore, his support as well.

Holding high expectations is a skill that can be taught, and needs to be practiced,

like any other skill. In order to do so, Todd needed to come to grips with the fact that his

pity for his students would not change their circumstances as much as high expectations

from an authority figure they respected. However, he also needed support to develop this

skill. As the following quote demonstrates, Todd was learning some of this through

experience and still had more to learn:

> *…I think they have to know that you care but they also have to know that*
> *that's not going to be a reason not to do what I'm asking you to do. And I*
> *don't think you can convey that if you're not addressing what's going on…*
> *Like J.P. for example, it was the beginning of year he was scoring like 30-*
> *40% on everything, and for the first six weeks I was just like, "Well he*
> *really wasn't putting that much effort in." Then I started tutoring him*
> *after school…and then I found out after school like one-on-one he was*
> *really great and he really likes the material and like I had not been setting*
> *high expectations for him at all the first four weeks. I just let him slide*
> *with 30-40's. And then now he consistently gets like anywhere from like*
> *60-80, which for him like that's a higher expectation.*

Chapter 7: TEACHING RACE, TALKING RACE AND RACIAL SOCIALIZATION

As the cases of Laurie and Todd make clear, there are countless reasons for teachers to think about race in the classroom, even if they never talk about it explicitly with their students. However, at the beginning of their work on race, many of the teachers in this study seemed to assume that the point of learning about race was to be able to have conversations with their students about race. Among the 25 teachers participating in the action research project at Friends Independent School, many of the White teachers were asking the same questions, "How do I help lead conversations about race?" or "How do I talk about race when it comes up?"

Throughout the course of the year, in my role as an inquiry group facilitator and consultant, as well as in my role as a researcher, I tried to emphasize that race learning for teachers is more about pedagogy and personal understanding than it is about talking about race with students. In fact, if teachers start talking about race in the classroom, but do not consider all of the other unspoken ways that it affects their classroom, that could be even more alienating or confusing to students.

That said, the ability of White teachers to talk about race when it comes up, to respond to race-based insults, to engage in conversations involving "racialized"[7] content (e.g. Black hair), to teach "racialized" content, to understand accusations of racism and to discuss racial trends, is critical in any classroom. For one, it breaks the racial contract,

---

[7] I put "racialized" in quotes because in fact, all content is racialized, but mainstream society tends to construe "racialized content" as only content involving people of color. Because White people are often not seen as having a race, history that only covers White people is often seen as "neutral" or non-racialized.

the implicit agreement among White people not to talk about race (Mills, 1997).

Breaking the racial contract, in turn, interrupts the status quo in which White people and White experiences are centralized and made normative. But it does more than this. It makes it possible for teachers to participate in the work of racial socialization. Racial socialization involves a conscious recognition of the fact that how race is taught and talked about in school will influence students' understanding of and feelings about race, and of themselves as racialized beings.

This chapter will look at all the ways that race talk enters the classroom, from intentional conversations about race, to the teaching of "racialized" material, to intentional racial socialization planned and taught by teachers. The chapter is broken into four parts. First, there is a brief review of the literature on talking about race. Second, it will look at teachers' struggles with talking about race in the classroom and the ways that it could come up more organically in order to break the racial contract. Third it will look at the issue of teaching "racialized" content and how "racialized" content can be taught in a way that acknowledges the racial socialization at play during such lessons. Finally, it will look at racial socialization itself, as a distinct and intentional form of teaching that differs significantly from simply talking about race. This section will also explore the complicated issue of White teachers being involved in racial socialization, and the questions that emerge from that.

1. Literature

Racist projects versus racial projects

Omi and Winant (2002) define race as "a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (p. 123). They argue that race has changed over time, due primarily to the ways in which it has been treated by different "racial projects" (p. 135).

> [A] racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular lines (p.125).

Importantly, a racial project is not necessarily racist, even when it promotes the distribution of resources according to race.

> A racial project can be defined as *racist* if and only if it *creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race* (p. 135, italics theirs).

Affirmative action that attempts to rectify past inequities would, for example, not be seen as "racist" under their definition. Omi and Winant's distinction between *racial* projects and *racist* projects is critical to the conversation of whether merely talking about race is racist. According to this distinction, talking about race for the purposes of de-linking student achievement from race is not racist.

The fear among teachers that discussions of race in schools are "racist projects" stops conversations about race before they start. But even beyond that fear, race conversations in schools are particularly difficult because there are two competing racial projects in the public sphere, both of which require an adherence to colorblindness. Winant suggests that colorblindness is a manifestation of both the Neoliberal Racial

122

Project and the Neoconservative Racial Project. Neoliberals use colorblindness to try to limit White advantages, while neoconservatives use it to preserve White advantages. Individual schools and teachers may adhere to a colorblind stance as part of the neoliberal effort to stop race from mattering, but either way, the effect of a colorblind stance is the maintenance of the status quo.

White people also tend to experience high levels of shame when participating in conversations about race, or even saying the word "White" to describe a White person (Thandeka, 2000). Some theorists have suggested that in order to fit into White communities, White people must follow certain rules of engagement, including not naming race, not noticing or naming Whiteness and not embracing difference (Mills, 1999; Thandeka, 2000). Charles Mills calls this the "racial contract" (Mills, 1999). Silence about race is therefore requisite for membership in many predominantly White communities. Breaking that silence can be a source of shame for White people (and people of color in those communities), which in turn impedes any forward momentum in continuing to talk about race.

Whether it comes from feelings of shame, a desire for belonging in White communities, or a desire to limit White privileges, the impact of colorblindness tends to be the maintenance of a racist status quo. Theorist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) has renamed colorblindness, "colorblind racism," and has demonstrated four different types (what he calls frames) of colorblind racism: "abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism and minimization of racism" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 26). Abstract liberalism "involves using ideas associated with political liberalism and economic liberalism in an

abstract way to explain racial matters" (Bonilla-Silva, p. 28). Naturalization describes the way that people explain racial differences and disparities as natural phenomena. Cultural racism describes how people explain racial differences and disparities as the logical outcomes of the cultural deficiencies of people of color. Minimization of racism is a way of downplaying the importance of racism and suggesting that it is less severe than it has been in the past. Bonilla-Silva (2006) calls this "color-blind racism" to emphasize the ways in which it denies and exacerbates the racism that structures life in the U.S. Ignoring racialized patterns in schools, for example, such as the underrepresentation of Black students in honors classes, simply perpetuates racial inequality. Then the blame for the existence of racialized inequalities (including the achievement gap) gets shifted away from structural racism and away from the racializing structures that keep Black students out of honors classes, and onto the individual students themselves. Because so many social and political structures in the U.S. are not colorblind, we cannot be colorblind in trying to address them. Regardless of the particular reasons why individual White people attempt to avoid seeing race or talking about race, the net effect is "colorblind racism," which serves to preserve racial privileges for White people.

2. Race Talk in the Classroom

Talking about race or discussing "racialized" topics does not have to be a high stress endeavor (although it often is). The following examples from Helene, Cara, Sam and Todd demonstrate the many small ways that race can be a part of classroom

124

conversations, and the insight that some race conversations can give teachers about their students.

Going with the flow of race conversations

Throughout the course of the year, Helene's question changed from "How do I help second grade students talk about race honestly and critically?" to "How can I lean into more conversations about race in the classroom?" Though the shift was barely perceptible, it was significant. "Leaning into conversations" involves noticing race tangentially in a conversation, following the lead of students, and going with the flow of the developmental and cognitive needs of the students. Helene shifted from a teacher-centered question to a student-centered question about race conversations.

Helene wanted race to come up more organically in classroom conversations and she struggled because she envisioned this as giving the kids of color a chance to share and explain their cultural traditions that differed from the White norm.

> *I'm thinking about how I can like have the kids' life experiences come up race in the classroom… The only time I can think of is like if they bring up a family celebration that we don't know about, like if it was like Three Kings Day or something like that…, but if they're talking about like a family BBQ or something, I don't know…*

> *Like for example Edna, one of my students, she's Liberian and her family just had a huge family reunion that she's been talking about for ages… I could ask her in front of the class all about it and what it was like and what they did. But then am I gonna be like, "Oh by the way your family's Liberian or African?"*

Helene wanted her students to be able to learn about different cultures by getting to know one another's cultures better, but she was worried about how this might objectify particular students, namely the students of color. This worry might come in part from her

assumption that only the students of color would have experiences to share. This

assumption comes from the common misconception in our society that only people of

color have race and that White people are an unraced anomaly in a racialized society. By

reframing Whiteness as a source of culture and traditions, all students become interesting,

and all cultural traditions become significant to share. This works better in a class like

Helene's where half the children in the class are of color (as opposed to a class in which

the majority of the children are White). But all children have cultural traditions that are

unique to them, and those who are different, for whatever reason, often feel marginalized.

Furthermore, the traditions of some of the White students, including Helene's traditions

as a White Jewish teacher, might be unfamiliar to other students in the class. Creating a

comfortable classroom space where all children feel comfortable being who they are and

sharing who they are with the class is the first step in helping children understand and

accept one another, which ultimately does lead to the understandings about race that we

want children to take home: that race does not define us or limit us, even though it

informs our identities and our experiences of the world.

In Cara's predominantly Black classroom, conversations about race came up more

organically than they did in Helene's classroom that had greater racial diversity (more

White students and more racial backgrounds represented). Cara shared once that she was

sitting on a school bus and listening to her students comparing different parts of the seat

to one another's hair – "this smooth part is like so-and-so's hair, that rough part is like so-

and-so's hair…" She said that even just overhearing that conversation was very

uncomfortable for her and she hoped she would not have to be a part of the conversation.

This is not necessarily a situation when she needed to intervene, but part of building racial competence is developing the ability, and the comfort, to participate in conversations like this one if necessary, without being paralyzed by discomfort. Racial competence can be as simple as being able to talk about hair, whether White children or Black children bring it up. And it is about knowing how to intervene when students are hurting one another, by calling each other "dark" or otherwise suggesting that their skin color or physical features are inferior. Most White teachers feel competent to have informal conversations about hair with White students, or to respond when White students insult each other. But when Black students are talking about specifically Black things, many White teachers freeze. Both Cara and Todd joined the inquiry group in order to feel more comfortable with these straightforward matters of teaching that seem infinitely more complex for White teachers with classes made up of all Black students.

Breaking the racial contract

In my observations, I noted multiple times that race came up or could have come up in conversations in Helene's class. During one observation at Quaker meeting, there was a guest, an applicant for the kindergarten teacher position, who appeared to be South Asian American. One of the students asked, "Who was the stranger in meeting?" Helene responded, "The tall man with kind of darker skin?" When she said this, Carl, who is Asian American, looked at his own skin. Helene said, "He's applying to teach kindergarten. His name is Giran." I pointed this out to Helene as an example of allowing race to be a part of the conversation, without much preparation or fanfare. In order to be consistent in using race as a descriptor, however, Whiteness must also be named when

127

apparent. Had the potential teacher been White, it may have sounded odd to say, "The tall man with the White skin?" Because Whiteness is normalized in our society and the lack of racial descriptors often presumes Whiteness, this response may seem unreasonable. And yet, naming race, including Whiteness, is an effective way to challenge Whiteness as the default, un-named race and to bring race into ordinary daily conversations.

Another day, Helene was leading a conversation with students about pioneers, asking the students to provide examples of pioneers that they read about in their biography unit. As the students named people, Helene slowly and subtly began naming race.

Student: Prudence Crandall - she made a school for Black girls since there were only schools for White girls.

Another student: It was in Connecticut.

Helene: Was that easy for her? Did everybody agree?

Student: Some people threw rocks at her. And she went to jail.

Helene: So was it easy for her to be a pioneer?

Students in chorus: No.

Helene: Prudence Crandall was a White woman. Benjamin Banneker was an African American man. Any other people we could use for our definition for pioneers?

At the end of the discussion about Prudence Crandall, Helene took a moment to point out the races of the people they were discussing. This gesture may seem small, but it took a lot of conscious preparation and thought for Helene to get to the point where she

128

could name people's races out loud like this. She was ready to do it because she had

been talking about it for weeks with her action research group. Naming race involves

breaking the unwritten standard of behavior in White culture that says we do not name

race; in particular we do not name Whiteness. And though it is quite a small act, it is

actually one very effective way to let race be an organic part of the classroom

conversation. As Helene moves forward, she may need to plan intentional ways of

bringing up race tangentially.

Connecting to African history

During the Egypt unit in Helene's classroom, students were filling note cards with

facts that they recorded about the aspect of Egyptian life they had been assigned to

research. In the process, two girls discovered that hair braiding in Ancient Egypt was "an

ancient and longstanding art." I suggested that this might be an organic way to connect

the Ancient Egyptians to Black Americans today. This is an important connection

because the Ancient Egyptians are often depicted as Middle Easterners, rather than

Africans, thus obscuring the early contributions of Africans to the fields of mathematics

and science. Africanists point out that texts referring to "wooly haired mathematicians"

refer to early African mathematicians, and that a great number of early human

civilization's discoveries in math and science, came from Egyptian Africans. Hair

braiding might be a way for students to link the great achievements of Ancient Egypt to

Africa, and by association to Black Americans today. The possibilities for weaving race

into the conversation seemed many; but it required both the preparation to be able to say

it, and the consciousness about the racial links to the content that they were working with in class.

Marginalized identities as teaching resources

Helene regularly mentioned Judaism as a marginalized identity in ways that contextualized it and highlighted it, but did not take over the lesson. When asking for examples of foreign countries, for example, she would include Israel. She noted in a conversation with me that the first Jewish doll of the American Girls series was only released a few years ago.

When talking with the class about President Obama as a pioneer, Helene said:

Helene: So do you think that sets the road for other African Americans to be president? And what else do you think that sets the road for? Could it just be White men or African American men now? Could it be anyone else?"

Students: Women

Helene: Women. We haven't had a Jewish president. So maybe he's making it possible for many other types of people to be president.

Her tangential mentioning of Judaism and Israel may have been barely perceptible to students who are not Jewish, or otherwise concerned with Israel (as many Palestinian students would likely be), but they likely provided Jewish students with a little bit of recognition and motivation. Sam did something similar:

I mean I think that there's a part of me that thinks wow I've been doing some of this stuff already, just like the need for everyone in the classroom to have a voice. The need for, I mean I love it when I go, "Oh man - hey we finally get a Jewish character and this is what they do to it!? Thanks a lot." I'll say stuff like that, you know what I mean?

I encouraged Helene to take a similar stance to race - to be as aware and invested in how Blackness or Asianness are represented as she is about Jewishness. She could mention race in small subtle ways, without always leading a large class-wide conversation about it. I suggested that she use the same strategies she used around Judaism. I wrote to Helene in an email:

> *I don't know if you are aware of it, but you do this really well with inserting Jewish identity into the classroom. It is so flawless… (giving the examples listed above). I think this is a great, subtle way to name and acknowledge difference as you go through the day, without it being loaded or heated – and letting the kids know it's okay to name it. I picture you doing a similar thing with race – and I think you already do. This also, incidentally, feels to me like a great reason to have diversity in our teaching force – having a Jewish teacher means, in this case, that Jewishness comes up seamlessly in class. I think the same could be true for having a teacher of color or a teacher who was adopted. Your Jewishness and the way you bring it up in class here and there expands everyone's experience.*

Helene said that she agreed that being Jewish made it much easier to slip in comments here and there about Jewish people and that she agreed that that was the subtle way that she could and should be doing it with race. But she said with race or with African American history, it is just "so much easier to feel like I'm getting it wrong or I'm not sure." When reading a book about the slaves of Ancient Egypt named Rachel and Benjamin, it was easy for her to say, at the spur of the moment, "I think they might be Jewish." She says, "It's harder to say with race – it's easy to not be sure."

When it came to the histories and experiences of people of color, Helene did not know as much and did not have as much of a context for it, so it was harder to make assertions. This is part of the way that an incomplete history handicaps us all. It is also a

131

reason that it is hard for White people to talk about race. We are often asking, "How do I bring up race here and there when I am not even sure if, or how, it has to do with race?"

All the same, Helene seemed to feel like this was a bit of a revelation, that she did not have to have a conversation about race that was all planned out and separate from what she usually did, but that it could just come in and out of what they talked about.

Similar to Helene, Sam found that he could use his experience of marginalization as a Jew as a tool to relate to the marginalization his students of color might feel:

> *There's this great moment in um the Great Gatsby…and Nick…starts thinking about when he was in high school and coming home from college, and they went to boarding schools, and they would come home and there was all this excitement seeing everybody at Christmas at the train and people were waiting for their trains to take them home to their little places. This was in Chicago the hub. And who had the green tickets? Which parties were you going to? Were you going to the Shultz's, were you going to the Uruguay's. So the names were kind of German decent, I mean that is the Midwest. But what I said to Rula, this Middle Eastern girl, "You and I wouldn't have been on that platform," you know.*
>
> *Ali: Did you say it in front of the whole class?*
>
> *Sam: Oh I said it about me. I said, "You know what, I wouldn't have been on that platform, I don't know if you would have been."…And like I said, I'm not invited to this, but I say it to them a lot of times… When we finally have a Jewish character I say, "Wow, you know finally a time." I mean I don't talk about them being excluded, I talk about me being excluded. It's good - being Jewish it makes it easy.*

In the above quote, Sam demonstrates how he related to students' marginalization through his experience as a Jew. Like Helene, he pointed out the places where Jews were missing or he remarked when a Jewish character finally appeared. What would it take for Sam to be able to do the same for Black characters? He felt comfortable doing this because he was Jewish. But would it be inappropriate for him to do that in relation to the

racial identities of his students, asking where the Black people would have been at that time in history?

Noticing student talk about race

Finally, while teachers were asking questions such as, "How can I talk with my students about race?" their students were already talking about race. In Laurie's classroom, Todd's classroom, Ann's classroom, Scott's classroom, Cara's classroom and Helene's classroom, it was already there; they did not have to bring it up. And sometimes they did not even have to respond. Students have all kinds of conversations among themselves in which teachers are not involved. And yet teachers do find that they need to be able to step in when necessary, and to be able to assess when that intervention is appropriate, without anxiety or fear. And they need to realize that when they do not talk about race, or when they intentionally avoid it at a time when it would very naturally be a part of the conversation, they are not being neutral; silence itself still sends messages about race to their students (Frankenberg, 1993; Thandeka, 2000).

Discovering what students think about race

At the end of the year, Todd invited me into his classroom to support him in presenting a lesson about media analysis with his students.[8] Although talking about race is not the only reason for teachers to learn about race, doing so can help a teacher understand a whole aspect of his students which usually remains invisible. This hour-

---

[8] I brought in a slide show that portrayed the covers of movie boxes from movies that depict urban schools (*Dangerous Minds, Lean on Me*, etc.) and others that depict suburban schools (*The Breakfast Club, Juno, Ferris Buehler's Day Off*, etc.). We analyzed the covers in terms of the messages they sent about urban and suburban schooling, as well as about race.

long exercise was incredibly valuable for helping Todd learn some of the beliefs and

values that his students held about race, which very likely impacted their learning. The

following points are realizations Todd had about his students' racial knowledge while

listening to their participation in this lesson.

First, some of his students, who were biracial, were actually censored by other

students who felt being lighter meant they could not authentically talk about being Black:

> *Two of them, like at one point, one of the students more or less questioned*
> *another students' ability to speak on an issue based on the fact that he was*
> *biracial, and one of them said they were 100% Black – it's hard to*
> *generalize, but clearly they know there's differences and people are*
> *treated differently based on that…it was just interesting to me.*

Second, his students seemed to think that kids who attend White, suburban

schools were better than kids who attend Black, urban ones:

> *…they have almost an inferiority complex about race and it's surprisingly*
> *not that negative towards—in some cases it is—negative towards White*
> *people – but it's also like, oh like White schools are better. And I don't*
> *think somebody necessarily told them that, but I think they have this idea*
> *of like schools, from things like media and things like that –but they are*
> *better and I think it can kind of be extrapolated onto a lot of things that*
> *they consider like White, like clothing, things like that.*

Third, rather than critique the structural racism that influences the differences

between urban and suburban schooling, students seemed to blame urban Blacks for their

problems, as if films that stereotyped urban schools as violent and unruly were accurate

portrayals:

> *Well that's what worries me, like there's like a little bit negative view of*
> *White people, but they're much more negative about themselves and other*
> *Black people… They were like, they are more violent, look at them… they*
> *don't think like 'well what's wrong with public education,' they think like*
> *'what's wrong with me that I'm not successful?' And I think you get those*

messages in a lot of ways, like if you're not successful—it's not your school, your principal, your teacher—it's you and your family. Like what aren't you doing?

Fourth, as a result of this lack of critique, his students may not have the negative feelings towards White people that Todd expected them to have, based on his own knowledge of structural racism:

And I don't get the sense that my kids are really, like I think they have a sense of injustice between White and Black, but it's not like overtly negative, there's not like a ton of animosity, I don't think. I don't know…I was a little surprised.

Fifth, his students did not seem to have a sense of the many different ways that Black people are economically successful:

We were doing a debate – and one kid said suburban schools have more money and there was some correlation that it was better. And one kid said well rappers, and R&B artists' kids' go to those schools too…. They didn't say doctor or lawyer – like if you're going to have money, that's the only way. Like why is that what happens in your mind? It's interesting to me that that's what pops into your head. Like when I was little, thinking about things that I could do to make money, like I would never think I'll be a famous musician, I thought like I'll be a doctor or a lawyer, that's how I thought you were successful. I don't know.

One of the things Todd realized he needed to do was expand the notion of Black culture for his students to include images of wealthy Black professionals and other forms of success typically associated with Whiteness:

Rich schools, White schools. My students call a lot of things White and that typically means with money. Like, "Do you live in a White neighborhood?" If so, it's a rich neighborhood… It's weird – I feel like it's important to be a part of Black culture, but at the same point, there's all these things that they don't see as part of their culture that they think are good….so like it's not good for somebody to call you White, but in a way it kind of is because it's kind of implying that you have certain things that other kids don't that are things that you might want to have.

The short one hour media analysis workshop that Todd and I led for his students helped him begin to get a picture of how his students thought about race and what he could to help them cultivate more positive images of themselves and their futures.

3. Teaching "Racialized" Content

The topic of teaching "racialized" content came up for a couple of different reasons. Sometimes, as was the case with Scott and Helene, it was because they thought they needed to teach "racialized" content in order to have conversations about race in the classroom (and in order for me to have something to observe). At other times, as with Cara, teachers actually joined the inquiry group to get help thinking about how to teach "racialized" content that was given to them as part of the curriculum. Whatever the motivation, the topic led to multiple other questions that will be explored here.

Who am I to teach about oppression?

When Helene and her second grade team tried to find ways to intentionally diversify their curriculum, they did so by introducing a biography unit in which the biographies were about people of color, notably Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. Early on Helene started to question whether they should focus so much on oppression and resistance. She wondered, "Does it *really* make sense to be reading this? Is this *really* helpful? Or am I like teaching them about injustice?" She wondered whether it was age appropriate to learn so much about hatred and she said that if she had known more about anti-Semitism as a child, she thinks it would have been really hurtful to her.

In spite of the fact that they had such different classrooms (Helene's classroom was about 40% Black, 55% White and 5% Asian American while Cara's classroom was all Black), Cara and Helene ran into similar stumbling blocks. They realized that there was so much missing from the version of history that they had been taught. Helene asked:

> *What about Asian Americans? And what were they doing at this time? And Indian Americans? And Latinos? Were they allowed to eat at the counters? Were they not? It made me wonder. And I didn't even know the answer and so I didn't even want to bring it up with the kids. But it was such a Black and White issue. And, it made me feel like, ok, I need to learn more. And…I don't know, it seems like it's so Black and White, so often. And not, without other perspectives.*

Cara seemed to feel similarly insecure about the aspects of the Civil Rights Movement that she did not know. Kids asked her questions that she did not know the answers to, such as, "If you were biracial, where did you sit?" Not knowing those answers contributed to a feeling of inauthenticity as a teacher of "racialized" content.

In defense of Whiteness

Both Helene and Cara also found themselves qualifying their statements about the racism in the Civil Rights Movement. They both found themselves questioning the value of teaching students about hate and prejudice.

> *Because you know teaching that people who spray kids, spray kids with hoses and dogs on them - How good would it be that you believe that any person would be that hateful? So, so, and then, kids of color, to hear that someone, that some adult was that hateful to kids or adults just like them would just make you angry and hateful. If I heard that, that like someone did that to Jewish kids, I would feel like, "Those bastards!" And I don't want, you know. And so, how do they separate, I mean, one thing that makes it a little easier was like, "Okay, well this was in the south and we're in the north, and this was a while ago." But that doesn't erase,*

that's one thing. But it's like, "Thank God we're in the north so that we can at least separate by distance. - Helene

It's like, really complicated! And I found myself reading the books being like, "and some White people…" "and some White people…" But others were really resisting. -Helene

Cara also realized at one point that as she taught, she felt defensive of White people because she did not want her students to think that she was racist. Like Helene, she made sure to point out to her students that there were White people who participated in the Civil Rights Movement; that not all of them were racist. I asked her if this was because she wanted them to understand historical nuances, or because she was defensive of herself. She answered, "a little bit of both."

From a pedagogical perspective, it is important for everyone to know that White people participated in the movement for civil rights. By seeing this historical nuance, White children get to see anti-racist role models, and everyone gets to see examples of ally behavior. It also interrupts the essentialism that happens when we talk about race and racial categories. It may help more White people see the Civil Rights Movement as "their" history too. But too much emphasis on White participation in the Civil Rights Movement really misses the point, which is to help students see the ways that Black-led multiracial (predominantly Black) groups fought for their rights against a largely apathetic and violent White majority. The fear that her students might think all White people were racist really came as an afterthought for Cara, a reaction to learning the history alongside her students, and not having time to process it for herself ahead of time. As she and I discussed afterwards, almost all of the people upholding racist policies and

138

implementing racist laws were White. And most other White people sat around not doing anything (while also benefiting from racist policies). The anti-racist White people were in the minority; there was not exactly much White honor to defend.

"It's not my property – I don't own this"

Cara actively wondered whether she, as a White teacher, could be an effective teacher of the Civil Rights Movement. Her urban charter school, where she taught an all Black fifth grade class, had an expeditionary learning design, which meant that each grade level completed multiple expeditions each year, in which teachers designed comprehensive learning experiences (including cross disciplinary activities, drama and poetic renderings). The fifth grade was doing an expedition on the Civil Rights Movement. Like with most things in her classroom, the Civil Rights Movement expedition seemed exciting, detailed and engaging for the students. Cara seemed knowledgeable about the topics and organized about her lessons.

The expedition was organized around learning goals, which included helping the students understand three main points: 1) The Civil Rights Movement was made up of everyday people, 2) Racial inequality still exists today and 3) Young people made change. Cara regularly checked in with her students to make sure they were learning these learning goals. She also taught skills throughout the Civil Rights Movement lessons. Vocabulary for their word wall was comprised of words they selected in their readings that they did not understand. They had extensive reading and creating writing assignments based on their Civil Rights Movement learning.

And yet, teaching the Civil Rights Movement brought up a lot of self-doubt for Cara. She constantly questioned herself. She felt that she did not know enough and wondered if she was simplifying it too much. "Yeah I want background. Any background I get even if I can't adapt it will help me to be a better teacher of this topic." At one point I told her I had some ideas for her and she said, "Yeah, gimme." She wanted anything she could get it. She had a healthy awareness of how much she did not know, how much there was to know, and how big of an impact it could have on her students. This was humbling to me as she was already teaching students aspects of the Civil Rights Movement that I had never learned.

While I observed her teaching, Cara came over to me and said, "This is a question… I feel like, it's not my property, I don't own this like I should to be able to teach it." I was baffled when she said this. Did she mean that the Civil Rights Movement was not her history? I later clarified that indeed, Cara felt the Civil Rights Movement was not her history, and that it was not really her business to teach it. She felt that her students' parents would judge her and see her as inauthentic. And she feared they might be right.

Just like Helene in the example above, Cara seemed to see Civil Rights and racial socialization as not her domain. Cara continued to say things throughout the year like, "It doesn't belong to me." There are probably a number of reasons why she felt this disconnect from the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. But part of it is the way that Black history gets segregated from mainstream American history and does not get taught to White people as part of their history. The Civil Rights Movement, which

represents so much of what is right and good about U.S. democracy, gets marginalized as fringe Black history that does not belong to all of us. Cara's sense that the history of civil rights in the U.S. was not her history came from the education that she received, as well as from mainstream ideas about history. She is not the first person to feel this disconnect. But it meant that she experienced more self-doubt as a teacher.

Cara's insecurities made her less bold as a teacher:

Ali: So what do you think were the biggest challenges in teaching the Civil Right Movement expedition for you?

Cara: Just like having a lot of self-doubt. Not knowing if I was simplifying things too much. Not feeling like I knew enough about, like I don't have a comprehensive knowledge base on the Civil Rights Movement.

Cara had wanted to reach out to parents all along, but feared that they would see her as just another White teacher teaching "their history":

I'm so concerned that they will think that I'm just this White person who is trying to impose more things from her White perspective on their kids and now I'm teaching about their history to their kids. I have all these concerns about that, but what's the alternative, not teaching it? I mean that's stupid.

She felt that she never learned the Civil Rights Movement well, so she did not know how to teach it. In that way, she is right that it is not hers. It is not hers, because like so many others, she was only taught a cursory understanding of the Civil Rights Movement and did not necessarily understand all of the details and nuanced dynamics. It is not hers because she did not embrace it and know it as her own. But that does not mean that her Whiteness should preclude her from making it her own.

141

4. Racial Socialization

Racial socialization is broadly defined as, "the transmission from adults to children of information regarding race and ethnicity" (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson and Spicer, 2006, p. 748). It is work that "enables children to negotiate contexts characterized by high racial, ethnic and cultural diversity" (Hughes et al., p. 747). Racial socialization is a term that usually refers to the work of families, not teachers. But racial socialization processes are occurring in schools all the time. For teachers, part of the work of racial socialization involves helping students to make their personal racial identities compatible with what happens in the classroom. Just as math teachers realize that they need to support girls in understanding that being a girl does not preclude the possibility of being a mathematician, teachers of Black students must help their students synchronize their racial identity and their student identity by interrupting misconceptions conveyed by the larger culture. Racial socialization involves talking about race, but it also involves much more, as the following examples demonstrate.

Emotional processing

In spite of the fact that teaching "racialized" content is not the ultimate goal of helping teachers to develop a racial awareness, it does happen to be an important part of the race work that teachers do, as well as a source of many of their questions. It can also be an important vehicle for racial socialization. One of the differences is in the mindset. Teachers who are aware of racial socialization processes recognize that they are constantly shaping the way that students grow up to feel about race and their racial identities. Teaching biographies of people of color and the Civil Rights Movement is not

142

just about content; it is about introducing role models, being critical of injustice and equipping students to recognize and confront prejudice in their own lives. The three main learning goals of Cara's expedition (1. The Civil Rights Movement was made up of everyday people, 2. Racial inequality still exists today and 3. Young people made change) seemed to acknowledge that teaching the Civil Rights Movement was more than content, that it could have implications for the students' lives. Cara approached these goals using a number of different types of learning, including writing and performing poetry on the different perspectives of people involved in different conflicts.

Emotional processing is not typically considered a critical part of teaching the Civil Rights Movement, and yet it came up multiple times in Cara's fifth grade charter classroom and in Scott's fifth grade gifted classroom, when their students seemed to need time to process the lesson emotionally. Ironically, there was usually not time for the emotional processing, in part, because both teachers had so much content to present. And yet they did such a thorough job presenting the content, that students seemed to need more time to process it.

In Cara's case, the students read historical fiction about the bombing of the church in Birmingham and they watched excerpts from *Eyes on the Prize*. They covered some of the most painful parts of the movement, not just the victorious moments that are usually touched on. During lessons, one or two boys laid their heads on their desks. Cara did not let them keep their heads down and would not let them check out. But I wondered if they were more than just tired. Was this an emotional reaction to painful material?

During one particularly intense read aloud, Cara read the narration of a scene

when a young girl was being arrested by police for being involved in a protest. She read, "They called me names and cracked jokes about parts of my body." From one of the girls, I heard a sound of sympathy, "Ahhhhh." Students seemed to be listening very quietly; they were not restless. Then Cara read, "The lock shut, it was final. It said I was trapped." One student raised her hand. Cara looked up from the book and said, "That's personification."

Because this was a read aloud book, something Cara did every day for 15 minutes, she did not have a lesson built around it, or even scheduled time to discuss it. And because she was generally trying to use every moment to teach skills, she seemed, out of habit, to identify writing techniques, like "personification," regardless of what else was happening in the book. In this moment, however, she missed a chance to help the students talk about how this affected them emotionally, as they heard about the arrest of a Black girl only a few years older than them. It seems that there might come a point where teachers have to decide whether they are teaching skills, or helping students process their emotions, because students cannot necessarily work on both at the same time. Opting for skills means distancing oneself from the emotional content in order to break down a reading for its technical parts. Choosing to talk about the lock, citing, "I was trapped" as an example of personification meant that the students did not get to feel the full dramatic effect of what personification accomplishes. Nor did they get to process what feelings it brought up for them.

Another time, while watching *Eyes on the Prize*, Cara gave her students instructions, "As we're watching this, even if we're angry about it, which makes sense,

144

we have to think about what perspectives they're coming from. If we just think they're crazy and bad, we can't understand it. So think about those interviews we saw with White southerners and what were their motivations?" She was teaching her students to think about perspective and to understand motives. But she skipped over a critical piece that she acknowledged at the beginning, which was, "even if we're angry about it." She affirmed that it would make sense to be angry, that it would even be okay, but she did not give her students anything to do with their anger. She acknowledged it might be there, but stopped at that. Arguably, these moments of emotional engagement are the places when students might be most likely to identify with the everyday people who made up the Civil Rights Movement, which was one of Cara's top three learning goals. And the opportunity to talk about their emotions is their chance to decide how to assimilate the emotional content into their own lives and experiences.

Part of the reason that Cara did not do this processing with her students was that she thought it was not her place, which related back to her own confidence and her self-doubt, particularly related to being a White person (which will be discussed further in Cara's case study). From the outside, it seemed that her students really trusted her, and I think they would have welcomed the chance to process their learning with her. But her own fears that she was overstepping her role as a White person held her back. Her hyperconsciousness of her Whiteness prevented her from taking steps that her students and their parents seemed to trust her to do, denying her students the important emotional processing aspect of racial socialization that could accompany this acquisition of new content.

145

The most vivid example of this was when Cara accidentally showed the part of *Eyes on the Prize* in which Emmett Till was killed. She had set up the video and then went into the hall to meet with another teacher. When she returned, she realized that they had seen almost all of the part on the kidnapping and lynching of 13 year old Emmett Till, which she had not intended to show. She turned it off before they showed the body, but students were begging to see the body. Some were laughing. Cara was deeply offended by their laughter; she said she could not believe their insensitivity about wanting to see the body. She told them that this was real life, not a video game. In reflecting on it afterwards, she said that it surprised her that she was actually more sensitive to this material than they were. She did not know what to do, but she was frustrated with them, so she reprimanded them for laughing. The next day, they wanted to finish watching the video, but she said they could not because it was not related to the topic of school desegregation, which was what they were supposed to be studying. She confided to me that the real reason they did not continue to watch the video was that she did not know how to deal with their reactions.

In this case, it clearly would have been good for the students to process what they had seen. The story of Emmett Till is traumatic. Cara agreed with this afterward. But she was not equipped, in the moment, to see their laughter or their curiosity as related to the trauma of witnessing this lynching. This was partly because her whole orientation to the Civil Rights Movement was largely academic. She was not necessarily anticipating emotional reactions, so she did not recognize that laughter could actually be a trauma reaction. But it was also because she had not intended to show them the story of Emmett

Till. Had she planned this, she likely would have thought about it extensively beforehand and talked to others about how to support kids emotionally when watching traumatic material.

Emotional processing in the gifted classroom

In preparation for my visits to his gifted classroom in a suburban public school, where all but one of his students were White and one was Asian American, Scott planned to begin reading about a particular "racialized" moment in American history: the Great Migration. I told Scott that I did not need him to teach anything in particular - that race is everywhere, no matter what content you are teaching. But he decided to teach the Great Migration because he wanted to take advantage of having somebody to talk about it with, and because he wanted me to have good material for my research.

He had been meaning to teach this particular content for a while in order to fill in some of the blanks of what Black history the students were receiving. "They drown in MLK, the Civil Rights Movement, what's her name on the bus, the Black Moses, maybe Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass – and the movement had so many more people involved besides MLK." His capacity to teach this material was made possible, in part, due to the efforts of an African American reading specialist who had picked up grade level appropriate books published by National Geographic on the Great Migration. Scott emphasized that often he did not know how to convey such material without grade level appropriate books and that having this set of books made it possible for him to teach it. After Scott's initial attempt to begin the Great Migration, the students did begin to engage with the text as they read it aloud as a class. Scott covered much of the history

thoroughly, and constantly stopped the reading to process with students, leading them to understand how and why things happened the way they did.

At one point, he asked the students to put themselves in the place of the White landowners in order to help them understand how they were threatened by the Black vote and Black power.

> *Scott: White folks get themselves back in power and get everything in control the way they want it. Which White folk—if it wasn't all White people together—what group was especially successful in getting themselves back in power?*
>
> *Michael: KKK?*
>
> *Scott: That was a way to execute it.*
>
> *Student: The president?*
>
> *Scott: Not the president so much. The big plantation owners – the big rich guys who wanted to be back in control. They used, often, the poor White guys to do it.*
>
> *Kyle: That's not nice.*
>
> *Harper: It's all good after the Civil War – No.*
>
> *Scott: So that's what happened and they did it by—I always find this really interesting, but not in a fun way—they created laws to make it legal.*

The readings and discussions in Scott's classroom were generally quite provocative and engaging. But it seemed as though it was primarily a cognitive discussion and the students who were not predisposed to accessing the material emotionally did not do so without prompting.

Scott and I realized jointly that the girls were much more emotionally engaged with the material than the boys. Throughout the reading, different girls would say things

like "What!?" whereas the boys would engage in the banter about the content, but did not tend to express emotions. Classroom conversations seemed to move at a fast pace, almost in a competitive manner, without taking the time to discuss and plug into the material emotionally. Scott likely influenced this atmosphere as a teacher who seemed to be more in touch with his righteous indignation about racism than he was with the sadness of racism.

Is it important for White students to process "racialized" history emotionally? As we think about skills that White students need, particularly if they are in classes segregated from Black students, one of those skills is identifying emotionally with people who have been oppressed and learning to experience their own feelings over the sadness of it. White people are widely criticized for only considering racism from a cognitive perspective and not actually becoming vulnerable enough to experience feelings around it. This is also a documented reaction to witnessing trauma: people tend to repress what they see because it creates so much cognitive dissonance (Cohen, 2001). In addition to the influential work that Scott did through teaching this curriculum, he could have taken it even further to support his White students' development of emotional intelligence in the field of history and racism. I suggested that this is a skill he could teach the boys in his classroom by breaking up the discussions and creating opportunities for students to journal about their feelings so that boys could have a chance to reflect emotionally. They seemed to need a structure for that because they were not doing it spontaneously or independently.

Additionally, as in the following example, there were moments when the students actually mocked the material:

Scott: African people made it to the western hemisphere how?

Students: Slavery

Scott: Europeans enslaved them, captured them, bought them, brought them to places like Brazil, the Caribbean and the United States.

Student: Let's buy some people.

Student: I'm going to buy me some peeps.

These were comments that Scott did not hear because he was focusing on teaching, but I heard it come and go within the discussion without much notice from the rest of the class. But I point them out here because they struck me very deeply when I first heard them. This was emblematic of the kind of microaggression that might actually be very alienating to a Black student, were they in the class to overhear it. Students were joking, in the context of a discussion about slavery, about buying themselves "some people." This kind of joking designates this classroom space as the preserve of White people, or at least of people who feel comfortable making snide jokes about buying people in reference to slavery, without the slightest consideration of what that might actually mean. It also raises the question of what is required for White children to be successful in our society. That child, who did not seem to be able to filter his humor, who felt free to speak out in class, who had learned to identify as someone who is smart, even though he lacked the social intelligence to know what was appropriate, is on an academic track (gifted class) which tends to lead to academic (and often financial)

150

success later in life (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Scott was trying to intervene with these students, who were bound for success, to help them have a more accurate understanding of the injustice upon which American democracy was founded. And yet again, the content was not sufficient to support his students in developing their own sense of the injustice.

Towards the end of the class, the students asked Scott to explain lynching. In a very matter of fact way he described lynching, both from the past, as well as more current examples of lynching:

> *White female student: Wait – what's lynching?*
>
> *Note: 3rd graders come into the room.*
>
> *Scott (to 3rd graders): You guys are early, wait outside. Lynching is a very specific. Lynching is where a group takes a person and hangs them by their neck until they die.*
>
> *White female student: Do they just take a random person?*
>
> *Scott: Usually a group of White men would take an African American male, drag him out, beat on him for a while,*
>
> *Students: Why?*
>
> *Scott: The reasons varied – he didn't get off the sidewalk when I walked by, he looked at my wife funny. Maybe occasionally the guy did commit an actual crime, but instead of going to a court of law, they lynch him. It's more of a show of power – lynching is a way to show power.*
>
> *White female student 1: Like they can do that and they don't get in trouble?*
>
> *White female student 2: So he got lynched because he wouldn't get off the sidewalk and they killed him and they didn't even get in trouble?*

151

Scott: Who got on juries in the south? White guys—guys like me—the greater culture allowed it to happen. And occasionally something like this still happens. (Scott told them about James Byrd Jr. in Texas.) 10 years ago a gay White man was tied up in Wyoming and tied to a fence with barbed wire and killed. So homosexuals still have to worry about that sort of thing and of course crimes against females, women, things like that.

From my observation note: He's still talking and kids are reacting ("Wow! What? Why barbed wire?"), but four or five are already standing up and going out, one is on the computer. This is pretty deep stuff and they're leaving. They seem, as a class, simultaneously surprised and distracted by what comes next; appalled and emotionally uninvolved.

In this scenario, a few students really clearly needed the time to process emotionally and cognitively what lynching is, and they did not have the time because it came up so close to the end of the period and was generally presented in a fairly off-hand way. Other students seemed completely undisturbed by the idea of lynching and may have needed a structured process to help them connect to the material emotionally. In general, all students seemed to need time to process these things emotionally. The reactions of this class stood out in contrast to Cara's students who did have strong emotional reactions to historical content, but who also did not have time to process it emotionally because there was so much material to cover.

Given that there was no curriculum he was required to cover, Scott could have taken the time to emphasize the importance of developing compassion rather than simply acquiring content knowledge. The content is not unimportant; as a child I was taught very little African American history and therefore I did not have access to either the knowledge or the emotions. However, Scott's students really continued to see the Great Migration material as just more content, and they were much more engaged with the

152

interactive activities, such as planning the bake sale, than they were with this material. If

Scott had decided at the outset that his goals were to teach the content knowledge of the

Great Migration while creating space for the students to put themselves in the roles of

both the Whites and the Blacks, and giving them opportunities to exercise their emotional

intelligence by accessing their feelings about the unfair conditions of Blacks in the south,

then the entire unit may have unfolded differently. I encouraged him to ask, "How do I

make the race material central, rather than the stuff that happens in between all the fun

activities, so that the students are excited and emotionally engaged by the material I want

them to learn?" Finally, for Scott, as with Cara, it might have been useful to give

himself, as a teacher, time to emotionally process material before covering aspects of the

history of race oppression in the U.S. This would have helped both Scott and Cara

become aware of the range of emotional needs their students might have, as well as of the

importance of creating an emotional space within the presentation of content.

From talking about race to racial socialization

Return for a moment to Todd, who earlier in the chapter learned a significant

amount about how his students viewed themselves and their community during a one

hour lesson that we taught jointly. When Todd first came to the group, he was asking

questions about how to respond when students racially insulted one another. Throughout

the course of the year, he began to realize that he needed to be proactive, not simply

reactive, to issues involving racial insults. Todd was not considering simply starting to

talk about race, or to simply break norms of colormuteness. He was choosing to

proactively engage in racial socialization to help his students think about themselves and

one another, as Black people, more positively. This was daunting for Todd, as it likely

would be for many White teachers, because, as the following quote demonstrates, he

often lost confidence when talking about his students' lives with them:

> *I feel ignorant about a lot of aspects of my students' lives. I have a hard time feeling like I have authority to speak to them on these issues. I feel like how they view me and Whiteness in general, sometimes I think they have this idea that it's intellectual… When I say things, I feel like why should they care? I feel ignorant – like I don't know what I'm talking about and it's a confidence thing.*

Examples of the race based insults that Todd was trying to address included when

students were passing a note about a dark skinned student that said she "just got off the

boat" or when they said, "If we turn off the lights, we won't be able to see you." These

race-based comments usually provoked a strong reaction in him and they caught him off-

guard. He found them extremely offensive, and he did not know what to say in response.

As the comments usually came to his attention while he was in front of the class, he did

not feel like he had the luxury of time to strategize a reaction. He wanted to make sure

the students who were targeted by these comments knew that he noticed and that he did

not think it was appropriate. But instead, his reactions usually drew more attention to the

targeted student and did not stop the inappropriate comments, "So I guess my question is

like how can I build my confidence around talking about those things in the class that's

like… not fake?" Todd wanted to feel like he knew what he was going to say before

entering into a conversation on race. He was afraid of responding in the moment, in part

because he had tried to do so in the past and the conversations had not gone well. He said

that particularly because it was middle school, he felt like he needed to keep things

154

moving in a particular direction and there was less room for uncertainty on his part. Yet, what recourse did he have but to intervene, when his students were using racially charged comments to insult one another?

> *When I try to address those issues, my kids know more about it than I do. Who am I to tell them what's appropriate? They always say, "We're just playing." Usually the person who's offended backs down and says it's just playing. So do I have a right to bring it up? The real reason I brought it up is there are certain kids that get picked on consistently for this issue and it's not addressed as much as other issues.*

Todd seemed unable to actually determine the severity of the comments. They offended him, but did not always appear to offend his students.

The inquiry group supported Todd's hunch that such race based comments, particularly the taunting around darkness and the disdain for Africa, were probably very hurtful to the students that were the targets of insults, as well as to all of the students, as they collectively perpetuated the notion that it is bad to be Black, worse to be dark Black and even worse to be connected to Africa.

Possible responses to race based insults

Through the inquiry group's discussions of racial socialization, Todd realized that addressing race-based insults may require a more proactive strategy in order to help students critique anti-Black sentiments. The goal was not just to stop the insults, but to support his students to love themselves and one another, as Black people, more authentically. Again, Todd shared discomfort with this idea, feeling like it was not his role, as a White person, to do this. And yet, we discussed the fact that 63% of teachers in Philadelphia are White (Watson, 2001), while the student body is majority Black. What

155

might change in Philadelphia schools if White teachers began to be responsible for some positive racial socialization in their classrooms?

Members of the inquiry group suggested starting with a small cohort of students at lunchtime and watching films about colorism (*A Girl Like Me* or *Family of Skin Bleachers*[9]) or listening to music (*Shades* by Wale) to prompt discussions about skin color. When he felt comfortable, he could ask the members of the small discussion group to be leaders in a wider class discussion of the same topic. Todd was excited about this idea, but hesitated, feeling that as a White person, he did not have the appropriate racial positioning to lead a conversation having to do with race:

> *As a White person with lots of privileges leading the discussion – am I reinforcing that I'm better than you? I feel so unconvincing whenever I try to address something like this – because I'm not talking about personal experience. I'm just stating what I believe or what I find is inappropriate in the classroom. And they're going to say, "Oh, he's gonna give one of his speeches again – they do need background on a lot of this stuff, but sometimes I feel like they don't care.*

Todd made the previous statement in the context of the inquiry group and Cara responded, "Sometimes I wish I could contract out and get someone who's Black to do this."

This inclination—to get support from colleagues or parents of color—is not unprecedented. Because White students and students of color will hear messages about race differently, depending on who delivers them, it would make sense for Todd to partner with a Black teacher in order to have explicit conversations about race with his

---

[9] http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/films/a_girl_like_me/

http://current.com/groups/culture/89328481_family-of-skin-bleachers.htm

students. This would be particularly effective in designing proactive lessons designed to mitigate their race-based insults. But in the meantime, he cannot realistically access another teacher every time his students insult one another using race.

In order to be able to lead any conversation directed towards racial socialization, Todd needed to practice talking about race outside of the classroom. Talking about race should be seen as a skill that one can develop, just like any other teaching skill. Unlike other teaching skills, however, there can be so much anxiety tied to making mistakes in talking about race, especially with seventh graders, that it is not necessarily something that will just improve with time without practice. Arguably, over four years, Todd seemed to have gotten more, not less, anxious about talking about race with his students, especially after he realized that his training in African American protest studies did not easily translate into connection with or understanding of his students. He needed a space to continue to practice talking about race and to debrief his conversations with his students in ways that helped him move forward, out of the anxiety, rather than sitting in it and maintaining silence.

Todd also came to the realization that he did not have to address everything in the moment. When Todd intercepted a note that students had written to a dark skinned Black girl, saying she "just got off the boat," he could have taken the note away, told students to get back to work and ignored the comments altogether, or waited to address it until a later time when he had time to think about it. He could also begin thinking about potential responses now that he realized that he needed a plan for when this happened again. Finally, it may also be useful to realize that even though the comments were about race,

the response did not necessarily have to be. Teachers can respond to race-based insults as they would any other insult. In the following excerpt from Ann's interview, she describes how she handled insults based on skin-color between two students in her class and her awareness that students use them to "go for the jugular."

Ann: ...She has this great relationship with Aaron because they're like siblings. They like pick on each other and stuff. I think sometimes he does go to the extreme and I think it does hurt her feelings, but it is often about their skin color.

Ali: The way that they joke with each other?

Ann: Uh huh, like, "What do you know you're so light skinned? What do you know you're....?" He calls her chocolate and stuff and makes her very angry, but like I never hear her talk back but to that she'll shut him up.

Ali: Do you ever wonder if you should be intervening with that or?

Ann: Well I do at times and I'll say to him, "You've offended her, she is your friend." And he'll be like, "Oh she doesn't care." And I'm like, "No clearly she cares because she told you to shut up." And I'll say, "Why do you have to take it to that level? It hurts her feelings." So I handle it more as a put down as I would with any other situation because I know that's the motivation behind it, but I do think it's interesting that...I mean I understand how kids fight and how they go for the jugular, you know, but I think that for other teachers that would look at that and say, "How's a Black kid gonna pick on another Black kid for being Black?" but I know that in their minds that's a disparaging remark to make...

Confronting racism directly with students

As Ann's case study demonstrated, she had many micro-proficiencies around race that made it possible for her to do things that many other White teachers found challenging. She felt comfortable talking about race with her students in many small ways, but that did not mean that responding in the moment to troubling racialized conversations was easy for her. It was not. It is not necessarily easy for anyone to know how to respond in the moment when students are going off course, and that is particularly true with regard to addressing racialized content as a White person. In the following story, Ann was not sure what to say or that her students would trust her enough to listen to her.

Ann introduced the following story to me by saying that she had a very interesting exchange with some of her Black students and "you are going to be proud of me." She told me that she had been at a mentor reception with some of her Black students and three of them were passing around the computer and laughing. She asked them, "What's so funny?" They showed her a picture of a Black male teen with an afro, hat sideways, holding a bucket of chicken with a t-shirt that said "Chicaboo Jones." Ann responded, "I can't believe you think it's funny. It makes me sad to think you would laugh at that." One student said, "What, are you being racist?" Ann answered, "Are you kidding me? Look at his t-shirt. What does it say? So they looked at the shirt, but they did not know what Chicaboo meant. She said to them, "Let me tell you how wrong this is and for many reasons. This is a derogatory term. It's not a nice way to talk." One of the students said, "I think I've heard that before." Another student looked it up online. She

159

said then they realized what it meant. Ann asked, "Do you get why that's not okay?"

She said she was so proud of herself because another year she would be been completely

dumbfounded and not known what to say:

> *A year ago I would have said, "That's inappropriate, put that away." I felt*
> *like I had grown to the point to be comfortable enough to sit down and go*
> *through it with them and tell them why it is wrong.*

In response to her obvious pride in having reached this new level of racial

competency, I said, "That's great!" She said, "Yeah me!"

This vignette demonstrates how difficult it can be for White teachers to engage in

even a simple exchange like this one without freezing up or ignoring something that is

problematic. Ann's excitement after it was over demonstrates that this was indeed an

achievement for her. Successful interactions like this one will help her to expand her

comfort zone so that her capacity to intervene in the future will increase. Because of her

relationship with her students, she was able to be trusted throughout this intervention (if

not immediately at first), in spite of the fact that she was not Black herself.

In Dr. Howard Stevenson's work with Black youth, he tries to help youth gain

skills so that they can reframe stressful racial experiences as mountains to climb, rather

than tidal waves that will drown them; hurdles, not dead ends. It seems a testament to the

strength of Ann's microproficiencies that she was able to frame the conversation

described below as a challenge for her (a mountain to climb), rather than a tidal wave that

would destroy her.

At the same time that Ann recognized the importance of equipping students to live in a racist society, she did not know how to respond when students accused other teachers of being racist.

Ann: So when the kids start throwing around words like racist, what do you say?

Ali: Yeah and that's hard because you want to support their reality, or I would think, I would want to support their reality and not say, "No that's not racist," but not support false accusations that are unhelpful.

Ann: Right. My friend (an African American teacher) will say things like, "So what? You're gonna run into people like that your whole life." And to me I'm like, "Did she just trash talk my colleague?" because that's how the child will take it. "You are right, she is." Now I say those are very serious…that is slander. You can't call somebody a name like without anything to back it up.

Ali: What if they do have stuff to back it up? Do you ever have students who are able to?

Ann: What they'll say is "she picks on me" and I'm like "how do you know it's not because she thinks you're capable?" I put it back on them, but always in the back of your mind you're thinking, "I'm not sitting there and right now this is how this child feels and I don't want to downplay how he's seeing this because even if he's reading the situation incorrectly he's walking out of there feeling a certain way." There are people who are clinicians who are probably trained to figure out if that's a ploy to get attention and that's not me. That part I'm not a lie detector, I can figure out. And sometimes it's the same teacher, same type of students over the course of a sustained amount of time. So is that a teacher who you could sentence to cultural proficiency? I don't think so. I don't think you can administrate someone to doing this.

Ann tried to negotiate the tricky terrain between supporting students' reality and not giving them excuses to fail. However, she also seemed to fall into the trap that most schools fall into, in which she felt that in order for a child to legitimately accuse a teacher of racism, they had to have proof. And yet she also acknowledged that very often the

same teachers get accused of racism by different students over a number of years. Her African American colleague, in the meantime, wasted no time in trying to talk students out of their interpretation. She simply would not allow students to use a teacher's perceived racism as an excuse to fail. Ann could not do this because she felt that not defending her colleagues was akin to slander.

Pro-active racial socialization

Cara's discomfort around the Civil Rights Movement was not simply with teaching the Civil Rights Movement. If she had simply been teaching the Civil Rights Movement, she could have done it with more or less precision and more or less emotional processing, just like any other White teacher, which is precisely what she feared people would perceive her to be. But in fact, she was trying to provide some racial socialization through teaching the Civil Rights Movement, which is not what the typical White teacher does. She was trying both to connect it to racism today, and to give her students tools for activism, as well as for success within a racist society. Cara felt strongly that racial socialization was a part of her work as a teacher of Black children. She felt awkward about it though, wondering how her students would perceive it coming from her, or how their parents or other teachers would perceive it as well. The following quote is from an email Cara sent me after an inquiry group discussion on resilience:

> *I was thinking about it, and the biggest takeaway I got from the resilience article is that I need to work even harder to help my students develop a sense of self-efficacy (I guess greater alignment between their "possible selves" and their "expected selves"). In service of this goal, helping students develop racial pride and identity seems like a key step, even if it's a sometimes-awkward endeavor for a White teacher like me, and I still have questions about how to do it (although learning about Black culture*

162

*and history myself seems pretty important, as well as teaching about it in
my classroom). Thanks, Cara*

When Cara said the Civil Rights Movement was not "hers," she was not just

talking about the history, but about the racialized experience of being Black. As a White

woman, she did not feel like she knew enough about being Black to engage in the aspect

of teaching about the Civil Rights Movement that is racial socialization. And yet, as a

teacher of Black students, who was familiar with the current and historical impact of

racism, how could she not?

Using "racialized content" for racial socialization

In spite of her reservations, Cara did say that she used the Civil Rights Movement

as an opportunity to do some racial socialization with her students. Sometimes it was

more overt, while at other times she may not even have realized she was doing it. While

watching a segment on the Little Rock 9, in which White students were trying to get

Black students expelled by making them angry, Cara said to her students, "So if you

didn't want to get expelled, what did you do?" They answered her, "Keep cool."

At another point, the students dove into a conversation about racism that Cara had

not planned and she skipped math in order to finish it:

> *Cara: I think it's important for you to know this, because if you're saying
> this is a pretty racist society, that racism still persists, which I just heard 3
> students say – then you need to be prepared to know how to face it.*
>
> *Black Female Student 1: But we're still young*
>
> *Black Female Student 2: Like Ruby Bridges*
> *Black Female Student1: She was like 12*
> *Black Male Student 1: I was watching the news and there was this pool
> some place and the Black kids tried to go there, but they turned them away*

and the White kids were there.

Black Female Student 3: I have a connection.

Cara: Some of you are helping this conversation and some of you are getting bored and antsy and not helping – I'm watching you play.

Black Female Student 3: My mom took me and my sisters to the bathroom in this Chinese store, or this hair store and the guy said I'm sorry we don't have a bathroom. And she said I will file a lawsuit against you for racial discrimination.

Cara: We have to be careful because one thing that's tricky to determine is if something is racism or discrimination, but it's good to know what's happened and what still exists so you can determine what happened.

Black Male Student 2: If somebody does do racial discrimination, they can go to jail for it today?

Cara: There are laws against it and we won't be able to cover it all – my hope is this will pique your interest so as you grow older, you will learn more and look into these issues and learn about them. It might not seem as bad – like Nadja said, people aren't getting lynched as much.

Black Male Student 3: As much?

Black Male Student 4: What do you mean people are not getting lynched as much?

Cara: I would hedge to guess that possibly it still happens and we don't know about it.

Black Male Student 3: That's scary.

Cara: One thing that changes is people of color are better protected by the law. Emmett Till's killers were protected – all the systemic supports for racism – the society, courts, those protected people. The law doesn't protect people like that as much, but we know – well I'm not going to rant.

Black Female Student 4: I was at this little restaurant in (a neighboring upper middle class part of the city) and the lady said I'm sorry we don't have no more tables, and there were like 4 tables outside and 6 inside and my mom said we're just going to go to another restaurant down the street.

Cara had not prepared to have this conversation, but she went with it and it

probably helped her reach some of her learning goals better than any other planned lesson

she might have come up with. Still, in this conversation, it seems clear that the students

might need still more support to process some of the things they were discussing, some of

which was scary. At the end of the year, I asked Cara, "Have you done any things this

year that you would consider racial socialization?"

> *I mean in the sense that teaching kids about like the history of um the*
> *Civil Rights Movement. In some ways that seems to be part of, that's sort*
> *of like racial socialization. I mean I think I brought that up in other*
> *circumstances since my kids have learned about it to point out like…like I*
> *occasionally have them talk about like modern day examples of*
> *discrimination. Like I really want them to know that the playing field isn't*
> *level and that they need to be strong and resilient people that recognize*
> *the world how it is kind of and I find myself telling them that I really want*
> *them to keep studying and learning about this and then the pressure is on*
> *me to like help them. …They're gonna be out of my hands next year but I*
> *want to plant seeds so that they'll remember this stuff and keep wanting to*
> *learn about it and I think that's part of the socialization process.*

Understanding race while offering rebuke

Cara found that after having taught the unit on the Civil Rights Movement, she

was better able to bring up race with students when acknowledging race seemed

appropriate to the lesson (sometimes disciplinary) she was trying to convey:

> *Cara: I think I brought up something about like - and I felt like maybe this*
> *is inappropriate, you know - I said, oh that kid goes to Dr. Stevenson's*
> *basketball games, so I was like, "You know when you go to basketball one*
> *of the reasons that Dr. Stevenson's having this league is because he is*
> *concerned that boys and girls are not learning ways to cope with issues*
> *that come up and this is one way you can learn to deal with it." And I*
> *don't remember how I brought up race but I remember thinking is this*
> *appropriate? I guess that's a question. This is a really roundabout way of*

165

saying it, sometimes it comes up and I want to say, "People are gonna be ready to write you off..."

Ali: And you want to say, "Because you're Black."

Cara: "...because you're Black." And I did say it, but I don't remember how I said it. I keep like dancing around it. I don't remember how I said it, but I said it. And I remember a Black teacher was walking by and I was like, "Oh my god what is she gonna think if she overheard this?!" But I felt like because Justin knows that we've talked about it in the context of our learning and because he goes to Dr. Stevenson's basketball games that like maybe it was okay for me to say that. I want him to be ready for the world and I don't want him to constantly feel like he has to shut up and smile. I just want him to know that like going off the deep end with his angry response is not going to get him what he wants.

Ali: Mm hmm. Is that a new thing for you to say that or go there?

Cara: Yeah. I mean it's still really uncomfortable and I don't know if I should or if it's appropriate, but it's easier for me now that we've studied like racial inequality and we've seen how students protesting peacefully were going to jail while people beating the crap out of them weren't. There are things that I can refer to with them. That's been really interesting.

Ali: So it sounds like the conversation just in general kind of changed since having done this unit with them.

Cara: It's kind of like my "in" sometimes, but I don't know how my kids are interpreting that message, you know. It's weird coming from me. It's like by saying that I'm saying it's different for me, but we saw examples of how it's different for people like me.

Ali: And it's obvious to them anyway. I mean I imagine that it is, you know.

Another way that Cara chose to talk to a Black boy student who reacted angrily to her reprimand, was to talk about the need to learn how to control those reactions without even mentioning race:

166

Bringing race up in general like I mean it's tricky and I'm not sure I always do it the right way, but I was sitting outside of my classroom with one of my students the other day who had reacted really angrily to something… I had asked him to sit in his seat. We were at the carpet and he had been talking to someone he wasn't supposed to or something and I calmly was like, "Well you're talking so that's why I'm asking." And he had this angry face and said, "Well I didn't do nothing" and he stayed angry about it for a really long time. So finally when I had time I had him sit outside with me for a little while and I talked to him about it and I said, "Do you understand why I'm out here talking with you right now?" and he said, "But I didn't do nothing."

And I said, "it's not about, like what you did wasn't even a problem, it was how you reacted to it." And I said, "I have time to talk with you and I care about you and I'm gonna keep talking to you, but you know because of what we've learned about…" and it didn't jump right from there to there, but I said, "I need you to develop better ways to handle it when you don't like something or when you think something isn't fair and I want you not to forget that you don't think it's fair and I want you to be able to explain your side of the problem, but you need to find ways to do it that people will be open to listen to. We know that the world's not a very fair place and some people will be really ready to say you're just a bad kid that's angry and bad. You need to find a way to calm yourself down before you respond to something." I always tell them, "I'm learning to do it too and I'm way older than you so you still have a lot more time."

Cara conveyed this lesson without explicitly talking about race, but she did so with the consciousness that it was a critically important lesson for her Black boy students to learn because of the way their anger would be perceived outside of her classroom. This may have been an effective way for Helene to talk with Wendell when she caught him stealing. Helene knew that the repercussions for stealing would likely be much greater for Wendell, one of her Black boys, than for any of her other students and therefore wanted to make sure that she handled the incident in a way that would effectively teach him not to steal. Cara's example demonstrates how she could do this without necessarily saying explicitly that her concern for him was due to the fact of his

being a Black boy.

Books

One of the most straightforward forms of racial socialization that teachers found, particularly at the elementary level, was through choosing books to read with students. Teachers struggled with how to choose books, whose experiences to represent and how to determine whether or not a book was a stereotypical representation.

Cara read aloud to her Black fifth grade charter school class every day for 15 minutes. All but one of the read aloud books that she read throughout the year had Black protagonists. Cara wondered aloud during an interview if it was overkill to have almost all Black protagonists. I laughed when she said this. I acknowledged that it is probably a good question, because all kids need diversity. But White teachers routinely read almost all books with White protagonists and do not ask that question. Having a wide range of Black protagonists gives her students many ways to connect to characters and to literature. Do they really need diversity in the free reading selections? Don't they get enough of other races in the history books, the mandated curriculum, as well as the teachers they had before Cara and the ones they would have after her? Again, at a school like the private school in this study, this might be a harder decision because there are so many different races represented in each classroom, and each child should have the chance to see themselves reflected by the protagonist. But when all of your students are Black, it seems like the choice is pretty straightforward.

One way to think about this decision may be to go back to the reasons Cara used free reading time in the first place:

1. To help students learn to love reading and being read to
2. To give students exposure to more books
3. To calm students down after lunch

None of these objectives are compromised by having only Black protagonists. In fact, the first may even be accomplished more effectively if most of the books have Black protagonists.

Context matters when diversifying literature

One lesson that I learned during this year of research was the importance of context when considering literature to read in the classroom. One parent came to the suburban St. Clair cultural competency group hurt and frustrated by her child's second grade teacher's choice to read a particular book aloud to the class. The book portrayed a Black boy with a single mom who lived in a city and spoke in an African American vernacular. He spent his free time at a neighbor's house, making art out of garbage. The mother felt that because her child was the only Black student in the class, other students would assume that his life was like the life of the child portrayed in the book.

When I first read the book, I (perhaps like the teacher) thought it would be a great way to bring an underrepresented experience, and language variety, into the classroom. I sympathized with the teacher who, in trying to diversify the experiences represented to her students, had hurt the family of her only Black student. I also sympathized with the mother, who religiously attended cohort meetings in the hope of making things easier for her children, and who was frustrated by way that she seemed to encounter offensive content and assignments coming home with her three sons every couple of weeks. She was tired of having to constantly explain why she found things offensive. In this case,

she felt that books like this gave her son's classmates a narrow understanding of what it means to be Black, and that it put extra pressure on her son to explain his life, which was much more similar to those of his classmates than they might think.

This conversation helped me understand the critical importance of context. That very same book might have been excellent to read in a classroom in which all of the students were Black, or in which more of the students saw their experiences reflected in the characters. Although the experience of the protagonist would not mirror the experiences of all the students, none of the students would have to fight to prevent inaccurate stereotyping from their peers the way they would in a classroom where Black students were in the minority. In this suburban classroom in which all of the students were White except one, the questions to ask when diversifying the curriculum change. Questions the teacher might have asked include, "How will this book affect my one Black student?" "How will this book affect the way my White students see their Black classmate?" These questions are not intuitive because they are not the same types of questions we ask when we think about White students. Because there are so many different depictions of White people and White experiences in our society, White people very rarely feel that they have to fight to be seen as individuals, or to resist stereotyping. But because Blackness is so often stereotyped, one isolated portrayal of Blackness (especially one that aligns with well known stereotypes) can be easily misconstrued as a depiction of reality for all Black people. Because there were many White students in the class, none of them was stuck with the burden of representing their race the way that the

170

one Black student was. Context matters significantly in the decision of what "racialized" content to teach and how to teach it.

In Laurie's racially diverse independent school kindergarten classroom, she focused on reading many different books and stories about people of different races. Discussions about stereotypes and media analysis helped Laurie continue to seek out good resources for teaching. But unanticipated issues still arose. She read one story about a bully on a school playground, and all of the characters were Black. The darkest child in the classroom asked, but Laurie did not hear his question, "Why do they look evil?" Indeed the characters were mere shadows on the playground; they did not even have facial features. The main character in the story was a bully and the rest of the kids seemed to be background figures.

When we spoke about it afterwards, I mentioned the comment I overheard. Laurie said she thought this would be a good story because all of the characters were Black – the bully and the bullied were all Black. And in the context of a diverse curriculum like the one that Laurie taught, it was one book among many that represented Black people. Had Laurie heard her student's comment, she might have been able to address his comment, and discuss what "evil" looks like and why he thought the characters looked evil. However, in the future she also might choose to read a story with all Black characters that portrays a different scenario. This story presented Black youth fighting on the playground, which is a stereotypical portrayal, even if all the characters were Black. Had all of Laurie's students been Black, this might not send a negative message because the risk of their generalizing the story to all Blacks would be small. But

with only a few Black students in a classroom in a suburban private school, the message

this sends is different. Why not choose a different story in which all the characters are

Black?

Teaching racism in context

> *We were making it, you know, intentionally diverse. And trying to put in…*
> *African Americans who didn't have an oppression as the main issue in*
> *their life. Some athletes and artists and scientists. -Helene*

The solution that Helene and her co-teachers came to when teaching a biography

unit, which included teaching biographies of people from a diverse range of racial

backgrounds, meant that they overcame a common tendency to teach about people of

color only from the perspective of oppression, as if oppression is the defining aspect of

life for people of color. This decision may illustrate one of the distinctions between

talking about race and racial socialization. They were increasing student exposure to the

lives and stories of Americans of color who did things besides fight for civil rights. And

in doing so, they were providing students with examples and role models of successful

people of color. And yet realistically, any accurate biography of any scientist, artist or

athlete who is an American of color, should probably include some perspective on their

struggles with racism, as very few people of color in our society have been successful

without knowing how to navigate racism and prejudice. Including this aspect can be a

contextualized, comprehensible way to present racism to young children, through the

lives of real people. Racial socialization is about more than just talking about race; it is

about helping students learn to navigate a world in which racism operates.

172

In Rebecca Bigler's research on racial attitudes (as written about in *Nurture Shock* by Bronson & Merryman, 2010), she found that children had more positive racial attitudes when they learned not only about Jackie Robinson as an athlete, but when they learned a small piece about his experiences with discrimination as well. A contextualized understanding of racism helps children make sense of the world around them, one that is and has been shaped by systems of racism. In his critique of textbooks that erase the true history of racism in the U.S., James Loewen (2008) has written that the ignorance that comes from a sugar-coated history leaves students "hamstrung in their efforts to analyze controversial issues in our society" (p. 8). Giving children an accurate understanding of history, and of their current social and political context, requires a contextualized, age-appropriate understanding of racism.

Conclusion

Racial socialization takes place in schools regardless of whether teachers intentionally engage in it. Not talking about race sends a message about race, just as talking about race does. With issues of race and racism, it is impossible for teachers to be neutral, which is why the topic merits attention and skill development for all teachers.

Racial socialization is not only a process that occurs for students of color. White students are constantly being socialized into Whiteness by their school experiences. Preliminary studies of White racial socialization in families show that it tends to take the form of an adherence to colormuteness and colorblindness with an emphasis on the specious claim that all people are equal, regardless of race (Bartoli, Michael, Stevenson, Bentley, Shor & McClain, in press). These lessons tend to be started at home, and

reinforced by the supposed neutrality of schools on race issues, a neutrality that perpetuates a racist status quo. This process of White racial socialization tends to leave students without the opportunity to develop skills of racial competence.

Racial socialization is different from merely teaching "racialized" content, although there is significant overlap in the two processes. Racial socialization involves the conscious realization that how one talks and teaches about race will affect not only students' cognitive development, but their attitudinal, emotional and social development as well. As the stories from the teachers in this chapter demonstrate, one thing that distinguished intentional racial socialization from the mere introduction of "racialized" content, was teachers' awareness of the racism their students would likely have to face in their lives. Teachers who were more familiar with the racialized obstacle course their students would have to master were better able to prepare students for it. Notably, this also seemed easier for Cara, whose students were all Black, than for teachers who had large numbers of White students in their classrooms. Although it may seem like racial socialization must be race specific, in fact there is a tremendous amount of racial knowledge, skills and competencies that can be taught in schools to students of any race. White students need to build racial competencies as much as their peers of color do.

This marks the end of Section I of the dissertation, the theme of which is that one can have a multicultural curriculum and still not have an anti-racist classroom. A racial socialization perspective recognizes that what students learn about race is not only about what they read, but it is about their entire experience of schooling: how people treat one another, who is favored and who ignored, how their families fit into the larger school

social scene, whether they are invited to other students' homes for birthday parties, whether they feel beautiful in their social context, how much they have to explain themselves and their reality to others, how often they must confront mistaken impressions based on stereotypes, whether they are able to build personal connections with teachers and other students, whether feel they have a role in shaping the life of their classroom and school, or whether they are simply perceived as an irritant within it. A racial socialization perspective acknowledges that race pervades every aspect of the classroom, not simply the curriculum.

Questions for future research on White teachers and racial socialization include: What is the specific role of White teachers in the racial socialization of White students? Is there a specific role for White teachers in the racial socialization of Black, Latino, Asian and biracial students? Clearly some of the primary aspects of racial socialization (role modeling, etc.) cannot be done by White teachers. But just as White people may be able to play a unique role in anti-racist struggles, due to their specific social positioning, so too might they be able to play a specifically White role in racial socialization. What, then, should be the aspect of racial socialization with which White teachers should concern themselves.

Section II. The questions we ask shape the answers we find

Chapter 8: RAISING RACE QUESTIONS

This chapter focuses on the questions that teachers asked about race, as well as the questions that remained unasked. I will analyze three broad categories of questions: questions teachers asked about race as it relates to teaching, questions about one's students and questions about oneself as a White teacher. Teachers tended to progress through these questions throughout the course of the year: starting with teaching questions and moving deeper into identity questions as the year progressed. I also add a fourth category, which encompasses the questions that teachers did not ask; the open-ended way that they asked me to tell them what I saw, because they knew there were questions they might have asked if they knew more. Almost all of the teachers seemed aware that this fourth category existed, but it was a category that produced anxiety more than anything, because they did not know what they did not know.

1. Questions about teaching

The teaching questions that teachers raised early in the year were questions about pedagogy (*how* to teach about race), resources (*what* materials, curriculum, books to use), instructional questions and knowledge questions (questions that came from a teacher's realization that they had significant holes in their knowledge, for example, often with regard to teaching Black history). When teachers brought up questions in their inquiry groups, they were usually questions that fit into this larger category of questions about teaching. Teaching questions were also questions about how to teach issues of race in the classroom (or "racialized" topics) and how to talk about race with students. Some examples of questions about teaching follow:

1. How do I emphasize to my students that there is great diversity within any given population? How do I help them understand that not all Africans are poor? (Helene)

2. How can I create a curriculum to support a healthy development of self and diffuse the impact of bias and stereotypes? (Laurie)

3. Where can I find short essays on race to accompany our discussions of the novels? (Sam – paraphrased)

4. How to be… able to talk about these things with elementary students… and have it be… manageable and appropriate for them. (Scott)

5. When is it appropriate to begin teaching students about injustice? (Helene and Laurie)

6. How do I find good resources that are inclusive of many racial backgrounds? (Helene)

7. How do I explain different types of slavery? How do discussions of slavery affect my students, especially my Black students? (Helene)

8. How do I help 2nd grade students talk about race honestly and critically? (Helene)

9. Where do non-Black people of color fit into the Civil Rights Movement? (Cara)

At the beginning of the year, as they were just beginning their own inquiry work, case study teachers' questions were dominated by questions about teaching. These types of questions were asked the most frequently and by the most teachers. On the general survey that I did of all the teachers participating in the inquiry groups, this type of question was the only type that teachers asked.

Age appropriate race teaching

One question that came up in this category that seems particularly challenging is the question of what is developmentally appropriate for different age groups. Is it appropriate to teach the Civil Rights Movement in second grade? In fifth grade? Which parts should be covered? Which left out? Do kindergarteners need to know about

racism? Is that a concept they can grasp? If not, what is the foundation that should be laid in kindergarten? There are very few resources on how to make race learning age appropriate, particularly for young children.

In Laurie's kindergarten classroom, for example, she wanted to know how to apply the broader theories about race that she had learned. One of her questions involved helping kindergarteners deal with the anger of racism:

> *Dr. Stevenson started to talk about something - I just don't know how much of this applies to a kindergartener, but he talked about how racism is obviously so physiologically damaging and children who experience this and are raised in a racist world who are a person of color how there's, they need to be supported like they need to get in touch with their anger. I don't know, I don't think it's yet developed in a kindergartener.*
>
> *Beverly Tatum suggested how you approach it is that kind of like a "that was then" kind of thing … And like I thought, "Who are you talking to? Who are you talking about?" You can't tell a kindergartener, "Be careful it's still happening today." So you know that's the big thing that sticking up in my head, like blaring in my mind, like what is developmentally appropriate for a kindergartener, a 1st grader, a 5th grader, a 10th grader? It's so completely different and that's where being more informed from experts and listening to my hunches is really important.*

As a teacher of five year olds, Laurie was left to combine theories of race and racism with what she knew about child development. She did not know the extent to which she could apply these theories about race (such as Dr. Howard Stevenson's description of racism as physiologically damaging) to the children in her class. Even if the messages were relevant to five year olds, she was still left to determine how to translate them into a message that five year olds could understand.

Cara also struggled with this, particularly when teaching material that depicts the violence of American's racial past:

179

There was a moment when I was reading Alzyia Buckston and this is this little boy, well he's 11 ...and his mother had been born into slavery and had escaped, and we hear his mom talk about when she was little her master made her go with his little girl and their family up to Flint, MI and um she came back from this long summer trip and told her mom "I saw Canada." ... And her mom like beat her up basically, like hit her and then said, "If you ever get that close and come back to tell me about it, I'm gonna kill you myself. I will ring your neck. I know what the master's got planned for you" and she like alludes to this thing that's really bad that she doesn't want her daughter to have to endure. And I felt like my kids maybe picked up on it a little bit and I didn't know how to talk about that. They're 10 so, but they were confused about why the mom would say I'm gonna kill you if you come back. And I said, "Well she knows that she can't protect her daughter. You have to think about how little power a person would have." And that felt a little uncomfortable and strange. This is in the context of your question about what I choose to read my kids, but that brought up a conversation that was a little weird because I don't know how to talk about rape with my 10 year olds, you know? I can't even imagine having a child and knowing that they're going to be at the mercy of someone else. I don't know.

Instructional questions such as these are hard, and the answers that teachers come to have a big effect on their classrooms. How we teach about, talk about and learn about race and the "racialized" history of our country impacts our students greatly. If we do not talk honestly about the violent realities of discrimination and slavery, students will not have a full knowledge of the foundation on which today's reality was built. And yet teaching the explicit details of a violent history too early could traumatize students before they have the emotional resources to contextualize that learning. The questions that teachers asked about teaching were the types of questions that needed immediate answers, as teachers planned to return to the classroom the following day and wanted to do so prepared with answers to student questions, plans for classroom conversations and a clear sense of how to do this work right.

2. Questions about my students

As the year progressed, teachers' questions seemed to focus less on instruction and more on their students and themselves. These questions reflect a more extensive knowledge base, as well as increased trust with the interviewer, which allowed teachers to ask questions that were significantly harder to ask. These questions were harder, in part because they required the willingness to think about students in racial terms and to ask questions that seemed politically incorrect, if not racist.

1. Why are they acting that way?

2. What are my students going through?

3. Why don't my Black male students want to participate?

4. Why are Black males overrepresented in special education? What's wrong with the system?

Noticing and naming racial trends

The questions about students take the level of inquiry one step deeper than the instructional questions. This type of question tends to acknowledge different racial populations within the classroom. Teachers who have not learned how to break the norm of colormuteness will usually refuse to acknowledge the different races they have in their classrooms and will not, for example, notice (or say they notice) racialized trends such as a tendency for White girls to go outside for recess while Black girls choose to stay inside. In any given classroom, such a phenomenon may not necessarily be a notable distinction, but it might be. If we are unwilling to notice racialized trends, then we cannot observe further. The following is an example of a teacher being willing to notice racialized trends:

181

I want to be more mindful of what being Black in the classroom means. And there's this one White kid who constantly interrupts her all the time and then I'm thinking well maybe all the White kids are… So equity inequality what does that look like, right? (Sam)

Sam's question required noticing a behavioral trend and being willing to superimpose a racial lens to see that it was not just the constant interruption by one student of another, but it was a Black girl being interrupted by a White boy. Again, this phenomenon may not be notable, but it is not unreasonable to suspect (as Sam does) that in fact, it is quite common and that it has a significant effect on the experience of both students. What might the school day be like for a Black girl who gets constantly interrupted by her White male peers? And what are the messages received by a White boy, who feels entitled to interrupt and ignore his female and Black peers? How might he respond if he was prevented from doing so? Sam would not be able pursue this question – to confirm whether this was a destructive pattern – if he had not been willing to notice and name race.

In most schools, where a culture of colormuteness dominates, even this one simple question would take a lot of nerve and practice to vocalize. Many teachers at Sam's school were just beginning to be able to talk like this out loud in the inquiry groups. And even though I imagine Sam would have been able to speak in racial terms such as this even before he began the inquiry group, it was new for him to notice trends such as this one, in which Black students were constantly interrupted by White ones. And it was a new stance for him to then ask "what being Black in the classroom means."

Similarly, Ann's awareness of disproportionality in the Special Education program required her willingness to see and name race:

182

Yeah I would say, um the majority of students that I have for reading are African American and I don't know why that is. I mean I know all the theoretical factors. Um when I talk with them and I say to them, "What was reading like for you in 1ˢᵗ grade, 2ⁿᵈ grade, 3ʳᵈ grade?" I want to get a feel for why do they hate reading? Why do they like reading?

The "untouchables"

Helene and Laurie both asked questions with me that they did not ask in their inquiry groups. I call these questions the "untouchables" – they are questions that teachers would not ask without a significant level of comfort and confidence, and that they ask even though the words do not feel right. The asking of "untouchables" is a skill in itself – to use words that others might not find appropriate in the interest of articulating a question, rather than staying silent because one believes the words are inappropriate. As the following two quotes show, neither teacher knew exactly how to frame their question, nor what exactly they were asking:

> *How to gain more knowledge to support a situation where perhaps a handful of my children of color, primarily African American/inner-city students, how the culture that they experience in their home and neighborhood may be different than, maybe in the upper school the majority, but in here a group of children definitely suburban White privilege. I've heard from some of these individuals um, mostly colleagues, who say, "I live two lives. When I leave my neighborhood, you know, I put on this (independent school) face, identity and when I go home to my family I talk different and I walk different and I have two identities. (Laurie)*

> *I mean, even my one kid who talks, I don't even know how to say it, but, in a Black dialect, if that's the way to say it…how much do I correct him? (Helene)*

I propose that part of the reason these two teachers do not know what words to use in asking these questions is that this topic of Black code switching is so rarely talked about in mainstream White society (except in derogatory and racist ways), that there are

183

no codes of behavior or vocabulary to support the asking of the question, much less

finding answers. Part of the reason that the question itself might be seen as racist is that

it falls into that category of things that mainstream White culture deems untouchable in

polite conversation. In the same way that simply talking about race can lead to somebody

being called a racist, similarly asking questions about broad differences between a school

culture informed by mainstream White middle class values and a Black student's home

culture can be seen as racist too. The idea that Whiteness even has anything to do with a

school culture is quite radical, because school culture tends to be seen and interpreted

more generally as simply "normal" (Lee, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In reality, it is

only "normal" for some of the students, teachers and parents who make up the majority

of the population, who often tend to be White and/or middle class.

Asking the "untouchable" questions required noticing and naming difference,

recognizing uncertainty, acknowledging and supporting difference (rather than

automatically working to assimilate children who are different) and taking the risk that in

asking these questions, one might seem racist. These are the kinds of questions that do

not get asked in public because they require both racial competence and a sense of safety.

Ironically, though these questions are some of the most important to talk about for the

sake of students' lives and experiences in school, they do not get asked because of social

norms that restrict this kind of explicit race talk.

One of the things these "untouchable" questions have in common is that they both

ask about Black or African American students. Singling out students of a particular

racial group, particularly Black students, can be especially awkward. These teachers

notably did not raise these questions in their inquiry groups. Is that because they felt

more comfortable with me one-on-one? Were they prepared by their work in their

inquiry groups to be more open to asking such questions?

"Just say Black and make it positive"

When I look at all of the questions that teachers asked in my study about

individual students, they were almost all about Black students. In the large group inquiry

sessions, teachers and facilitators (myself included) would often talk about "kids of

color" and "White students" as if the line between the two was the primary racial fault

line. In reality, where teachers were flummoxed, the racial fault line tended to fall

between Black students and non-Black students. Why not, then, talk more about Black

students, rather than "students of color?" It seems that this same unwillingness to name

Blackness specifically interferes with being clear about what students we are talking

about at any given time.

In spite of the fact that they were almost always talking about Black students,

teachers usually used the broader term "kids of color." Or they did not qualify their terms

at all, as in the following example from a conversation with Ann:

> Ali: **"So what's the racial makeup of your students? You said you have 28**
> **students?"**
>
> Ann: "Mm hmm…isn't that funny that I don't even know? 28, so we have
> Denise, Brian, Tristan…I have to go by classes….um, Chris , Sam,
> Elliot….[pause] ….honestly… I'm supposed to know this huh? I didn't
> know there was going to be a quiz. I just don't even think about it and
> maybe it's wrong that I don't think of them that way. [pause – counting].
> So 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, but some of those I have more than once, **so I would say**
> **6, 7, maybe 7 out of 20 cause some of these guys I have two times.**
> Ali:… So just to be clear you have 7 African American students out of 20.

Ann: I do. Do you need to know for sure?

Ali: No no no - I thought, "I wonder if she's counting the Black students or the White students?"

Ann: Oh I see.

Ali: Cause when you said 7 out of 20 I was like, "I wonder what number that is?" And then the rest are White or you have other?

Ann: Yes the rest are White this year. I usually have kind of a mix, you know, but… I do have one, he's from Pakistan. I don't know - Is he considered a child of color when he's from Pakistan?

Ali: I think so, probably. Asian.

In this example, it was the Black students who were referred to as "students of color," the bodies who were counted as raced in response to a question about the "racial make up" of the classroom. Ann did not know whether her Pakistani student would even be considered a child of color. I responded by placing him in an American racial box, as though doing so would be helpful to her. In fact, it would be more useful to find out more about how he identifies and how his race and culture affect his experience of school.

Some teachers said they simply felt awkward talking about Black students instead of "students of color." In one inquiry group meeting, Laurie expressed her own awkwardness with the word "Black" in her inquiry group. A White woman in the inquiry group said to her matter-of-factly, "Just say Black and make it positive." Because Blackness has historically been used as an insult, a mark of inferiority and a legitimate grounds on which to discriminate, many White people have trouble using the word "Black" as a descriptive term, and yet not doing so makes it harder to be clear about

which students, exactly, we are talking about.   Laurie's colleague had learned how to "say Black and make it positive" so that she could use the term freely, with students and in talking about students, without fear of causing (or actually causing) a negative impact.

And yet, in other moments throughout our time together, some teachers seemed quite proficient in talking about Black boys and Black girls as analytical categories and seemed quite willing to name Blackness, particularly within the questions they explored within their inquiry groups. This enabled Ann to ask important questions about her students, "*This is the whole nut for me. Why do African American males typically choose to not engage in school?"*

Other questions about Black students included questions about students' feelings and interpretations about different events or books.

> *Ann: Is there a way for my students that are involved in this leadership team, can they learn about their culture, where they come from, the fact that they are African American students in (this suburban community) - without getting angry?*

> *Ali: Mmm I mean I think that's probably a personality issue and how they've been socialized at home around different issues.*

> *Ann: Like is it like the grieving process when you start to realize what it's all about?*

> *Helene: How do discussions of slavery affect my students, especially my Black students?*

Non-Black students of color

For the most part, teachers did not ask questions about non-Black students of color. This is partly a reflection of the student populations in the classrooms I observed. However, even in classrooms with Asian students or Latino students, non Black students

of color did not seem to draw much attention as students of color. Sometimes this was

because they seemed to fit into the classroom norms without any apparent difficulty.

Sometimes it was a result of not knowing how to address non-Black/non-White issues:

> *Scott: One issue that I do think about is how do you then get beyond the*
> *Black question. I raise that and it sounds pretty lame, but what I mean is*
> *there is more to this than Black, you know, the history is with Black, but*
> *for me personally and my own family background and the people I have*
> *loved I guess I would say that's probably my first priority too, but it's like*
> *that's not where it ends.*

Other times non-Black students of color seemed to have notable social difficulties, but

they still did not tend to draw much concern from their teachers in connection with race.

For the most part, any Asian American or Latino American children that were in the

classrooms I observed were the only student of their particular racial background in the

class. They did not seem to trigger the same level of stress for the teacher that their Black

peers did. And yet I often found myself wondering whether this apparent ease with

which they seemed to assimilate into the racial mainstream (or make their racial

"otherness" invisible) demanded a certain cultural occlusion for them, one that they

might not be able to consciously recognize until much later in life.

Whited-out – the implicit privileging of Whiteness

The other category of student that did not receive much explicit attention in the

form of racial questions from teachers was White students. As teachers developed the

courage to ask questions about racial trends or particular student groups, they tended to

ask questions about Black students as if they were the only students whom racialization

might affect, rather than asking questions about how White students play into the racial

dynamic as well. The following two examples demonstrate how much a White student's

188

sense of centrality in the classroom can alienate students of color (Black students in these examples) and how difficult it can be to intervene with this sense of entitlement.

Overall, Ann was consistent in the ways that she responded to students with high expectations and humor/sarcasm. But there were a few instances where I noticed a difference in how she talked to students, a trend she had asked me to look out for. One of these instances was with a wealthy White student. Ann had told me how many wealthy parents now fight to get their children designated as needing special education because they get extra time on the SATs and other tests. It is possible that the student in the following scenario technically did not even need to be in her special education classroom. But on this particular day he wanted to go to the library and he wanted Ann's help and he would not stop hounding her until he got it. Ann was working with a Black student named Keisha. This is an example of not necessarily treating Black students poorly, but allowing White students to use their privilege to assume a centrality that they do not deserve:

For about 10 minutes, Doug read his essay out loud trying to get Ann to help him. She had just told him that she would not help him until she finished working with Keisha, but he was sitting by himself reading in a voice that suggested that he expected her to be listening and that he was reading it for her sake.

Ann: What are you writing about?

Keisha: Romeo and Juliet.

Ann: Not just them – about what.

Keisha: It's about true love.

Ann: That's a true statement, but what's your essay about?

Keisha: Um, it was over here!

189

Ann: (Reading from paper) how they rushed into love - so we call that the impulsivity of youth. I picked out the four themes from R and J that are easiest to understand. If you had to pick three of those, which three would you pick?

Keisha looks over the themes.

Ann: This could get remarkably less difficult if you chose to use those three themes.

Keisha: Hmm?

Ann: See those three themes as your one, two, three.

Doug: Can I go to Ms. Gatto (the librarian)?

Ann: No, I feel so left out when you say that.

Ann left Keisha and looked at Doug's work over his shoulder. She said to him, "The difference between this sentence and this sentence is that this is a 9th grade sentence. This is the sentence of a student preparing to go to college."

She made a move as if to go back to working with Keisha and he said, "Hold on, don't go anywhere." She went back to working with Keisha. About 30 seconds later, he said:

Doug: Am I allowed to go to the library soon?

Ann: Oh honey, you're like a dog with a bone.

Doug: Okay, I really want to go to the library.

Ann: I know.

Ann: (To Keisha): Okay, so you picked 3 out of those 4, which one of those do you want to do?

Doug: I wrote this thing like 5 times. May I please go the library?

Keisha: No, she said no.

In my field notes, I observed: *This is the first point where Keisha spoke up against him. He had been interrupting her time with Ann for the whole class.*

Ann: I'm never going to feel sorry for you for rewriting. Ms. Michael – how many times do you think you'll rewrite your work before you publish it?

190

Ali: I don't know.

Ann: I wrote an article once… and I had to revise it 8 times before they printed it and it still had a typo, and I was so embarrassed. So you will never get my pity when you have to revise.

Doug: Can I just read you what I have so far?

Keisha: Didn't you just read that to her? Oh my God, Doug, stop, she's got to help me.

Ann: Just wait – let him read.

After he read, he asked again, "Now can I go?"

Ann: Wait!

Keisha: You can't go to the library.

Ann: What are you going to do? You're going to play games, I know.

Doug: I have no math. I can work in bio.

Doug: Just, please? Come on Harper.

Ann: You can't go tomorrow – I'm going to have a sub and leave very specific instructions.

Doug: I won't go to the library tomorrow.

Ann: Oh, I know you won't.

Doug: Thank you Ms. Harper, enjoy the rest of your day.

Ann: Okay, and I have the books for your mom.

In this scenario, Doug wanted Ann's help and he wanted to leave the room to work in the library. He persistently interrupted Ann's work with Keisha until he got both of what he wanted. Keisha became increasingly vocal throughout the scenario, as Ann failed to communicate to Doug that she would not listen to him. This scenario played

itself out in other classrooms as well, most notably during teacher-student writing

conferences in Helene's classroom. The way it would play out is just like this one: the

teacher would be working one-on-one with a Black student and they would be repeatedly

interrupted by White students, who seemed to feel entitled to the teacher's time. It was

not even necessarily notable, except that the reverse did not seem to happen; Black

students did not seem to interrupt when the teachers were working one on one with White

students. White students seemed to literally *White out* their Black peers, inserting

themselves in front of the teacher (both physically and in terms of attention) so that their

Black peers were rendered momentarily invisible.

Neither Doug nor Ms. Harper intended to be hurtful or disrespectful to Keisha.

However, by tacitly allowing Doug's persistent interruption, Ann lost many minutes of

work with Keisha that she might have had otherwise. Keisha clearly wanted Doug to

stop interrupting but did not have any power to make that happen.

Another thing that stood out in this scenario was the way that Ann framed Doug's

choices in his essay writing, giving him the choice between a freshman sentence and a

college sentence which, in my limited observation time, she had not offered to other

students. One piece of advice I had for her (which I gave knowing that she may already

do this) was to ensure that she held up the expectation that her students would go to

college for all of them. I found this assumption that Doug was college-bound ironic,

given his immature behavior in contrast to Keisha's respectful behavior. But looking

back, I wonder whether indeed his entitled behavior, which ultimately functioned as a

form of self-advocacy with no negative repercussions (except, perhaps, damage to any

192

relationship he had with Keisha), might ultimately be the more successful attitude within a college setting, where students must know how to self advocate and where White males do not tend to be punished for aggressive and self-interested behavior.

The second time I witnessed this kind of implicit privileging of Whiteness occurred when a White student's sense of entitlement went unchecked at Cara's predominantly Black charter school, where she had one White student for certain subjects, and he was the only White student in the class.

At the beginning of class, a Black girl came into the room, threw her watch across the room and then shouted. Cara asked the girl to spend the rest of the class time in the hallway and she reported these details to the girl's homeroom teacher, explaining, "I don't know if that flies in your classroom, but it doesn't in mine." Cara told me that this girl had been acting up more recently and that people suspected she might have Asperger Syndrome.

In the meantime, a White student named Brian was dominating his small group. Brian was the only White student in the fifth grade and he was not technically in Cara's class, but the teachers had switched classes for this lesson.

Brian's small group included a Black girl, a Black boy, and a Latina girl. They were writing a script for a play about segregation. Brian was reading his part out loud, "It was horrible for the Blacks, of course – segregation." His group mates looked at him and then went back to writing. Cara came over and began to read his draft aloud:

"Back in the 1950s and 60s, there was segregation, which was separation of people based on skin color. It was horrible for the Blacks, of course. They went to horrible schools. They were often thrown in jail for crimes they didn't commit. They didn't get any lawyers."

Cara hesitated when she read it. She told him, "It makes it weird because some of us reading this are Black, so it makes it sound like it's about other people who are Black –"

Brian said to his group, "Sorry!"

Cara: "It's okay, Brian. I didn't mean them. I don't think anyone's offended. I'm not offended. Okay, so you can say -" Struggling with how to reframe it, she asked, "How should we say this?"

The rest of the group started discussing how to use what Brian had written. The Latina girl said, "I'm thinking that would be a good part for the narrator."

Cara left their table and then Damien, the Black boy in their group, began to write Brian's script into their group notebook. In the meantime, Brian continued to seek Cara's attention. Brian said, "Am I going to get an F?" Cara said, "You're not going to get an F, you're doing a very good job, I'm very proud of you. "

Brian asked me if he could go to the bathroom. I said I'm not the teacher.

He called out, "Ms. Almquist?" She turned away from the student she was helping and said, "Yes Brian?"

Brian: Can I go to the bathroom?

Cara: Yes.

This attention seemed a departure from the way I usually saw her deal with students, who were not allowed to interrupt or call out.

When Brian came back from the bathroom he asked his group mates, "Need help? Need help? Need help?" Then he started to ask his classmates what tarpaper is. They didn't know so he asked me. Damien had rewritten their script, and he tried to read it to me, but Brian interrupted multiple times.

Cara came over to the group and said, "I want to go over the rubric with you one more time and I want you to be very sure that you met the standards for the assignment." She was then momentarily distracted and Brian picked up the rubric and started reading. He steered the group. The other students protested, saying, "Ms. Almquist is going to lead us in the rubric."

When Cara came back in, she tried to refocus Brian:

Cara: Brian, are you ready? We're going to look at level 4. For cooperation and participation. Brian, will you please read level 4 for that? How do you guys feel like you did for that?

Brian: I think we could do a 3 or 4.

Cara: What do you guys think? What do you think Alyssa? What do you think Damien? Kayla?

Because Brian continued to interrupt, Cara had to ask each student individually. None of them responded very loudly or forcefully and Brian continued to try to interrupt.

Cara: Brian, we're going to take turns, okay. Damien, can you read use of resources? What resources did you guys use? Damien, and Kayla, did you also use the packets?

They don't answer.

Brian: We also used them without each other.

By the end of the rubric, Brian had answered every question Cara asked (whether it was directed at him or not), as if he was in a personal conversation with her. Every question she asked, he answered, "4?" rating his group the highest on each category in the rubric.

She laughed, "Yes, from what I've seen so far."

Brian: No, right now, I should get an A.

I wrote to Cara after this observation:

> *I think Brian seems like a really good learning opportunity for thinking about a lot of the issues that we discuss.   One of the things I've noticed with other teachers I work with in multiracial classrooms is that we pay a lot of attention to how we discipline our Black students, but not how we privilege our White students. I'm not exactly sure how White privilege works in a school setting in which the White student is the only White student in the class. I mean, I'm sure that must be hard for him sometimes and, like I mentioned above, the Civil Rights Movement work probably poses some confusing scenarios for him. At the same time, he exhibits so many behaviors of privileged kids – he talks almost nonstop, to his group and to you. In the small group discussion, he seems to feel as if he's in a one-on-one conversation with you instead of acknowledging that it's a five way conversation. He is quick to take charge in the group. He called your name from across the room to ask if he could go to the bathroom (he didn't wait patiently with his hand in the air, as the other students do). It might be worthwhile to think about some of your Black boys who get in trouble a lot (particularly a talkative one) and imagine if they did what Brian does, how would you respond?*

Later, in a follow up interview, Cara told me that Brian had also been diagnosed with

Asperger Syndrome. This raised my interest because the girl who had sat out in the

hallway during class that day did so because Asperger Syndrome made it hard for her to

control her impulses.

195

This raises the question of how different learning difficulties get manifested in different children, and how they get interpreted. The student who threw her watch and shouted had to spend the class time outside. Brian, whose classroom interruptions were arguably equally distracting, seemingly talked himself into an A on the rubric. And his constant worrying that he was going to fail prompted Cara to reassure him about how well he was doing. Though the two students acted in demonstrably different ways, it seems that in raising race questions, it is worth asking whether Whiteness played a role in how Brian acted out his Asperger Syndrome, and how Cara interpreted it. How does this disparate centering of Brian's experience (which Cara obviously did not intend, but which happened during her class time), shape both Brian's and his classmates' expectations of racial dynamics in the future?

Conclusion to "Questions about my students"

The questions in this section that teachers asked about their students are not just about how to teach, but about understanding how their students experience the world and their classroom. Just as teachers felt they needed to have a sense of the psychological developmental stages of children in their grade level, they also wanted to know more about the racial and gender identity development their children were going through. This process of racial identity development will be different for every student, and it will differ significantly based on context as well. The identity struggles that students have will always be related to their school and classroom context, as well as the ways they have learned to think about their racial identities.

3. Questions about me as a teacher

The third type of questions that teachers asked were questions about themselves as White teachers:

1. Am I a racist?/How do I come across?/How do my students perceive me?

2. How do I reach out to Black families?
    a. How do I get them to trust me? (Cara)
    b. How do I get them to participate in my group? (Scott)

3. Am I, as a White person, sufficient as a teacher?
    a. How do I start a group for Black males when I'm White? (Scott)
    b. Can I be a mentor to my students as a White male? (Todd)
    c. Can I play a role in racial socialization? (Cara)

Some teachers like Cara, as her case study chapter shows, prefaced most of their questions with an explicit awareness of their Whiteness:

1. As a White woman, how can I connect with the parents of my students in a more authentic way? (Cara)

2. Can a White teacher be an effective teacher of the Civil Rights Movement? (Laurie and Cara)

3. I know that racial socialization is good for my Black students. Is that something I can do for them as a White teacher? How? (Todd, Laurie, Helen, Cara and Ann)

Cara's question about connecting with students' parents was based on her awareness that as a White teacher, she may have to do extra work (work she might not have to do with White parents) in order to perform a basic aspect of the job of teachers: building relationships with parents. Cara understood that this was not because the parents of her students were racist, but rather it was a reality of the historical moment, in which there tended (and tends) to be distrust between Blacks and Whites.

197

Cara's questions were typical of the kinds of questions that White teachers asked about themselves as White people, when they were confident enough to turn their analytical lens inward. These questions seemed to come up especially when teachers were attempting to do that part of teaching that is not about instruction or curriculum, but about role modeling and relationship building.

For Todd, this question came up as a group of Black male teachers formed a mentorship group for Black male students and he was not asked to be a part of it: As a White male am I valued as a model of behavior for my kids?

Scott hoped to start a group for Black boys in which they could talk about their experiences of school, but he too had many questions about how he could do that as a White person:

> *Yeah, I mean how to and what to say. I mean what, how to reach out, how to not just come off as, "What does this White guy want? What?" Hmmm, this is really uncomfortable imagining the other people go, "This seems pretty weird." Umm so how to communicate it effectively, how to uh create an environment where questions and doubts and to even be challenged on it if necessary. Like if somebody wants to go, "You want to do what? How come?"*

In addition to questions about their own practice as White teachers, all of the teachers said they wanted models for what it would look like for them to be racially aware, to have an anti-racist practice in the classroom, to do the work of racial socialization with all children (but especially with Black children) and to teach racialized conflict resolution effectively.

> *What does it look like when this work is successful?* (Helene)

> *I feel uncomfortable leading the way because I don't know where we're trying to end up.* (Cara)

198

So it's hard to take a direction when you don't know where to go. (Scott)

For some teachers, this was more possible – they had White colleagues or

colleagues of color that they could observe and mimic or at least strategize with. For

others, like Todd, it was much harder. As is clear from his chapter, Todd did not feel that

he had models for how to interact with his students:

> *Like the way my colleagues who are from West Philly interact with the*
> *kids is much different than the way I interact with the kids. It's much more*
> *physical. It's much more at times verbally, I think, abusive and things that*
> *my colleagues say, if I said them like I feel like I would lose my job. I don't*
> *know and by violent I mean really race-based and derogatory.*

Todd lacked role models because he could not engage with students the way his

Black colleagues did, who said and did things that would be racist for him to do. It may

be the case that his Black colleagues were practicing a form of culturally relevant

practice; but it may also be that they were abusive in ways that are inappropriate for

teacher to behave, regardless of race. However, it remained significant that as the most

senior White male teacher in his school (after teaching for four years), he did not have

anybody in his same racial and gender position to consult or observe.

Teachers' questions about themselves began to take into account their own

Whiteness and their non-traditional willingness to acknowledge the way that the racial

context in which they taught shaped all of their relationships. They acknowledged that as

White people, they had work to do in building relationships with Black students and

parents. They knew that if they left all of the work of crossing this racial barrier up to the

students and families, they would not be doing their jobs. They also knew that the White

teachers with whom their students had interacted previously might not have done this

199

work, which meant that they had negative impressions to undo in order to gain the trust of the students and their families. Finally, they knew that they were stepping outside the boundaries of what was socially acceptable for White people and they wanted to do so in a way that would be understood as anti-racist, rather than racist.

4. Questions teachers did not ask

The Johari window is a tool of cognitive psychology for understanding one's own personality and where one's strengths and weaknesses lie (Luft & Ingham, 1950). The Johari Window demonstrates that for all people there are four types of knowing:

1. Things we know we know
2. Things we don't know we know
3. Things we know we don't know
4. Things we don't know we don't know

The last two categories of questions: Things we know we don't know and things we don't know we don't know created a lot of paranoia among teachers. In spite of all they had learned (in fact because of all they had learned), they were aware of how much they did not know. This was a concern not only because they did not want to look ignorant, but also because they did not want to do things that were hurtful to students.

There are still spots of ignorance that I still have and I think, "Am I gonna make a total fool of myself?" Will I expose that to somebody in a really idiotic way? Or you know, will I be fortunate enough to somehow figure that out without being hurtful to someone else? (Scott)

What aspects of race do I think about and what aspects get lost? I want to be thinking about it more but like where…does it get lost? It's like, well, what parts of it do I think about? (Cara)

Sometimes I wonder if I'm racist in the way I'm talking to students? Like I don't know. (Todd)

Do I come across like that? Do I sound condescending? I don't think I'm condescending, but I've been told I am condescending, but is it based on race? (Ann)

Our questions reflect what we know and what we are ready to change

When I asked teachers what questions they wanted me to focus on in my observations, they all had questions that personally interested them. But they also unanimously said that I should look at anything that stood out to me, and that I should tell them what I observed. As a result of their openness, I found that my observations often focused on questions that they did not ask: the things they didn't know they didn't know. Todd, for example, asked questions about classroom management and about whether he was racist, but he did not ask questions about whether he held high expectations, or how to do so. Laurie asked important questions about curriculum and racial identity development, but not about how to create structured anti-racist free play. Scott asked about how to start a group for Black boys, but not how to challenge the disproportionality of White students in gifted education. When I offered my interpretation of what I observed, teachers responded in different ways – sometimes taking up the dilemmas I offered, sometimes moving forward with their own questions instead.

Even though teachers asked me for feedback and often wanted to make the suggested changes, I found that for the most part, the changes teachers implemented were changes that grew out of their own questions, and not my suggestions. There are many possible explanations for this – perhaps my suggestions were outside their realm of influence, perhaps they did not have the skills to implement such suggestions immediately, perhaps they disagreed with my interpretation of events.

201

I came to believe that the questions we ask are precisely the questions we are willing and able to address. When we do not ask certain questions, it is partly because we do not yet have the background knowledge to ask. It seemed especially difficult for teachers to engage those things that they didn't know they didn't know, even when I pointed them out to them and they willingly tried to engage them. This is why it is so critical to constantly receive input when trying to learn about race – inquiry based on what we already know will not help a teacher move through progressively deeper levels of inquiry.

The importance of input

The model of inquiry research that the Friends Independent School group followed was significantly strengthened by the fact that they scheduled numerous opportunities for teacher learning that pushed teachers past the questions that immediately occurred to them to ask. One potential problem with the inquiry model, when it comes to race, is that teachers can only ask questions that grow out of their existing understanding of race. Without input from outside speakers, workshops and readings, teachers would have all continued to ask instructional questions, such as those from the very first section of this chapter. They would not have been pushed to ask questions about relationships and unconscious bias, the types of questions that did emerge over time and with more direct professional development.

This was particularly evident in the experience of Helene. Her questions progressed throughout the year, becoming deeper and richer each time my co-consultant and I did a presentation. She began the year asking instructional questions, such as "How

do I find good resources that are inclusive of many racial backgrounds?" While this question is important, it does not push against her practice in any way, nor does it really provide a foundation for going more deeply into a cycle of inquiry. Instead, if this was the type of question she continued to pursue, it would keep her at a superficial level of inquiry. After we had spent more time together, Helene started to share questions about her students, "I mean, even my one kid who talks, I don't even know how to say it, but, in a Black dialect, if that's the way to say it…how much do I correct him?" This is a question that really does not have an answer, but that would lead Helene into an inquiry process of reading, experimenting, reflecting, and continuing to ask.

When my co-consultant and I presented a framework for thinking about racial microaggressions and used the example of the microaggression, "Black people are so loud," Helene was triggered to think about that statement. It was something she had thought before, and it certainly was something that she felt was true about her classroom. Thinking about it as a microaggression made her question herself, asking, "Do I yell at my Black students too much? They make more noise than everyone else." We worked together to think about that question in terms of a microaggression and to reconsider whether noise was the only type of classroom distraction worth paying attention to.

Finally, Helene had asked me to tell her anything that I noticed about her classroom. As we worked together, I began to recognize the ways that Helene worked with her students of color and their families to learn the school's culture, but she did not tend to ask what she could learn from them. I encouraged her to ask, "What can I learn from the parents of my Black students whose home culture is markedly different from the

203

school culture?" This question falls into the category of things "she didn't know she didn't know." It was one that she was excited about, but not one that she necessarily would have developed on her own. However, because it also grew out of the types of questions she was already asking, it was one that she was particularly receptive to when I suggested it.

Without this model in which teachers were constantly receiving input, the inquiry model (with regard to race) would not have been transformative. The extent to which teachers in this study were successful in asking challenging questions was a result of the inputs they received, which they were able to use to go deeper into the cycle of inquiry. These inputs could take the form of professional developments, as well as the conversations that they had with me one-on-one. Notably, some of the hardest questions (especially questions about students, such as ones that address language differences), they still did not ask in the context of their groups. This reserve with which they approached certain questions indicated to me that they felt a certain safety (at the very least the kind of safety that time and attention can bring) in our interviews that let them explore these deeper levels of questions.

5. Conclusion

As the year progressed, teachers' questions changed. Early on, they asked instructional questions about curriculum and resources. With more input, more time engaged in inquiry and more relationship building with me, many of them began to ask more substantive questions about students and themselves, their relationships, their experiences and how to better support their students. They continued to ask me to help

204

them see anything that they could not see themselves, to help them with what they didn't

know they didn't know. The experiences of these teachers demonstrate the importance of

outside input when learning about race. The inquiry group model, which enables

teachers to learn at their own pace and ask themselves hard questions is insufficient for

race learning, if it is not also paired with strategies for ensuring that teachers are

simultaneously expanding the window of what they know they don't know – and

minimizing the window of what they don't know they don't know.

Chapter 9: WHEN HOME CULTURE AND SCHOOL CULTURE ARE INCONGRUENT

"I know that my classroom management practices are entirely informed by my culture and expectations. Does one type of child fit into that more easily than others?" -Helene Gibson

Helene taught 2nd grade at an independent Quaker elementary school. She was newly married and in her late 20s at the time of the study. Helene grew up in a Jewish family in "a working class town next to (an upper-middle class town with a liberal arts college)."

Helene grew up with racial justice work as part of her education. Her parents were involved in Re-evaluation Co-counseling (RC), in which participants counsel one another through exploring and confronting different oppressions in their lives. She describes one of the main goals of co-counseling as "ending racism." Helene has participated in RC as an adult, and she looks forward to her husband participating in it as well.

In terms of her process of learning about race, Helene felt that her experiences in high school were negative and confusing. She had a Black boyfriend from a private school. He was a good friend, and yet she started to feel ashamed and confused about their relationship after she found out that one of her favorite teachers was a racist. She broke up with her boyfriend, started to hate her favorite teacher and graduated from high school feeling profoundly confused.

Helene said that in college, she loved learning about race. She majored in psychology in undergrad and took a class on racial identity development with Dr. Beverly

Daniel-Tatum. She facilitated for an inter-group dialogue project at her college. Before coming to Friends Independent School (FIS), she worked at two different private schools in NYC while she finished her Masters in Education. She said that when she first came to FIS, she "felt guilty" about working in a private school, but she felt a Quaker school would be okay. She also felt good about the fact that FIS is more diverse than most independent schools. She joined the Race Inquiry Community at FIS because she sought the same community, in which race was talked about openly, that she had in college.

The year that Helene and I worked together, she was in her third year at FIS and had moved forward with her students from first to second grade. This was the second year teaching many of her students. She immediately welcomed me as a researcher into her classroom. Helene was eager to have support thinking about racial issues in her classroom. She had a lot of questions that she wanted support answering, and she also knew that there were probably a lot of things she did not see. She eagerly set up times to have me observe and she responded openly to my feedback. Her lack of defensiveness surprised me. I suspected that her practice analyzing racial dynamics through RC or her college facilitation work had prepared her for the kinds of conversations that we had together. She also may have been less defensive around me because we were peers in many ways. Helene and I had many overlapping friends and experiences, as our partners were in the same graduate program. We also had similar college experiences and we both began learning about ourselves as white people with racial identities through classes in college. I think that she perceived me as a friend more than a researcher, and my comments seemed to be received by her as if from a friend.

207

Chapter theme: WHEN HOME CULTURE AND SCHOOL CULTURE ARE
INCONGRUENT

This chapter will focus on Helene's questions about students for whom home
culture and school culture seemed different and sometimes conflicting. It will focus on
three aspects of the home and school cultural divide: disruptive classroom behavior,
teaching Black boys in a predominantly White environment and physical discipline.
First, it will look at the question of disruptions in class. Helene asked, "Am I yelling at
my Black students too much? They are making more noise than everyone else." This
section will explore this question and her interpretation of disruption. Second, it will
address the many questions that came up for Helene about one Black boy in particular:
How to support his language differences while still teaching him what she judged he
needed to know; how to address an incident in which he was caught stealing; and how to
communicate with his family around all of these issues. Finally, the chapter will address
Helene's dilemma over the question of physical discipline and how to work with families
who believe in it, when she did not. All of these conflicts related only to a couple of
Helene's Black students (i.e. not all of her Black students) in this historically White
independent school. As was demonstrated in Chapter 8, Helene's early questions did not
focus on questions of race and culture, but as she developed her inquiry further, and as
we built a trusting relationship, she pushed past early instructional questions to the
questions explored here: questions about students and herself, as well as questions that I
suggested.

Helene's classroom was about half students of color and half White. But the culture of the room and of the school were both guided by White middle class norms. The following vignette captures a sense of the classroom.

Classroom vignette

I arrived at the school a few minutes after 8:00 a.m. and expected to find Helene in her classroom with all of her students, as I knew school started at 8:00 a.m. Instead, there were just six students -- all of them Black -- in the classroom. Helene came in from the hallway just after I entered the room and called for the students' attention by saying:

Helene: 123 all eyes on me
Kids: 12 eyes on you

Helene introduced me to this small contingent of the class as "Ali." She then announced that they were going to start sign-in and goal books. The kids started to take down the chairs, which were still on their desks from when the carpet was vacuumed the night before. More students started arriving over the next few minutes. Maya passed out the "goals" notebooks, putting them on students' seats. When Max, a White boy came in, Helene said to him, "Max, I had Maya start passing out goal books because you weren't here, but if you want to, you can." He shook his head no.

Over the next 40 minutes, all but one of the students arrived and began working independently. They wrote their goals in their goal notebooks, read books for their research projects on Egypt silently or in pairs and followed Helene around the classroom to tell her about their research projects or the books they were reading. A couple of student pairs went into the hallway to work. By 8:15 a.m. all the chairs had been taken off the desks, but only six students were sitting in them. One student was kneeling on the floor by Helene's desk, four were sitting on the floor in the carpeted hallway, four were looking through books and three were in the reading corner showing their work to the teaching assistant, Maureen, a White woman who split her time between the two second grade classes.

Helene moved around the room getting organized for the day. The third member of the team, the other second grade lead teacher, came into the room through the door that connected their classrooms to ask Helene a question. The other lead teacher had been teaching second grade since Helene was in the eighth grade.

Two White boys approached Helene to ask her to look at their work: "Helene, can you look at this, please?" All of her students called her Helene. She immediately sat down cross-legged on the carpeted floor right where they stopped to ask her their question, and

she read their work aloud: "Did they have refrigerators to keep the food cold (in Ancient Egypt)?" Through questioning, she led them to the answer that you can't have refrigerators unless you have electricity, so their next task was to find out if there was electricity in ancient Egypt and that would tell them if they had refrigerators. The two boys went to a bookshelf that was full of books on Ancient Egypt and looked at the table of contents to strategize their research. One said to the other, "Do you want to do food or market first?" The other answered, "Let's do food." They turned to the chapter on food.

In the reading corner, Wendell, a Black boy, was sitting at the kid-sized table with his partner Cary, a Black girl, working on their Egypt project. Every few minutes as they worked, Wendell would lean back in his chair and give a little push to the giant inflatable mummy that was positioned behind him. The mummy would wobble back and forth and then right itself again. After about three or four pushes, Helene said, "Could you please leave that be, Wendell?"

One student asked Helene if she could get a drink and Helene said "Sure." Just as she was leaving the room, Maureen was coming back in with a pitcher of water that she had filled. The student turned around and came back in to get a cup of water from Maureen.

A White boy and a Black boy came in from the other second grade room to sign in. They raced to the sign in sheet, and the White boy got there first. The Black boy said, "Darn it."

The two White boys who had approached Helene earlier went to her again because they couldn't find "marketplace" in the book they were using. Helene said, "Each time you pick up a book, what's the first step you're going to do?" The boys answered, "Look at the table of contents." They went back to their book to look through the table of contents.

Helene approached one table with three White boys and one Asian American girl. The three boys --one of whom was partnered with the Asian American girl -- were talking about a recent ball game, instead of their Ancient Egypt projects. Helene, pretending to play dumb, said to them, "Oh, are you all in one group? Because it seems like it because you're all talking to each other. Were you asking them about fish? And they were asking you about doctors?" The kids played along and told her "yes," they were asking each other about one another's topics, even though they all seemed to know that wasn't true.

A White student arrived around 8:30 a.m. carrying a blue Tupperware container that read, "Second grade treasure" on the top. Helene said to her, "All right Miriam, you brought treasure?" Each week a different student brought something different for "treasure." Later in the day, the students would play a guessing game of 20 questions with the treasure.

A pair of Black students, one of whom was Maya, approached Helene at her desk to ask her to look at their work. She asked them to wait a minute while she finished something on her laptop.

At this point in the morning, around 8:30 a.m., there hadn't yet been a moment in which Helene greeted all the students and gave them instructions on what to do. I wondered to myself how all the students knew what they were supposed to be doing? The morning progressed like this, with students moving around the room, doing work, having side conversations, spontaneously holding races, hugging each other, or going to get a drink of water, until 8:45 a.m. when they gathered in the corner by the electronic whiteboard for "circle," where they sat cross legged on the floor in a circle to discuss the agenda for the day.

Just as the students gathered, Cecilia, a working class Black student, arrived. Cici waited in the doorway. Helene greeted her, "Cici, we're glad you're here," and walked over to take the note that Cici was holding in her hand. She then sent her to the office to check in.

The class accountant counted to make sure everyone was there: sixteen students. Helene said, "That's right, because one student is missing and usually we have seventeen." Another student read over the agenda for the day:

Morning work and quiet choice
Circle
Meeting for worship
Snack
Recess
Reading
Lunch
Recess
Social studies
Español
Music
Read Aloud

Verve and communalism

The first day I was in the classroom, Maya stood out as she skipped back and forth to a table of "artifacts" from Ancient Egypt, admiring and showing others the papyrus. "Hey, look, Papyrus!" she smiled, her mouth full of gaps where her grownup

teeth had yet to come in. Maya was a consistent participant in the second grade classroom

conversations and she was well liked by her peers and her teacher. She was exuberant,

hard working and bright. She often completed her work early, although Helene said she

had room for improvement in the quality of her work. She volunteered for extra tasks in

the classroom, and she embraced new lessons with enthusiasm.

But Maya also got in trouble multiple times each time I visited in the classroom:

*Maya, this is your last chance – then I'm going to move you to a private
desk if you keep on talking.*

*Maya, who are you reading to - are you reading to yourself? Can you do
that in your head?* Maya nodded.

Maya please sit up.

*Isaac, Cordell, Maya, we need to separate you. Isaac, come over here.
Maya, move over one so you're not right next to Cordell.*

So let's think about where we have traveled. Maya, it needs to stop now.

*Maya, I would love to hear your ideas, but I don't want you to chat with
your friends. Can you think of any?* Maya: *Nelson Mandela*

*Maya, what just happened? What did I just say? I said we are starting
out the unit on pioneers and you said, "I see Oregon." That's great that
you see Oregon, but it's not the time to tell us right now."* Maya looked
down at the ground.

Helene felt that she had tried everything with Maya. She said that Maya really

thrived on positive reinforcement, so Helene had designed a behavior chart that was

entirely based on positive reinforcement and when Maya did good things (e.g. was quiet

lining up, was quiet during work time or during transitions) she got a sticker. Helene said

her parents were trying something similar, but that they too were frustrated because

212

Maya's behavior did not seem to change, regardless of what they tried. According to Helene, the other students seemed to feel ashamed and to fall into line quickly when they were spoken to directly. Maya did not.

It was students like Maya, who prompted Helene to ask, "*Do I yell at my Black students too much? They are making more noise than everyone else.*" This is a question that Helene had been asking for a while, particularly about two of her Black students, Maya and Wendell. Because she had moved from first grade to second grade with this particular class, she had had Maya and Wendell as students for a year and a half, and she had been working on getting them to lower their volume in the classroom for that whole time.

Helene's question seemed to take on new salience after a professional development session that I led with my co-consultant Dr. Chonika Coleman-King, in which we discussed racial microaggressions. One example of a microaggression that we listed in our presentation was, "Why do Black people have to be so loud?" When Helene saw this, she immediately recognized it as a question she had asked herself before. Helene said that she recognized why this was a racial microaggression, i.e. it attributes one quality to a whole group of people and assumes there is a recognized appropriate (White, middle-class) volume for speaking. It implicitly generalizes that Black people, as a group, exceed that "appropriate" volume. And yet Helene said that she had asked that very same question in the past which made her wonder whether she should think differently about the "noise" that her Black students make in class.

Helene and I did not necessarily answer this question, but we worked together to understand the complicated dynamics underlying it. In my observations of Helene, I noted that she seemed to respond to certain disruptions in class more than others. In trying to give her support around answering her question, I encouraged her to think more broadly about disruptions and to think about her interpretation of "noise." I also introduced her to an article that suggested possible reasons for different behavioral needs among certain Black students.

Psychologists Rodney Cunningham and A. Wade Boykin (2004) have compiled studies on research-based Afro-Cultural practices that have significant positive effects on the cognitive performance of African American children. In particular, they suggest that the incorporation of Afro-cultural practices in schools can improve student achievement. These practices include "communalism, verve and movement expressiveness" (p. 490). By "communalism," Cunningham and Boykin describe a context that "imbues cultural themes that denote awareness of the fundamental interconnectedness of people and overriding importance of social bonds and social relationships" (p. 491). The research that Cunningham and Boykin synthesize in this article demonstrates that many White children generally learn best in individual learning conditions, while many African American children generally learn best in communal conditions. In addition, they introduce a concept called "verve," which is a predisposition for the presence of multiple and varied sources of noise and stimulus. Cunningham and Boykin cite studies in which Euro-American children perform better in low vervistic environments while African

214

American students perform better in, and prefer, high vervistic environments. They suggest that music, in particular, may shape a preference for high vervistic environments.

I gave the Cunningham and Boykin article to Helene and suggested that it might be that Maya is the kind of kid who needs more noise around her to work well, to be stimulated. Obviously not all Black students are going to fit these trends, just as not all White students have the same learning needs. But I suggested that this preference for a high vervistic environment might fit Maya in particular and that it is something that Helene could ask Maya's parents about.

This idea of verve captured Helene's attention. She said that Maya's parents were musicians and Maya was a twin, so it made sense that she might prefer lots of stimulus. According to Helene, *"Her mom's very loud. She talks in a very loud voice. Her mom's Puerto Rican and her dad's Black. He speaks in a softer voice. Her mom is just like - even in conversation it's a little bit like why are you talking so loud?"* Helene's observations pointed to the fact that Maya might actually need the stimulus she got from talking. She loved Helene, and respected her, and she wanted to do well in school. So why would Maya continue to talk, even when she knew it disappointed and frustrated Helene, unless talk was something she needed?

Helene said the ideas of communalism and verve also made her think of Wendell Dery, who worked best in small group learning conditions. She said:

> *The way that I think I grew from reading that article and from talking to you about it was that with Wendell, thinking of him as social helped me to understand that when he's talking to kids in class it's not that he doesn't know the rules or want to follow them, it's like he's just such a social…it was like kind of seeing it as positive instead of a negative. It still wasn't ok*

215

*if he was like talking, talking, talking, ...but when I would see him coming
to circle instead of walking quietly, like if he was like talking to people, I
was like, "Wow that's his strength, he's incredibly social, and he's gonna
make a lot of friends and be a personality," not like a loud personality but
like he's very social so it helps me think of it more in a positive way.*

Helene recognized that Wendell needed something different in class: "There's
nothing wrong with him. He just comes across as unfocused and has a lot of energy.
He's better in social situations. He has a lot of, what they call verve. But I don't really
know how to create that in the class." To support Wendell's needs, she tried doing yoga
with the students, but did not see any change. I suggested that verve was not just about
movement (if it were, the yoga may have helped), but rather about multiple simultaneous
sensory inputs. Students who need a lot of verve might thrive on noise and/or movement
rather than on silence and/or movement. Verve is energy building, so rather than
distracting, it helps them focus. Helene took notes while I spoke.

Helene asked, "Wouldn't it distract the other students?" I said, "Maybe they need
to be near other students who wouldn't be distracted." I suggested that she could put the
kids together who need a lot of verve and they could fulfill that need for one another
while the students who needed quiet could sit at other tables. She asked, "What if kids
feel like it's unfair because they get to talk?" I answered, "Tell them life's not fair. They
can talk and you can't." I also said that I think the chances are good that if kids need
quiet to focus and they're trying to get their work done, they might not even notice that
the others are talking. As the following quote shows, Helene tried to incorporate this idea
of verve into her concept of what was happening in the classroom. But she also seemed

216

to feel offended that Maya would not listen to her when she decided that there was too much noise:

> *In terms of the noise with Maya, on a good day I would try to notice, like you suggested, like okay when she's talking to other people - Is it really distracting them? And what I was able to do was not necessarily call her out the first time she was talking, but to wait a minute and see if it kinda died out on its own. But then if it kept coming back I would have to ask her to stop or ask her to move. And it just seemed like beyond - in a way I was gonna say but I don't know if this is true - it seemed just like beyond cultural sensitivity because it was just like how many times do I have to ask you to stop talking and you just keep doing it? In like any culture that just seems like rude, to me, or probably to most people, right? I don't know if I'm right about that. But you know you tell someone to stop talking and they keep talking. And it wasn't like I was saying, "Would you like to stop talking?" you know. I learned a long time ago to be direct. I was like, "You have to stop talking." And then I would move her and it would be fine. Yeah I don't know.*

I empathized with Helene's concerns. It would be a big risk to make the kind of radical change that we were toying with after reading the article on verve. I wanted her to try to have differentiated standards for noise, so that the students who seemed to need multiple sensory inputs in order to concentrate might get in trouble less and do their work better. But this is not an easy shift to make, or an easy change to implement, when one is accustomed to the idea that all people need quiet in order to concentrate; and because we all live in a world that does not always honor the notion that race and culture sometimes inform each other, and that our culture impacts our learning. Maybe Maya's parents did not even want her need for verve to be accommodated. Perhaps they sent her to a school that does not honor verve so that Maya could learn how to work quietly. But it also seems possible that they sent her to a school where she would have only seventeen classmates so that she could learn in an environment that could be amenable to her individual needs.

217

And it may be possible that as a twin, and a daughter of musicians, a need for verve was foundational to who Maya was, regardless of how her teacher responded to it. But verve was a concept that was incompatible with Helene's notion of a productive classroom.

> *I need to relax on the noise level. At the same time when I'm in the classroom it gives me a headache, it's exhausting…. I guess I still haven't figured out really a good balance because I want them to get their work done. That's my priority. So you know if they're talking, it doesn't seem possible they could be talking and writing. Most people can't.*

Helene may have been right that people cannot write and talk at the same time. But I felt it should be worth trying to see what might be possible for her students. In such a small classroom with such flexible, child-centered rules, it seemed like it should be possible for her to create a space for Wendell and Maya to work near each other and to talk while they worked. According to Cunningham and Boykin, one child's need for verve in order to concentrate may be just as great as another child's need for silence.

Ultimately, in spite of her appreciation for and connection with the article about verve, Helene did not feel that it was realistic for her to try to accommodate Maya's and Wendell's apparent needs for multiple simultaneous sensory inputs. It felt too hard to have different behavioral standards for different students. And she doubted whether some students could actually work better with noise. She did not want to put her students in a position of failure when they moved to 3rd grade and no longer had her as a teacher. Most importantly for her, perhaps, she felt that the noise was too personally distracting to her, never mind the other students. She shared that when she was growing up, someone very close to her had anger management issues. And when he was mad, he would yell

and hit things. As an adult, loud noises still unnerved her and distracted her. She felt that she needed to insist on a quiet classroom in order to teach.

Other reasons Helene struggled to accommodate individual learning needs might include the reality that it is challenging to change patterns in the middle of the year and to push against the community norms of behavior of the school. Finally, the issue may be simply that she was not convinced by the theory that some of her students had high vervistic and communalistic needs. All of these factors would make it hard for most teachers to make the small but profound changes that acknowledging and accommodating for verve would require.

Helene's reservations are undoubtedly common. I imagine many teachers would have similar concerns if asked to consider the implications of the concept of verve on their students' learning and their teaching. For that reason, I offer a few ways to challenge some of those reservations. These are not answers, but rather more questions, meant to keep open the option of honoring verve. The main challenges to accommodating verve were:

1) other students would think it is unfair if some could make noise and others could not

2) it would be distracting to the teacher

3) it would be distracting to the other students

First, we regularly differentiate instruction and curriculum according to student needs. Why are we unable to do the same with behavior? Second, if a teacher cannot tolerate noise, perhaps matching vervistic students with teachers who have a low

219

tolerance for verve is not a good teacher/child match. Why is it that the children, not the teacher, are usually the ones deemed unfit in the teacher-student relationship? Third, teachers constantly need to teach children with different learning needs than themselves. A need for verve is as real as the need for silence; it is simply less common, particularly in predominantly White institutions. I offer these responses to help the reader continue to inquire how we might make a place in schools for students with high vervistic needs.

Defining disruption

In consideration of Helene's question, "Do I yell at my Black students too much? They make more noise than everyone else," I suggested to Helene that she consider classroom distractions other than "noise." In my observations of her room and of classes in the school, there did not seem to be standards for what the noise level was supposed to be; the teachers simply asked the students to quiet down every ten minutes or so and then they did. I pointed out that there were some who got in trouble a lot, every time it got loud, because they were the loudest ones. But, I suggested, if you stop and look around when you hear those students, often there were others who were contributing to the overall atmosphere of chaos. They were always being a little less "loud," but were also significantly contributing to the general feeling of mayhem in the room. I gave the example of a Black female student getting in trouble in line for pushing while three others, including two White boys and a Black girl, were blowing farts into their elbows. They were not being "louder" than everyone else, so they were unnoticed, but they were significant contributors to the general spirit of free-for all. Seeing this was confusing to me, as a visitor, and it made me wonder what the standard for behavior was. The

220

students did not realize that noise, for Helene, was more offensive than other rude and inappropriate behaviors. As a result, to an outsider, it did seem that the loud kids got in trouble more than others, who may have been distracting the class just as much. And though not all of the Black students got in trouble for making noise on a regular basis, the three students who were reprimanded daily for making noise, were all Black.

Finally, I also encouraged Helene to look not only at her patterns with Black students, but also with White students. I pointed out the subtle ways that her White students interrupted the class in ways that did not trigger a disciplinary response. One morning, Helene was sitting with the whole class on the rug going over the agenda for the day. One of her White students raised his hand and, changing the topic of the conversation, asked if he could put up the calendar. Helene said, "Sure." A few minutes later, another White boy interrupted asking if they could put up birthdays on the calendar because it was his birthday. Again, Helene said, "Sure."

I shared with Helene that I felt these interruptions were characteristic of a general trend of White children seeming to feel a lot of ownership and entitlement to interrupt. Because they were doing so in a way that fit the norms of what was appropriate, by raising their hands and asking to do something that counted as a legitimate classroom interaction, they did not get reprimanded, in spite of the fact that their behavior was potentially as distracting as talking while the teacher was talking. Their behavior had the same effect of getting the class off task, focusing the attention on themselves, and taking up time. Given her concern about telling Black students to be quiet too frequently, I suggested that perhaps she should shift her gaze away from the Black students altogether.

221

The teachers in this study did not have practice examining the silent and insidious ways that they let White children have more power, centrality or access in the classroom. Because such students assume access or belonging in culturally privileged ways, teachers may be more tolerant of their behavior, even when it constitutes a disruption. Helene may never stop reprimanding kids for making noise. But she could begin evenly distributing her reprimands by noticing all of the ways in which the class is interrupted by distractions other than "noise."

A few weeks after that conversation, Helene shared that she had tried to stop letting one White student in particular call so much attention to himself. Realizing that his behavior was immature and distracting to others, she had stopped letting him focus the conversation on himself and stopped indulging that kind of privileging, and she felt good about that.

Teaching Black boys without looking like a racist – a Catch-22

This issue of verve and communalism was not the only concern that Helene had about her student, Wendell Dery. Helene's relationship with Wendell captured multiple different common questions that White teachers often have about race, particularly about Black students. Not only did she have questions about how to support him around language, social interaction and academic work, but she had questions about how to ask her questions and how to describe Wendell.

Helene's questions about Wendell were always loaded with her own insecurities about stereotyping Black boys. These insecurities were heightened by a professional development session I had led a few weeks before in which we asked teachers to compile

lists of common stereotypes of different races. We had discussed the common

phenomenon in which teacher evaluations of Black students are often loaded with

common stereotypes of Black people rather than with specific feedback about a unique

student. This idea made Helene particularly sensitive to how she described Wendell.

Helene's main question was, "I mean, even my one kid who talks, I don't even

know how to say it, but, in a Black dialect, if that's the way to say it…how much do I

correct him?" As her hesitation in this question shows, she was unsure how to describe

the way that Wendell spoke. Later, she said, "He just has a lot of behaviors that clearly

come from living in the inner-city, in a predominantly Black community."

I asked what kind of behavior she meant was coming from growing up in the city.

She said one time they were walking as a class across campus, and Wendell shouted to a

White man that was across the way, "Hey you crazy White man!" She said, "He just says

nasty stuff sometimes." A little later in the conversation, Helene began to regret some of

her honesty about Wendell. She said, "I guess I'm worried that I'm going to sound like he

says nasty stuff, and he's physical and those are typical things that get said about Black

boys." Still later in the conversation she mentioned that she did not want to send him to

Student Support Services because she felt that too many students of color were

recommended for student support, which was not actually a system that ended up

supporting them as it should.

As we continued to talk, Helene said, "I can't even define it – that's where I feel

like it's related to race and expectations." She knew that her questions about Wendell

must be about race because she could not even figure out what they were.   As she raised

223

questions, as she described his family, she felt as if she heard racism in her voice and she resisted that. Yet she honestly did not know how to respond to some of his needs and behaviors.

This inability to even articulate her question is so common for teachers and I empathized with Helene's frustrations. Helene did sound racist in her assessments of Wendell's problems as coming from the inner city, or his tendency to "say nasty stuff." She and I both heard racism in these assessments. And yet, she did not want to be racist. She wanted to ask the right questions so that she could support her student in getting the education that he was there for and his mother wished for him. In some ways the situation was a Catch-22. If Helene did not raise questions about Wendell, address some of the issues that he struggled with or acknowledge that he was a Black boy, she would be avoiding confronting the influence of racism on her teaching and his learning. And yet raising these questions sounded racist too.

Her fear of being seen as a racist, or worse, being a racist, was contributing to her inability to diagnose, or even describe, Wendell's situation. Ironically, Helene's ability and willingness to articulate these questions honestly, in spite of her fears, was an indication of her anti-racist stance. It is a highly developed racial skill to be able to acknowledge and articulate potentially racist thoughts, to ask the "untouchable" questions, rather than suppress them while continuing to act on them. Suppression is actually the easier, more common, and less socially and politically risky approach.

Helene struggled with a few different issues related to Wendell. The first was one of learning how to support his high vervistic needs, the same issue that she had with

Maya. The second, his speech: he spoke differently from the rest of the class and Helene was unsure what her responsibility was to help him fit in and learn the speech patterns of the dominant culture. The third was related to one incident of stealing silly bands from a classmate. The fourth was how best to communicate with his mother. Finally, she struggled with how to put all of these dilemmas into words. Helene struggled with how to put all of this in to words. The following sections will address Helene's challenges with the latter three issues: Wendell's speech, the incident of his stealing, and communicating with his mother.

Speech

> *…Relationships with families have been coming up a lot this year. But it's also been coming up around kids. I mean, even my one kid who talks, I don't even know how to say it, but, in a Black dialect, if that's the way to say it. I mean, …how much do I correct him?*

> *… I brought it up in a co-counseling setting and was just like, "what do I do?" and the woman I talked to was like, "you tell them that all people talk different, and that every way is great, that the way he talks is great, but there's different ways of talking in different settings." So I tried to have that conversation with him, but his way of, his thinking just wasn't there yet. So he was just like, "Uh huh, okay." He's also not really able to articulate himself that well, so um, so it didn't really go that well.*

Helene was concerned about how to teach Wendell what he needed to learn to be successful. She instinctively recognized that speech was somehow related to success. She said:

> *I think the point I would want to get across is like just because more of us speak in this way doesn't make it better and just because that's…I don't know, there's something about that (Standard English[10]) being expected in*

---

[10] Terrence Wiley refers to Standard English as "so-called American English Standard" (Wiley, 2005, p. 5) to emphasize that the language that is often called "Standard English" is not standard at all. Within the U.S., "there is no academy of experts as

school and my future jobs things that it seems important that. I don't know.

At the same time, she was also concerned about how to help the other children support

Wendell, as somebody who spoke differently from the rest of the class. How do you talk

about language differences when the language one student speaks is not always

recognized as a language and is widely regarded by the dominant culture as an inferior

form of English? Especially when you are afraid to talk about race to begin with?

> *Helene: ...The kids noticed it and they mentioned it to me at one point.*
>
> *Ali: While he was there…?*
>
> *Helene: No. They said something like, "Oh how Wendell speaks," like that. I don't know what we were talking about.... I mean I said something like, "Yeah well we all speak in different ways and they're all fine or they're good"… I didn't really realize they were noticing that… (I)t was a Black female student saying it, but once I was aware that they thought, oh yeah, he speaks differently than everyone else. It's like they're aware of the way people speak and probably are putting a judgment on it just like I am and everyone else is in some ways. So that would be another place that something could be brought up in class.*
>
> *Ali: How do you envision that happening?*
>
> *Helene: I don't know. It would have to be…I think I would have to talk about how people speak differently and then ask them for some ideas, like people speak with an accent.... But I don't think I could come up and be like "some Black people speak differently" you know. I think the point I would want to get across is like just because more of us speak in this way doesn't make it better…*

Helene's instinct was to talk about lots of different accents and different ways of

speaking. As an approach to language difference and dialect, this is a fantastic approach:

there is in some countries with the authority to define all of the characteristics of the standard" (p.5). I agree with him and, for the ease of this discussion, I continue to use the term "Standard English," just as he does throughout most of his chapter. Conversations about race and language can be stymied by a fear of using problematic terms. I want to acknowledge the problems with the term "Standard English," but not let those problems preclude a discussion about it.

226

imagine that the situation has nothing to do with race and think of how you would handle

it then. Say one of the students in this Northeastern city was from Texas and spoke with

a Texas accent. Situating the discussion in the broader context of language difference

beyond issues of race lowers the risk and makes it easier to answer students' questions.

Helene's instinct was a great beginning. But her uncertainty around how to begin and

what words to use in such a conversation stopped her.

> *Helene: But I'm just not sure where that would come up and like how's that gonna make the one student who speaks differently, you know, feel. And how do I even label that traditional Black, not traditional, but like Black dialect? I'm not really sure exactly what that way of speaking is even called. But I could have had a conversation with those students that were there.*

> *Ali: And what do you think stopped you?*

> *Helene: I think I went so quickly to the safe answer of like, "Oh well everyone speaks good," you know. Wanting them not to like think that his way of speaking is worse, but I think I also didn't know what to say. I guess I could have said like, "Oh so you've noticed that, what do you think of that? Have you noticed other people…" I don't know, but then if I'm asking them for more information, what are the kids getting out of it? I mean in a way they're getting out of it like, "Oh we're allowed to talk about this kind of thing," but are they getting out of it like I should notice that someone speaks that way but I don't judge it or assume that they're less educated or….*

> *Ali: Because that's what you would want them to get out of it?*

> *Helene: That's what I would want them to get out of it. But then I guess we talked about this today in the (inquiry group) meeting, we talked something about, someone said something about just telling kids what you want them to know versus setting up the thing where they're gonna figure it out. Diana, I think said it.*

Helene's race question is, "How do I name the way that Wendell speaks and how

would it make him feel for us to have an explicit discussion about the fact that it's

227

different from the rest of the class?" Her pedagogical question is, "If I want my students to refrain from making assumptions about people who speak differently from them, is it better to tell them that explicitly or to set up a conversation or experience that helps them learn that for themselves?" She is also realizing, pedagogically, that she could have asked her students more questions about what they were perceiving and what they thought it meant, rather than jumping to the assumption that they were judging Wendell negatively.

Throughout this study, I found that teachers were often stumped around questions of race because they made assumptions about students' prejudices or felt as the teacher that they had to have all the answers. Frequently they realized, upon reflection, that they could have just stopped talking and asked the students more questions. But the fear of not knowing the answer, and of entering into an impromptu conversation about race without an agenda, often held them back.

Helene also realized that in some ways, Wendell was giving his peers an opportunity to learn something that they may not get later as they all worked to assimilate to the private school culture. She was surprised that he had not started assimilating to cover up his differences with his peers, but she appreciated it and she recognized it as an opportunity:

> *I guess I am also wondering with him like he lives in a place, I guess, where other people speak like that* (in African American Vernacular English (AAVE[11])), *although his mom doesn't really, but if he's in school*

---

[11] AAVE is also called Ebonics, (Williams, 1975), U.S. Ebonics (USEB), Black English, Black American English, and Black Vernacular English, (Smitherman, 2005). There are critiques of all of these names. I choose AAVE for the sake of having a term with which to pursue the discussion, not because of a political preference for AAVE over any other terms for the language variety that many black American speak.

all day like why isn't he speaking like everyone else in school? He's the only one in his class that speaks like that. I wonder like has he not noticed that or if it's just so natural. At some age he might start experimenting with the way he speaks based on his observations and it's kind of nice that in second grade he isn't and there could be some conversations about it.

Wendell essentially spoke a different language and needed to learn Standard English in order to be successful in school. Language scholars (Nieto, 2009; Cummins, 2000), have demonstrated the importance of seeing dual language learners as coming to school with more assets than single language learners, rather than seeing the home language as a deficit that holds the student back from proficient development in the school language. Helene seemed to realize that the issue of speech variety that Wendell's speech presented offered the class an opportunity to talk about language differences. But she did not seem to realize how his language could also be a valuable asset to him.

Language scholar Terrence Wiley suggests that with AAVE or Ebonics more specifically, the "the real communicative challenge between speakers of the 'standard' and speakers of 'accented' English is not to comprehend the other; rather, it is to overcome social judgments made on the basis of language" (p. 13). Because AAVE is a denigrated language variety in the US, this tendency to make social judgments is a particularly important aspect of a teacher's personal work on racial bias. This is also the work that Helene hoped to do with her students: to communicate to them that AAVE was different, but that it was not inferior.

But another pedagogical issue remained, which was whether and how to teach Wendell "Standard English." In "Using the Vernacular to Teach the Standard," John Rickford (2005) suggests three ways for teachers to teach the standard dialect while

229

building upon AAVE as an asset. The first is the "Linguistically Informed" approach, in which teachers have a deep enough knowledge of AAVE that they can recognize that students may not be mis-coding words when they read, but simply reading the word on the page with the pronunciation of the AAVE language variety. The second is the "Contrastive Analysis" approach, in which teachers explicitly teach the differences between AAVE and "Standard English," "which allows students to negotiate the line between the two much more effectively" (p. 29). The third is "Introducing the vernacular, then switching to the standard" approach. In this approach, students are instructed in the vernacular for a number of years and then transition into the standard. Richford reports that students taught in this method quickly surpassed students who were simply taught in the standard throughout their schooling.

Ultimately, Helene needed to support Wendell in being who he was while helping him to learn the culture and language of power in a way that did not denigrate his way of speaking. Delpit (2006) suggests that educators help teach the language of power in a mock interview or a mock dinner party, emphasizing the contextual nature of language. This also requires that when a student expresses himself in a task that does not require the use of standard English, that the teacher focus on the meaning of his words, rather than the language of delivery. Otherwise the child might be silenced altogether.

As Helene suggested, Wendell's way of speaking can also be good for his classmates, not just in conversations about race, but in learning to communicate with people who speak differently from themselves. There is no reason to expect that he should speak Standard English for every minute of every day.

230

Helene had read Delpit's book and she said that she would read it again. She understood much of the theory behind affirming a child's home language while also explicitly teaching him to use Standard English in particular circumstances. This challenge was hard for her to do in a classroom where Wendell was one of only two students who spoke AAVE regularly. She did not want to single him out but she also did not want to neglect her responsibility to him, if indeed it was her job to teach him Standard English, which she was unsure of. In fact, she was surprised that after three years of private school, he had not begun to pick it up himself.

In the meantime, Helene also struggled to understand Wendell's speech. She described him as "inarticulate" and said that he frequently got confused. She got some advice from a Black colleague in her re-evaluation co-counseling session in which she was told to affirm the way he spoke and tell him that there are different ways of speaking for different contexts. Helene said that she tried to say this to him, but she was unsure whether he understood what she was talking about. He simply responded, "Uh-huh."

Helene gave a number of examples of how hard it was to communicate with Wendell:

> *"I just wasn't getting like any straight answers out of him. And often I don't… Like he said he has a brother who is the same age. And I said, "Oh, you have a twin?" And he said, "Yeah." And I ended up, you know, calling his mom because like he said, like his mom is thirty-four, he has two nineteen year old siblings, and a twin, and a seventh grade brother…And so they're all in this house, so your mom was twelve when she had these kids? He just, wasn't getting it straight. So I talked to his mom. He doesn't have a twin, he has a cousin, who's his same age. All he has is a brother in seventh grade and himself. There's nineteen year olds that like his dad had. It's all just like, all very…he just has trouble articulating…*

We do not have an objective measure of Wendell's articulateness or inarticulateness. However, a few points from this conversation indicated that cultural differences might explain some of the miscommunication between the Helene and Wendell. In fact, Helene might be misunderstanding some straightforward points that Wendell was making. If his father had nineteen year old children, then it is perfectly logical for Wendell to consider them his siblings, even though they may technically be half-siblings. If he had a cousin the same age, it stands to reason that he might consider him a brother. In many cultures cousins are considered siblings, and aunts and uncles are considered parents. If his cousins lived in the same house with him, then it is even more likely that he might consider them part of his immediate family. This example of miscommunication demonstrates how Wendell has been positioned in this case as inarticulate when in fact, he may have simply been articulating from the perspective of a culture that is unfamiliar to the listener, leading to misunderstandings that may produce a negative evaluation of his general competencies. This analysis is not meant to discount Helene's assessment that Wendell needed support developing his communication skills. It simply redistributes the responsibility for effective communication; part of Wendell's difficulty may have been the result of cultural differences between himself and his audience.

Stealing

By our last interview, Helene said that she had been thinking about race a lot lately, especially with Wendell. He was caught stealing Silly Bandz (colorful rubber

bands in different shapes that are popular with students) out of somebody else's

backpack. Apparently Joshua had said that Wendell stole his silly bracelets. Helene

asked if that was true, and Wendell said no. Joshua said they were in his pocket. Helene

said she needed Wendell to reach in his pockets and show her what was in there. He

reached in and pulled out of the missing Silly Bandz.

She said to me, "I think this is really important because stealing is a really big

deal, especially if you're a Black boy. Or, I don't know, maybe it's important for

everyone, but I feel like it's especially important. But I don't want to impose my values

on him, like, that right path is defined by me."

When Helene first started talking about this incident, I felt as if she really

understood the importance of this incident.   One of the main reasons White teachers

should understand race dynamics is that they have to prepare students to be successful in

a world where race matters. Any incident of stealing should be taken very seriously by a

teacher, but an incident of a Black boy stealing should be handled with the added

consciousness that he will not likely be given second chances if accused of something

like stealing after he leaves school. At first Helene seemed to realize that being a Black

boy gave this incident added weight. But then Helene started backpedaling, taking a

cultural relativist approach to his stealing, saying that she did not want to impose her

values on him. To her concerns that she was defining the right path for him, I answered,

"Not just you." I said that our whole society looks down on stealing, but that it would

interpret a Black boy stealing differently from other non-Black students. She was

233

absolutely right to take it very seriously and make sure he learned from it. I told her I thought she had the right instincts about that and should keep following them.

I asked, "What was his punishment for stealing?" She said, "Nothing – a conversation with me." She also told the head of the lower school and his mom. She said, "I emailed (the head of the lower school), because I thought it would be really important for him to have a conversation with the head of school, because that would be very intimidating. But she didn't get back to me."

For her part, Helene said that she talked to Wendell about how, "Sometimes it does feel bad when people have more than you. It does feel bad." She said she tried to help him think about other strategies for dealing with that feeling besides stealing. She said that he could think about some things that he does have. She also said that he had to return the Silly Bandz to Joshua and apologize. Additionally, Silly Bandz are no longer allowed in her classroom.

Communicating with parents

Throughout all of our discussions about Wendell, I felt strongly that it was important for Helene to maintain an ongoing conversation with his mother. In particular, it seemed that when he did not respond to Helene's discipline, perhaps it was because he was accustomed to a different type of discipline style at home.

I asked Helene if she had talked to Wendell's mother about how she talked to him at home. I asked this because I thought Helene could learn from his parent how to better communicate with him. Helene answered by telling me about the different strategies she had told his mother about for conflict resolution. Helene said that she had asked his

234

mother to talk to him about how hitting is wrong, about how to do an "eye-to-eye" in which you solve conflicts between children by having children take turns talking talk about what went wrong. Helene said that Wendell's mother had said the suggestions were really useful. In reference to contacting her about the Silly Bandz incident, Helene said, "I guess I'll write her an email about how I want her to talk about making good choices and thinking about how people view you based on your actions." These were the messages Helene wanted Wendell to take home after being caught stealing, and she wanted to be on the same page with his mother.

I agreed, affirming that it was really important for his mom to know about the incident and to talk to him about it. But I said that I hadn't meant to suggest that Helene tell his mother how to manage conflict in their home. I had asked about whether she had talked to his mom because I thought she might talk to him differently than Helene did and I thought that she could give Helene some tips on how to talk to him more directly or more in keeping with how she talks to him at home. This idea had not occurred to Helene. Perhaps it was the pressure of needing to feel like the expert, because Helene was a young teacher. Or perhaps it was a disregard for the experience of a young parent. Or maybe it was a subtle disrespect for Wendell's home culture. For whatever reason, Helene did not solicit advice or input from Wendell's mother. Instead she gave her suggestions on how to parent. And yet when I suggested that she ask her, Helene said, "Oh, yeah, that's a good idea." She was not resistant; she simply had not thought about it, nor had she received such a suggestion in her training.

Lisa Delpit (2006) coined the term "culture of power," which she defines as "codes or rules for participating in power" (p. 25). In the US, White middle class norms tend to shape the culture of power. Delpit advocates that part of a teacher's job is to educate students to be fluent in the culture of power, which requires explicit instruction about what the culture of power is and how it works. It also requires that teachers understand that their students who are not from White or middle class backgrounds may not come to school communicating in the same ways that White or middle class students do. Delpit writes, "Children from middle-class homes tend to do better in school than those from non middle-class homes because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper and middle classes – of those in power" (2006, p. 25).

Furthermore, White middle class norms direct teachers to minimize their authority. In the case of this school, students call teachers by their first names and address their students, according to Quaker culture, as "friends." Delpit writes, "Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority. When the teacher instead acts as a "chum," the message sent is that this adult has no authority, and the children react accordingly" (p. 35). If Helene understood more about how Wendell's mother spoke to him, she may have been more successful in helping him act the way that she expected him to act in the classroom. It may be that she, and other adults at the Friends Schools, did not act in ways that Wendell perceived as authoritative.

Delpit does not actually advocate educating parents to assimilate to the school culture. She warns this might be a form of "cultural genocide" (p. 30). While that risk is real, it also seems potentially useful that Helene shared some of the discipline strategies

of the school with Wendell's mother so that, if nothing else, she could support him in navigating this new culture. However, there may also be many ways that she could help Wendell bridge his two cultures by asking how his mom gives him instruction. She could put together a few instructions she needed to give him every day and ask his mother, "How would you phrase this if you were talking to him?" Then, for Wendell in particular, she could mimic his mother's style.

Helene was responsive to these ideas at the time that I shared them, but she did not follow through with them. It is unclear why, except for something that she said during my first observation. One of Helene's three main questions was about classroom management practices: "I know that my classroom management practices are entirely informed by my culture and expectations. Does one type of child fit into that more easily than others?" Her question reflected an awareness of the very dilemmas that arose and are described in this section. And yet as she continued to share her questions with me, she said that her question about how culture impacts her classroom management was less important to her than her other questions because she felt that, as a new teacher, she might not be able to change.

Indeed, changing the parts of our teaching practice that are informed by our culture is incredibly difficult. Helene demonstrated considerable self-awareness in recognizing this from the beginning. However, the changes that, as an adult, she would struggle to make consciously for the sake of her student, would likely be much easier for her than for her student. And almost certainly, the process of engaging in thoughtful analysis of how culture influences her behavior would give Helene some empathy for the

237

work of cultural assimilation that Wendell most likely had to confront every day, without

the benefit of an adult consciousness and understanding of the social dynamics involved.

Her understanding might even lead her to ask how the work of cultural assimilation that

her student had to engage in might distract him in his actions or language such that

simply talking and participating in class required more concentration for him than it did

for other students. And perhaps this might tentatively illuminate the ways in which

Wendell's behavior might sometimes seem irrational.

Discipline and family relationships

> *We are a Quaker School. So you are, like, signing on for Quaker, non-violent education. So I had two kids recently…they write weekend news every Monday where they write about their weekend…um, and one kid wrote like, "I got a whoopin.'" And then there were like two kids standing behind that child, like waiting for me to respond. And I said, "Oh, what exactly does that mean when you get a 'whoopin?'" because that's alarming to me. Um, and she said, "Oh, I get spanked or hit with a belt." And I asked, "Well, where do you get hit with the belt?" "On the butt." "Oh, okay." That sounds, like, that seems a little old fashioned...." And the next kid was like, "Oh yeah, me too." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Oh, I don't get hit with a belt, I get hit with a piece of wire. Or spanked." I said, "A piece of wire? Does that like leave marks, or bleed, or leave you red?" And he said, "No." And I said, "It sounds like it hurts, right?" And he said, "Um, yeah." And then I talked to him privately later, and just asked like how often this happened. And he's a pretty inarticulate kid in all areas, so…*

Helene's dilemma, of how to address the situation of families who use physical

punishment with their children, grew stronger throughout the year. In this scenario, both

students who brought this concern to her classroom were Black.   Many factors

influenced Helene's approach to this question. She had negative experiences with

physical punishment as a child herself. She also had heard talks by Black educators who

said that physical punishment of children is wrong and is not a part of Black culture. Finally, Helene felt when families signed up to send their children to a Quaker school, it meant certain things, one of which was that they could not use violence to discipline their children.

In a previous year, she had had a White student who shared with the class, "Last night the police came because my dad was hitting my mom." Helene called the mother to let her know that the child was sharing this in class and to offer her support. The mother ultimately left her husband and called Helene to tell her that her call had helped her find the courage to leave. "She didn't tell me right away, but she told me she was so grateful for that call, that I was brave and told her."

Helene used this story to help herself feel more confident in handling the situations of two students of color, both Black, who reported getting hit at home. Helene felt that it was better to have a direct line to the parent than to call an outside authority. She also believed that it was her job to talk to the parents because she believed that physical reprimands made it harder for the students to learn good conflict resolution skills that were expected in school. She did not know how to respond to the students' stories, but she felt strongly that she should.

Helene first went to the head of the lower school who suggested that, in the first case, she call the father who was hitting his daughter with his hand, and, in the case of the mother reported to have hit her son with a wire, that she arrange a meeting with the mother and the school psychologist.

So I called and had just a really awkward conversation with the dad where I said, "You know, I'm not trying to make you feel bad, but…" But I kind of was, because I was kind of pissed off that this kid has a lot of issues. And that one of her issues is social skills. So if… they could work on conflict resolution at home, that would be really helpful.

The Dad responded, "No, I threatened her with the belt. I never actually hit her. She gets spanked every once in a while…" And I said, "Okay." And he said, "She shouldn't be, like, talking about that in school."

Helene told him, "Actually,…it's great that they feel safe." She described the call to me as, "just awkward."

In the meeting with the other parent and the lower school psychologist, who was also White, Helene and the psychologist chose not to talk about the wire incident first. They started the meeting by talking about her child's physical tendencies and how they work in the classroom on conflict resolution. When they finally asked about the wire, the mother said it was not true.

I asked Helene if she had a racial analysis of these two incidents or, in other words, how did she think race factored into these situations? She said, "I think it has been passed down through families as 'this is okay.'"

Helene also heard a racial analysis from someone who is a leader in her co-counseling organization. The woman was "an international liberation reference person for people of African heritage." Helene repeated what she heard from the leader, "Slave owners used to beat us to keep us in line. How dare we do that to our own children?" Helene said, "So I feel a little bit more, okay…so it's been passed down, but here comes this woman who grew up poor, you know, in the South, and she was smart enough to

240

figure out that…just 'cause that her parents did it did not make it okay…That it's perpetuating oppression, just that, I don't know. Was taking the same form as slave owners to slaves. So…"

Helene struggled with this particular racial analysis because even though all of those things are probably true, she felt, "you can't really say that to a parent, as a White teacher…Cause that would piss them off…It's like, I know I'm right but… But that [laugh] wouldn't really fix it."

I empathized with Helene's reliance on an expert of color to say whether physical punishment is wrong for people of color. I told her that I do the same thing. I find it very hard to say what is wrong for another person. And I am aware that my training and experience as a White person has taught me to believe that my way is always the right way. So it becomes very difficult to know whether my views are actually right or just a side effect of my training as a White person living in a world where "White is right." Helene already felt that hitting one's children is wrong, but she justified her feeling by the fact that she had heard a powerful Black woman condemn it as well. I admired Helene for her conviction and her commitment to defending her students even if it meant having awkward conversations with their parents.

At the same time, we both may have been overlooking a few important points. First, Helene had a limited understanding of what was actually happening at home, because it relied on what her students were telling her. Second, in fortifying her points, she was relying on the expertise of a single Black woman from the context of Re-evaluation Co-counseling (RC). In her speech, this woman was addressing Blacks who

241

subscribed to the RC philosophy. The parents in Helene's class did not necessarily subscribe to that philosophy. Just because one Black woman said it, does that make it right for all Black people?

Helene invoked the choice to place their children in a Quaker school as a reason that the parents should embrace the principles of non-violence. This seemed to be a strategy for convincing the parents to do what she wanted from them, suggesting that if they wanted to continue to enroll their child in the school, they should know that there were certain rules that they had to follow. In reality, the school was not consistent in holding parents to the principles of non-violence. They did not insist, for example, that parents only invest in non-violent companies, avoiding, for example, stocks in weapons. And it was not stated anywhere that in order to attend the school, parents must abide by particular Quaker principles. The principle of non-violence seemed rather like a caveat that could be invoked at will.

"Awkward" was the word that Helene used to describe this situation. She said it was awkward because she was in her 20s and she is White, while the parents were in their 30s and 40s, and are Black, and she did not have children while they did. Part of why it was awkward for Helene to engage in these conversations with parents was that she was trying to convey messages of disapproval without actually stating disapproval. In terms of building an authentic relationship with these parents, she may have had more success had she simply told him outright what she thought.

She also made a lot of assumptions about the nature of physical punishment in her students' homes. She assumed that it came from anger, rather than from an intentional

242

disciplinary strategy. While hitting a child out of anger is an abuse of power by a more

powerful person over a less powerful person, in some contexts spanking can be an

intentional and considered method of disciplining a child. When she used the example of

a successful prior intervention with a White mother, Helene may have overlooked the fact

that domestic violence in which a husband hits his wife is different from using physical

force to discipline a child. Throughout history, many cultures have believed in a

behaviorist model of discipline in which children learn through physical reprimand in

response to wrongdoing. Also the fact that the family was White may have enabled the

mother to feel less defensive in response to Helene's intervention. Without that racial

difference, she may have been that much less afraid of judgment and reinterpretation.

By the end of the year, Helene remained uncertain about these two situations, in

spite of some of her strong convictions. She continued to go back and forth between

feeling certain that she was right and feeling like that certainty itself was what made her

wrong.

> *Helene: In my opinion, I just don't think it's right to be hitting them and
> telling them…like Cecilia's mom tells her, "You wonder why I'm mean to
> you, this is why I'm mean to you! You make me be mean to you!" I don't
> think that's culturally insensitive, I think that's just not nice and not
> helpful to a kid who has trouble with conflict resolution. So there's a way
> in which it's like, yes my view, which is like a White middleclass view, is
> the right way of conflict resolution and then there's a way where it's like,
> no it's just the right way.*
>
> *That's part of it, but I've heard Black people talk too about how it's
> atrocious for parents to hit their children so it's not like a racialized way
> necessarily. It's just, I don't know. I guess I'm trying to figure it out and I
> don't want to judge but at the same time I think the not judging is
> dangerous when it needs to be judged that if you're hitting your kid that's
> not helpful to your kid. And I don't care if that's what your parents did to*

*you and that's what their parents did to them or if it's part of your culture,
which I don't think it necessarily is. It's not part of all Black culture. I
don't know. I just noticed that some of the kids who said they got hit....
Like Cecilia came in one day and she was just having a really rough day
because she had gotten hit a lot that morning so um so I guess I'm trying
to find a balance between understanding where families are coming from
but not necessarily saying well it's a cultural difference so it's ok. Because
it's not just cultural, it's class based. It's because they don't know any
other way, I don't know.*

*Um and I guess what I could do at the start of next year, um, is send home
something about conflict resolution… some way of educating parents. The
only problem with educating is like, what are the people called the go into
other countries and try to spread their religion?*

Ali: Evangelists? Missionaries?

*Helene: Missionaries. It's a little bit like…I don't know. I guess I'm torn
between educating parents and pushing my idea of what conflict
resolution should be on other people when they might have some other
way. But it's unlikely that I'm gonna think their way is better if it isn't a
talking through way or even yelling through way, fine, but it shouldn't be
getting hit.*

*Ali: Well but I wonder what place there would be for also asking parents
what they do at the beginning of the year just to have a sense for it. I also
wonder like when kids get hit like what that means. I think it might mean
something very different in different households. So it's hard to tell from
what the kids say…*

*Helene: Right that's true. And it's different if you're like smacked on your
butt than like…*

Ali: Right than if you're like getting beat.

We discussed this issue throughout the year and by our last interview, Helene still had

questions about how to handle this dilemma better.

*I guess the one question that comes up still is if kids are coming in saying
they're getting hit or beat with a belt, how do I talk to the parents?
Because it didn't work very well last time. I mean the one thing that
worked was I had Wendell's mom come in and Susan, the school*

psychologist, and I sat and talked with her about parenting. Susan mostly talked because she's a parent and I think that was helpful to her, but I guess just how do I as not a parent and a young teacher talk to the parent? So it's like I owe it to the kid to talk to the parents about different ways of dealing with conflicts.

Some of Helene's conviction about this issue came from her own experiences as a child.

Ali: …Don't talk about this if you don't want to, but it sounds like you also have a strong reaction to this because of your own experiences.

Helene: Yeah exactly. And it wasn't like hitting. I remember one time I left my suitcase somewhere and my dad like dragged me by my arm through the house to pick it up. He would like throw things or put a hole in the wall, but it wasn't like hitting. He wouldn't touch me most of the time, but it was scary and I still flinched. But just seeing Cecilia and Wendell…Cecilia seemed to really take it personally, like, "I'm bad and I'm doing something bad." Where like I think an approach of like, "I'm not angry at you, I'm angry at your actions," or like something where her self-esteem could be intact and she could get some redirection would have been a lot more helpful than just getting smacked a bunch of times.

I suggested that she was still left with the dilemma of whether her interventions further alienated Black parents. She responded, "That's hard, but what if I really think they parent wrong? So it is hard to know when." I answered, "I don't really think this is clear cut. This is like a classic dilemma for a White educator, actually. It's a fabulous, really important question because how do we support parents and not make them feel alienated and judged and do what we think is right for kids?"

Helene: And going the easy route means like not standing up for the kids who are not going to stand up for themselves because they think it's normal and what kid would ever tell their parents "I don't like when you hit me. I think there's a better way"? No one! One time with Wendell I said like, "Do you ever tell your mom at school we are taught to use our words to solve conflicts"? [laughs] He was like, "No." What kid is going to say that to their parents, like, "At school we don't hit we are taught to use our words." Like probably no kid is going to say that.

245

> *Ali: Even that there might be kids in some families who are encouraged to talk back to their families, but there's a lot of families that hold the value that kids should just listen and not talk back. So even the idea that he would come home from school and challenge his family could be really problematic.*

Ultimately, Helene felt conflicted but right about contacting her students' parents. And the source of her conflicting feelings was less about the possibility of alienating parents than it was about the possibility that parents might come down harder on children for telling their teacher what happened.

> *Ali: So how do you feel looking back on it? Do you feel, I was given the right advice, that's what I should've done? Or do you feel like, "I shouldn't have had to make that call?" What do you think?*

> *Helene: I don't know…yeah, I think it was probably the right thing to make the call. …if a kid is saying, I'm being whooped at home. The parents have to know that's what the kids have been saying. At the same time, you know, if the dad's response is like, "How dare she talk about that in public," then…what happens when the kid gets home? Not that she's gonna get whooped but…*

Helene and I went around and around with this question, discussing all of the different dynamics that we could think of. Throughout our discussions, I told her how much I appreciated her willingness to engage this question and engage with her students' parents in spite of their different viewpoints. Another teacher that I worked with in this study told me that she sometimes did not report the negative behavior of one of her Black male students because she was afraid of how his father would react. She had no evidence that the father was violent, but she feared his reaction nonetheless. This kind of protection of Black children from their own parents is not uncommon and it has negative ramifications for everyone involved. Students need to know that their parents and

246

teachers are collaborating and that they all know how the child is doing at school. Keeping information from parents simply severs this line of communication and begins to rip the net of support formed by parents and teachers. If a teacher has reason to suspect inappropriate physical violence, as Helene did, they are often required report it, or talk to the parents. But there is a wide range of appropriate disciplinary strategies. Keeping information about students away from Black fathers is particularly common, because of the common perception of Black men as violent. It is this very kind of unconscious assumption about Black fathers that the inquiry groups were meant to support teachers to uncover and change.

Helene's question, of how to address the situation of families who use physical punishment with their children, like most questions, does not have a right answer. However there are a number of racial dynamics at work within the question that are worth analyzing. The following points are aspects of this difficult question that Helene and I developed together:

First, it is important to recognize that physical punishment is an individual family choice and that this choice is deeply informed by one's own experience in the world. Second, parents of Black children have to prepare them to live in a world that will not always give them second chances. Demanding that they listen to authority may be a way of protecting children from a violent society. Physical punishment may be a part of that parenting strategy and therefore less of a matter of "culture" and more of a matter of adaptive survival. Third, teachers and schools do not have the authority to tell families how to raise their children. Raising children is a collaborative effort between families

247

and schools in which families should have the final say. In these collaborations, no matter how old the parents, the parents should be respected as the ultimate authority. In this scenario, Helene approached the parents as if she were reprimanding them, making the conversation "awkward," as she described it. This approach is very likely to alienate parents from the school. By invoking the fact that it was a Quaker school, she attempted to garner more support for her argument. In doing so, however, she set up an "us vs. them" dynamic, both in the actual conversation, as well as in her description of it, that framed the parents as outsiders, rather than as contributing members of the school community. Fourth, it is hard to know how Helene might have handled the same situation with White children. The common perception in our society of Blacks as violent may contribute to a distorted sense of what it means to "whoop" a child. This may not have been true in Helene's case, but it is a factor to consider in a racial analysis such as this one. Finally, Helene's own experience as a child gave her a strong and admirable conviction that she must protect her students from the physical punishment of adults in their lives. While her response might be admirable, in moving forward it seems important to track the way the personal nature of this particular issue may influence the ways she reacts and responds to student reports of physical discipline.

What helped Helene move forward

Throughout the year, there were a couple of things that helped Helene move forward. One was talking with others about her questions. She talked to her Race Inquiry Group, she talked to an RC co-counselor and she talked to me. She also talked to her head of lower school and a colleague, both of whom were women of color. These

248

conversations moved her forward to the extent that they helped her reframe her questions, view her students differently and take action on day-to-day dilemmas. They did not necessarily answer her questions or even help her develop long term, fundamental changes to her teaching practice.

During one of my visits, Helene decided that she needed to journal in order to keep track of her thoughts about race and about ongoing dilemmas with particular students. When I asked her later if she had been journaling, she responded:

Helene: Yes and no. Yes in terms of like a quick phrase, like today I wrote in the idea about the movie, "show movie, talk about gender and race." I think what I should start doing over the summer is journaling more in general about what I'm thinking about.

For example like, over the year if I had been journaling about stuff with Wendell cause that's like a perfect example. Wendell is like a normal kid and is not fitting in perfectly in the school because what he's getting at home is totally different compared to what a lot of other kids are getting and what the school is expecting in terms of noise and the way you speak and whatever. But I think journaling would be an area of growth for me, like full sentences. Because that was just a little notebook with a quick thought. I think I should start, you know, as I read articles or as things happen in the classroom. Cause then maybe I can go back and read…once you reread you might have new insights on stuff.

After going through this year of research with Helene, I also felt that a long term journaling practice could help her significantly. Throughout the days I spent in her classroom, I often felt like I could not name anything useful for helping her think about race. I would return home to write up my field notes, feeling like I was the wrong person for this job. And as I filled in my notes, I would realize how much was going on that I had not seen as racialized the first time around. Even in our interview, Helene had

convinced me that Wendell Dery was inarticulate. Only after reading my notes multiple times did it occur to me that she might be missing something. Journaling could be a way to build this kind of reflective practice into her teaching so that she could see the same things that I was seeing. Reflective writing is a chance to step out of the normalcy of each day and look at events with a different lens. And it allows a teacher to constantly reassess her own habits and practices, which are difficult to change without a long term view and a concentrated commitment.

Conclusion

It is notable that the dilemmas that arose around home and school cultural mismatches in Helene's classroom were all related to Black students. This may simply be an issue of numbers: Helene had only two students who were neither White nor Black; both were Asian American. And yet, perhaps even if there were more non-Black students of color, the dilemmas would still focus on the Black students. Some theorists (Morrison, 1992; Foley, 2005) suggest that Blackness is often used as a boundary marker in U.S. society by which Whiteness is defined. As such, Blackness becomes what Whiteness is not. In a school where the terms of participation and success are informed so extensively by Whiteness, Black students may have particular difficulty achieving success.

Places where Helene got stuck include talking explicitly about Wendell's differences and communicating with certain students of color. Helene also got stuck around accommodating different learning styles, particularly communalism and verve, which were so different from her own. Ironically, the only classroom in which I saw verve respected, was in Scott's almost all White gifted classroom in a suburban public

district. He had small groups of students who learned communally, who were allowed to speak whenever they wanted without asking permission, who talked while they worked (even when they were writing), and who were allowed to move around the room at will. It seems that in general, we do not reject the idea of a classroom that accommodates verve and communalism outright, but we just think of these as higher order skills that only belong in gifted classrooms with small numbers of students.

Notably, Helene spent two years[12] in a small, multi-racial inquiry group and she never raised these questions about home culture, African American Vernacular English, physical punishment or verve with her inquiry group. Within the inquiry group, she focused on questions about talking about race questions that were explored in the cross case analysis chapter on talking about race. Clearly Helene recognized the questions explored in this chapter as important race questions, as she brought them up with me during interviews and observations. Why didn't she pose these questions in the group?

My work with Helene helped me see the critical importance of 1) relationships and 2) input, when teachers engage in inquiry about race. Our relationship was critical to providing the safety, time and attention that Helen needed to raise and pursue some of these questions. But none of them would have arisen without the input that she received from articles I shared with her and professional development sessions we[13] conducted with the inquiry groups. The professional development sessions and the articles did not

---

[12] Helene's inquiry group met for two years, the first year of which coincided with my research.

[13] My colleague, Dr. Chonika Coleman-King, and I designed and conducted these professional developments for the 25 teachers in the inquiry group on race in which Helene was participating.

necessarily give Helene answers. However, they ensured that Helene was asking

substantive questions about her students' experiences that took her deeper into the cycle

of inquiry. She moved from asking questions about instructions and resources to asking

questions that inquire about students' actual being and belonging in the classroom as well

as their sense of self worth.

Chapter 10: GROUNDING AND LOCALIZING A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

> *I mean when I really think about it hard, especially if I think big like society and the structure, it just kills me. It's just too frustrating and too heartbreaking and too painful and it's like, "Okay… let's take a little step back. Like, what can I do? What can you do?*
> *- Scott Grant*

-Scott Grant taught elementary gifted education within a predominantly White, middle to upper-middle class public suburban k-5 elementary school. Each gifted class he taught was almost all White, with the exception of one Asian American or biracial Asian/White student in each class.

Scott Grant was a second career teacher, who did all of his teacher education and student teaching while working full time and being a dad. At the time of my research, he had two grown children who had gone through the same elementary school where he did his student teaching, and where he taught fifth grade for ten years before becoming the gifted education teacher. The year I conducted my research was his fifteenth year of teaching. Scott usually dressed informally, wearing jeans or shorts and a t-shirt with nice designer sneakers. He had big shaggy curly hair that he wore loose.

> *My parents could be characterized as liberals and they were members of the NAACP and you know stuff like that. Um and so my household just growing up was one of um, I wouldn't even limit it to just tolerance, but openness and conversations about injustice and so on.*

Scott grew up in liberal circumstances and, like many White people, remained estranged from Blacks. He recalls growing up in a small, historic city in Pennsylvania, where only about 5% of the population was Black and 95% was White.

> *I mean we were friendly but you know when I look back on it I didn't really have Black friends, we were just friendly. And I didn't know how to bridge that gap really. …I mean race was always, I think, in my consciousness. I didn't really do anything to change my, I mean, I didn't know how to act on, I guess, my feelings really.*

253

He credits two relatives of his wife with teaching him about race. Both men were actors; one was a well-known African American actor and the second was a White actor who portrayed John Brown in a one-man show. Both taught Scott about race through their life stories, as well as through books they shared. One of them also introduced him to Tim Wise, a White male anti-racist activist who writes and speaks widely against racism. Scott watched Wise online and connected to him as a White man.

> *I guess I wonder what are those hidden pockets inside myself of ingrained racism that I'm not yet aware of. There's definitely no doubt about it that that's there. I mean I've already uncovered some things and that's one of the things that Tim Wise writes about, you know, White guys… So to hear from another guy who also had that same, who had to learn it, and of course Tim learned it way before I ever did, but yeah you know what I mean.*

Scott read a lot about African American history and spoke at length during our interviews about what he was learning from his most current read, *America in the King Years*. He also tried to read whatever was suggested at the cultural proficiency group, including the most recent recommendation: *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum.

Scott became involved in the work on race in his school district through an African American teacher at his school who invited him to join a group of teachers who had started the cultural proficiency work a few years before.

> *It was a younger teacher, came to me and said, "Hey would you be interested in joining this cohort? I think you're ready and you can handle it." 'Cause we had done a lot of talking earlier so she knew I wasn't just your typical White guy [laughs] completely blind to the privilege and so on. So she knew I would be ready for the emotional stuff.*

The cultural proficiency group was a racially diverse group of teachers and counselors, organized by the administration, who met monthly with an expert on race and education from outside the district. The group was unique for school-based work on race. Scott was invited to join them after they had been meeting for a couple of years. Soon after he joined, they decided to form a second, identical group for teachers who had not been involved from the beginning. Scott took part in both groups.

In addition to his work with both cultural proficiency groups, Scott participated in the Education and Race Committee (ERC), which was made up of teachers, administrators and parents, to address racial issues within the district. At his elementary school, Scott and an African American colleague co-led a reading group on race for teachers. The group membership was entirely White women, which was representative of the teacher population at the school.

Scott seemed to think that because he had no Black students, his work in his own classroom was only tangentially related to the work of the cultural proficiency group, which, given the auspices under which he joined the group, it may have been. At first he said he did not think it made sense for him to be in my study because he was not a traditional classroom teacher. Scott taught gifted education for the entire elementary school, which included groups of 5-8 kids in each grade level (first through fifth) who came to Scott's classroom for thirty minutes to an hour once or twice a week. He was one of many people who worked in the district, including Spanish teachers, guidance counselors, another gifted education support teacher and principals, who said they were interested in participating in my dissertation, but who thought that their job

description disqualified them. This may have been a result of how I described my study

and the design of my study, which included classroom observations. After working with

all of the teachers in this study, however, I realized that it also reflected the ways race

work gets broadly interpreted as either explicit instruction of "racialized" material or

teaching Black students. Many people seemed to feel that if they were not teaching about

race explicitly or teaching Black students, I would have nothing to observe in their work

with students. I told Scott that I believe there are things to observe about race even in

classrooms with all White students, where no "racialized" content is being taught.

Scott's anti-racism projects involved his co-leadership of the reading and

discussion group for White teachers and the initiation of a group for Black boys to foster

their leadership and cultivate support. I could not observe him in those settings because

the group for students was still in the planning stages and because he wanted the

discussion group for White teachers to be a safe space, without introducing outsiders. As

a result, my observations focused on Scott's classroom, in spite of the fact that he had

very few race questions related to it.

Chapter Theme: GROUNDING AND LOCALIZING A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Scott had two primary goals concerning anti-racism: 1) to help his White

colleagues develop an awareness of their Whiteness and 2) to create a space in the school

for Black boys to feel belonging and achievement. When I asked him questions about his

classroom, he seemed to be quite clear about the fact that gifted education is a highly

contested territory in the struggle for equity in education. At the same time, he usually

had a complex analysis of social inequity that took our conversations way outside of the

256

realm of education, often to a point of no return. Scott had such a complex political and economic analysis of racism in education that it seemed to preclude a concrete application in his own sphere of influence, his classroom. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, Scott wanted to ground his structural analysis so that he could make change locally in a way that would feel less overwhelming. But his training and his personality led him to think big instead.

This chapter will analyze some of Scott's questions about his discussion group with teachers and the seed of the idea to begin a group for Black boys. It will also cover conversations we had as a result of questions that I raised about gifted education, from the perspective of learning to ground one's analysis for the purpose of making local change.

Classroom vignette

Seven first graders blew into the classroom with smiles on their faces and immediately (and loudly) started taking over the space. Two girls asked Scott, "Why were you absent?" He responded, "I had meetings." One boy, Lawrence, got up into Scott's chair and started spinning in circles, remarking, "This is a warm chair!" Another boy opened a laptop while the girls retrieved their notebooks from the file drawers. Scott placed bound storybooks that they had written on the conference table and two girls exclaimed, "Oh my god!" They started flipping through their books remarking, with their voices trembling, "Oh my gosh! It's so exciting."

Scott's classroom was spacious, with large windows lining the outside wall. In the middle of the room there was a giant conference table (made up of five tables pushed together) around which about 16 metal chairs were placed. Scott sat at the head of the table in a padded rolling chair. Inside there was a handmade sign hanging up on the wall that read:

Touchpebbles Ground Rules

1. *We do not raise our hands when we want to speak.*
2. *We speak to everyone in the group, not just our neighbors and friends.*

3. *We do not interrupt when others are speaking.*
4. *We listen carefully to what other students say.*

Five of the students in this first grade gifted support class were White, one was Asian and one was biracial (Latino and White).

Scott said to Lawrence, who was White, "Get out of my chair, please." Lawrence responded, "But it's so warm!" After a stern look from Scott, Lawrence got up and positioned the chair right behind Scott so that he could sit on it.

Scott announced, "We're going to start something today – it's a combination of imagination, creativity. I want you guys to make your own weird creature. Let's do a creature."

Boy: Can we do a plant? We can do like a plant that's like a Venus Flytrap?

Scott: Why not?

Boy: It's a good idea to do a Venus fly trap?

Scott went to the board to demonstrate the project and all of the students went with him, standing around him as he drew. He said to them, "You can use laptops, toilet roll things, paper towel tubes, construction paper – whatever objects you can come up with." He continued drawing, saying, "I might make something that starts out looking kind of like a cat."

While Scott drew, one student erased the rest of the board so that Scott had room to expand. Lawrence threw a glue stick and lid up into the air while walking around in circles around the other six students who were all looking at the board at what Scott was doing. He did a little dance. Another boy jumped while he listened. All of the students gave Scott advice for how to make his animal really crazy.

Lawrence suggested that Scott give him a squiggly tail and then asked, pointing to the tail, "Is that a fart?"

Scott answered, "You said to give him a squiggly tail and now you call it a fart. Why is that?"

Lawrence: Oh.

Scott: You're not just creating the animal, you're going to write a description of where the animal came from. Give it a world.

Student: The imagination!

Scott: More than that - give it a world where it lives.

Student: Can we make up a world?

Scott: Lawrence – stop. Is that mine? (referring to the glue stick he was throwing)

Lawrence: No it's mine.

Scott: Okay, then just keep it in your hand or pocket.

Student: I already have an idea!

Different student: I already have an idea!

Student: Does it have to be a sea creature?

Scott: No, no, don't do this one – everybody does their own. Then you're going to write about it. So you're going to create your figure and then you're going to write about it. The students returned to their seats at the conference table. On the way to the table, Lawrence walked past me and said, "You have a small computer." He then embraced arms with another boy (Gabriel) like they were about to fight, then they let go. Gabriel touched Lawrence's nose and Lawrence responded, "Why are you going to pick my nose?" They laughed.

Lawrence returned to sitting in Scott's chair. He said, "I'm going to make a sea creature like you did." Then he realized he didn't have any paper. Scott said, "Maybe you can borrow from a classmate. Ask." A girl offered him paper, but Lawrence said, "I don't like that paper, I want that paper," pointing to Loren's paper.

Scott asked Loren, "Loren, can he have one of your sheets?"

Lawrence then got up to sharpen his pencil and his paper fell on the ground while he was up. When he returned to the table, he said, "Hey, who did that?"

Gabriel: Hey, this computer's busted!

Lawrence offered to fix it and then turned the computer off. Both boys laughed.

Lawrence sat in Scott's chair again and spun around. Scott was sitting in a kid-sized chair working with some of the girls.

All but two of the students talked continuously as they worked. Gabriel said, "I think I have a real good idea." Lawrence described his creature as it went through many different iterations, "It's a penguin body with bat wings.... It has a vacuum mouth – it sucks things up and poops it out…. this dude, he has a vacuum nose and goblin ears, cartoon eyes and bat wings, penguin body, rocket feet, a tail like a monkey and he comes from Avazar… He picks up trash and spits it into recycling or into trash. He sorts it in his body… Actually, can I do something different? He sucks up people, puts them in the dungeon and then he had vampire teeth to kill them. I want to do that."

Lawrence shouted new ideas every few minutes while spinning in Scott's chair. As he developed his ideas, Scott encouraged Lawrence, "Write this stuff."
To other students, Lawrence liberally spouted negative comments, "You're dumb as a doorknob…Boogers!"

Another student with a significant lisp (pronouncing "r" as "w") showed Lawrence his animal, "Hey Lawrence, this one has two mouths, one over here, and one over here." Lawrence responded, laughing, "They eat where they should poop and they poop where they should eat."

Another boy asked Scott, "Mr. Grant, is it okay if we do a plant?"

Scott: Yeah, it's your creature, dude.

Diana and Caitlin (White and Asian) shared a chair, both kneeling on the same chair while they worked on separate drawings.

Lawrence said: He sucks up people. He sucks up eggs. He sucks. He sucks.

Scott: Lawrence.

Lawrence: Mr. Grant, do you know one time I drank up milk, somebody made me laugh, so I spit it out from my nose?

Lawrence threw Gabriel's paper on the floor and Gabriel smacked Lawrence's paper.

Scott: Hey, stop it, now. Stop touching one another's stuff.

Scott typed stories on the laptop while the students narrated.

Scott: About 5 minutes!

Students: We're leaving in 5 minutes?

260

Scott: Yeah, time flies when you're having fun.

Girl: If you're bored, time feels like it moves so slowly.

Girl: Yeah, like 10 minutes feels like an hour

Scott: No, we're down to 3 minutes. I know! It goes so fast. Make the most of it and I will see you on Tuesday.

Lawrence (to Scott): He sucks up people and puts them into dungeons. He can swim underwater for a long time. He has goblin ears so he can hear from far away. He has a monkey tail so he can hang from it.

Scott (to Lawrence): Okay, I'm going to give you a blank page and I want you to do a nice big drawing so it's nice and big and then we'll do the description under and then we'll find a wall somewhere that we can hang it up.

Scott: Okay, it's time to pack up.

On the way out, Caitlin (who is Asian) tried to write a message on the board and Lawrence erased what she wrote as fast as she could write it. All the while, he was shouting, "Good bye, Mr. Grant" and Scott, who was working with another student, would respond, "Good bye, Lawrence," without noticing Lawrence's harassment of Caitlin.

A reading group for White teachers

When Scott first mentioned that there were no Black students in his classes, I remarked that there is plenty of work for racial justice that needs to happen with White students; it is not necessary to have Black students present to teach for racial justice. But I was then left to wonder what, exactly, that work is. I was not convinced that teaching Black History content to fifth graders was the extent of the racial justice work that Scott could do as a gifted education teacher. Scott's answer to this question was to help lead a reading group for White teachers, which he had been invited to help lead by a Black teacher who was already running it. Scott seemed very clear on the ways he wanted to

change the school, and he also seemed to feel some responsibility to do so. But even

within his work with White teachers, he struggled to define a concrete goal, besides

helping White people become more aware of their Whiteness:

> *Ali: Let me ask you one more question: so how would you like your school*
> *to look different? Like five years from now, how would you like it to*
> *change from the work you're doing but also just what's your vision?*
>
> *Scott: Yeah that's a good question. That's a hard question. Um…I don't*
> *know that I have a five-year-plan actually. I mean what I would ideally*
> *want would be that every staff member has done this work and done it*
> *honestly and done it as thoroughly as they could so they are then fully*
> *committed for the rest of their lives, I mean that's the thing, once you start*
> *down this path you can't go back. The curtain's back, there's Oz and he's*
> *just a guy [laughs], you can close the curtain but…. I think if that happens*
> *then the dynamic changes and all the kids feel comfortable.*

Scott said that he and his co-facilitator, an African American colleague, struggled with

what the goal of their group should be:

> *I think for her, and I share this with her, but I think for her one of her*
> *main goals is closing the achievement gap. That's what she wants to have*
> *happen and I do too, but I think for her it's that. For me, my number one*
> *goal really is to have these White women recognize their Whiteness and*
> *their privilege and all that stuff and I think it's different.*

I felt a strong empathy for Scott, as I recognized myself in his struggle. There had

been a time when I believed that an awareness of one's Whiteness–and of the

oppressiveness of Whiteness–would be enough to help teachers make change. But I have

come to see (in part through this dissertation) how much additional work it takes for

teachers to learn how to apply that learning. I saw how even he struggled to apply his

extensive knowledge to making change within his classroom. I encouraged him to make

the lessons and the discussions more targeted so that teachers could begin applying their

learning bit by bit.

> *Ali: But this is a hard thing with teachers …to connect that structural level racism or classism or whatever it is with, um, what's going on in the school and that's, I don't know if you've run into that in your group, trying to connect some of the big picture with the local stuff that's happening?*
>
> *Scott: I'm not sure yet. I'm not sure we've gotten far enough to even begin to. I don't even know where that would stand. Like, you know, I'm assuming….whether you agree with me or not, that at least some familiarity of it, certainly the economics of enslaving others and that driving force and whatever…*
>
> *Ali: But I'm working on making that connection too, it's hard.*
>
> *Scott: It is, it's very difficult 'cause it's very convoluted and … it's not something… people are looking for. This is definitely a candy and flowers kind of environment and puppies and so on, you know what I mean, it's warm and fuzzy and you don't want to be in the elementary environment if you don't have some of that - men too.*

Scott felt like there were some cold hard facts about racism and colonialism that

people in his group needed to be comfortable with before they could make changes that

would help them be anti-racist or culturally proficient teachers. I felt strongly that he

might alienate potential allies if he demanded that they all have the same political take on

the world in order to understand how racism structures schools and classrooms. I

imagined that his co-leader, whose goal was to close the achievement gap, may have had

some ideas for how to do that that would be more expedient than turning all members of

the group into revolutionaries first. But the question remains open for me: How

politically radical does a teacher need to be in order to be culturally competent?

Scott generally seemed to want teachers to learn how to acknowledge their Whiteness and to stop being colorblind. He seemed to get angry at them for being so attached to this idea of colorblindness, which he knew was so obviously hurtful to people of color. And yet I knew that the teachers in his group were not going to be able to listen to his anger about it; I felt that he needed a way to understand their attachment to the philosophy of colorblindness in order to help them get past it. I did not hesitate to share some of my concerns with Scott. In fact, during our conversations, he seemed most interested and engaged when I shared my own experiences of working with White people on issues of race.

I shared stories with him about times when I had been in the same position as the one he was in. I told him a story about my dad in order to demonstrate how he might reframe his approach to White teachers claiming a colorblind stance:

> *Ali: Yeah, I was struggling with my dad awhile ago around colorblindness and I was talking to an instructor of mine and he said, "You know, the thing to acknowledge when you're working with people who say they're colorblind is that it often comes from a place of wanting to have good intentions and wanting to honor people as individuals and it also comes from a whole generation of people who think that's what Martin Luther King stood for, and it's not, but you know that quote that 'We will be judged on the content of our charterer and not the color of our skin'…?*

> *Scott: Oh so if I just don't see skin… oh, I see.*

> *Ali: Exactly. So just acknowledging that this might be the way that a lot of us were taught to deal with race and it feels like the right answer and here are the reasons it's not the right answer, but acknowledging the intentions that people have so they feel at least not like total morons when you…*

> *Scott: That's a really valid important point. You don't want to crush them but sometimes the frustration is like "stop!" [laughs], but then it's like,*

"Okay I actually really want this person to grow and so crushing them is a bad idea."

Ali: It's not always the most effective [laughs], but it's tempting.

Scott: Yeah and that's the thing too. I feel like the more I come to understand in some ways the less empathetic I am to my own, it's like, "What - are you kidding me?! Where's the bucket of ice water, wake up!"

Ali: For me I feel that a lot and I think the two things that keep me empathetic are how many people have been so patient with me on my long journey and that I probably hate their ignorance so much because I see myself in it. You know like, "Wow that's what I was like 10 years ago or 20 years ago? Eww, that's repulsive."

Scott: So I'll hit you instead of myself. Psych 101.

By the end of the year, perhaps because of our work together, or perhaps for other reasons, Scott had started to take a different tack with his group.

Scott: Well I have actually kinda reined myself in. In the beginning I was just like, "When do we get to Tim Wise?" knowing full well that you know, that is way down the line for White people.

Starting a support group for Black students

I mean I don't know. That's the thing, I don't know…so it's hard to take a direction when you don't know where to go.

As a White teacher at an elementary school where 90% of the school faculty was White and only 9% of the student body was Black, Scott was aware of the difficulties that Black students faced and of the need to feel belonging and centrality in the school. Although this chapter will also explore other structural changes the school could make to support Black students without marginalizing them, the fact remains that Black students did not have a space in the school where they could get affinity support focused on their experience in this predominantly White, culturally White and middle class school

environment. The cultural proficiency group talked about this and the leader of the group

(a race expert from outside the district) encouraged individual teachers, regardless of

race, to create supportive structures for Black students within their schools.

When Scott and I spoke the support group was still very much in the planning and

dreaming stages, and Scott's questions started to overwhelm him once he started asking:

> *Yeah, I mean how to and what to say. I mean what, how to reach out, how*
> *to not just come off as, "What does this White guy want? What?" Hmmm,*
> *this is really uncomfortable imagining the other people go, "This seems*
> *pretty weird." Umm so how to communicate it effectively, how to, uh,*
> *create an environment where questions and doubts and to even be*
> *challenged on it if necessary. Like if somebody wants to go, "You want to*
> *do what? How come?" Like, I think I can be, I can handle that, it's what*
> *would be the vehicle? Where would this happen? Here? In the*
> *community? I don't know. I've never done this, I've never been a part of*
> *anything like this and I don't know anybody who has. I'm sure it's been*
> *done, I just don't know them so I can't ask them how to go about it. Uh, so*
> *anyway, that was the big piece, how to get the word out, how to have*
> *people feel comfortable enough to make it happen.*

Scott's comments illustrate the potential usefulness of a broader support group of

anti-racist teachers. He rightfully anticipates questions from parents, and expects that

some people will see him as weird. And he is aware that other people have done similar

things, but he does not know those people.   Throughout this study, I had the sense that

all of the teachers across the schools in which I conducted my research would enjoy

getting to know one another – and that there is so much room to build relationships

among teachers working for anti-racism, given that individual teachers doing so often

feel isolated in their classrooms. The cultural proficiency group in Scott's district was

great for this very reason – it pulled together actively anti-racist teachers from all over the

district. However, Scott still did not know of any other White teachers doing what he hoped to do.

The first step to starting a group like this might involve simply starting to build relationships with Black students and families and starting to get a sense of what types of support might be useful to them. A second step might be working to find parents or community members who might want to lead the group. It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that this kind of work has to be done by teachers alone when in fact parents are often more than willing to support this kind of work, or do this kind of work, if invited to do so.

Listening to Scott, it was clear that there were countless complex logistical questions associated with planning such a group. One way that he could make such a group happen might be to team up with an African American parent to run the group. Parents, who have less access to the school structure and teachers, would have a hard time organizing such a group within the confines of the school day on their own. Scott could organize all of the logistics so that all they would have to do is be present to help run the group.

One question that came up for Scott was whether it would be necessary to have a Black teacher or parent sponsor the group for the Black students or the Black and Latino students. It seems that this is not absolutely necessary. In fact, having one of the few White males on the faculty host the group might be a nice way for the students involved to form more personal relationships with a broader array of adults in the community, a way of forming social capital within the school. But it does get at the question of what

267

role White people should play in the racial socialization of kids of color. And clearly Scott intended for the group to be a place to process racialized experiences, which is an important outlet for kids to have. Working collaboratively with parents or teachers of color could create more opportunities for mentorship from adults of their own racial group.

I predict that if Scott decided to work with a colleague or parent of color, all of the logistics would begin to feel less complicated. It seemed true that there were a number of complex organizational logistics, but in general, it has been my experience that logistics around race questions seem easier if you know you will have community support for a project. The anxiety of beginning a potentially controversial project such as this one can sometimes magnify the challenge entailed by the logistics to make it seem like the project is nearly impossible. In actuality, what is getting in the way is not the logistics, but the anxiety about the original idea itself.

As we continued to work together, I found myself asking what other ways Scott might propose that the structure of schooling could change so as to honor Black boys' need for support and for verve within the classroom. Honoring the need for verve in an after school group is completely different from creating the space for it within the hours of the school day such that children know they will be able to learn and to behave in ways that are comfortable for them and sanctioned by the school. In fact, most after school programs accommodate verve already. This led me to ask questions about gifted education that he and I had, up until that point, left off the table.

Raising gifted education questions

The following section will describe Scott's gifted education support class in greater depth and will examine five main questions that arose as I observed Scott in his gifted education classroom:

1. **What happens in this gifted education classroom?**
2. **Is disproportionality[14] occurring?**
3. **How is giftedness connected to race?**
4. **What are some alternatives to the way that the program runs now?**
5. **What helps students succeed in this gifted classroom?**

1. What happens in this gifted education classroom?

This section begins with a vignette from one of Scott's classes during which he and his students discussed plans for the fundraisers they were holding to raise money for a solar panel initiative. They were going to have a bake sale in school, have a dunking station at a fair and raise donations from among their parents. Scott described the project as "not necessarily gifted, but how do you get shit done."

> *Student: How much money did we have before the grant?*
>
> *Scott: During that play, your parents donated about $260 – so I just sent $296 to the fund. We're now at $4500 and some. A parent–you know Jim Franklin–his parents just made a $100 donation. Also, there's talk about the 5th grade class gift might be like $700 or something. We're going to continue to fundraise and here's why, solar panel prices are down around the world. Why are prices down?*
>
> *Student: Because the economy's bad and people aren't buying them.*

---

[14] "Disproportionality" is defined as "when students' representation in special education programs or specific special education categories exceeds their proportional enrollment in the school's general population (Blanchett, 2006, p. 24). The term most commonly refers to the overrepresentation of Black and Latino students in special education programming, but it has also come to be used to refer to the overrepresentation of White and Asian American students in gifted education programming.

Scott: Right, so the manufacturers are letting the prices go down and down.

Student: That way more people buy, and they actually make more money.

Girl: What about the grant?

Scott: Here's the thing – it's a preliminary agreement. I don't know how long it will take them. I applied for the grant in March of 2009 when you were in 4th grade and it didn't come through until April of your 5th grade year for them to say we think we're going to do this. So it could be months before they actually give us a check. We'll have a big celebration for it and hopefully you guys will all come back. You'll definitely be in Middle School, yes.

Student (Michael): Mr. Grant, I have an idea, if we spend all the money we raise on the lottery, we could buy a lot of solar panels.

Scott: Okay, Michael, I just have one question.

Student: That isn't going to work

Scott: Well let's just say, if we didn't win, probably everyone's going to be really upset with me because I said we're going to use this money for solar panels and we gambled it all away in the lottery.

Student: Blame it all on Colin.

Scott: You cool with that Colin?

Student: Blame it on the lemon.

Scott (sarcastically): Girls I'm shocked that you would just want to gamble the money away that way. (Sarcastic because the girls weren't even part of this conversation).

Scott: Should we write an announcement ahead of time? Probably write something ahead of time.

Girl: Yes, definitely ahead of time.

Scott: Okay, but we're not going to do that now. We have to move on.

What was striking about this scenario was how comfortable and happy the children appeared to be in this classroom with seven students. They got to be silly and say what they thought and they got to be themselves. The conversation went in and out of being mature and completely immature, as is arguably appropriate for fifth graders. Notably, they were doing things that would have gotten them in trouble in Cara's fifth grade classroom just a few miles away in the city, or perhaps even in their own classrooms down the hall. This is not to disparage either style, just to acknowledge the differences.

The class fundraiser required a lot of big donations from individual parents. Scott had mentioned to me previously that his own children felt marginalized by the wealth of the average students in this district. And yet the way he spoke about the fundraising seemed potentially alienating to students from low-income families who could not contribute such amounts. But it also had the added effect of exposing students to a particular global economic analysis, which simply marked the classroom rhetoric in a way that suggested owning class. I wondered how these dynamics shaped the classroom culture as one that felt most comfortable for upper middle class and White children?

My time with Scott in his classroom led me to question what, exactly, we mean when we say a child is gifted and what the subsequent gifted classes should look like. According to Scott, there is no certification program for teachers of gifted classes, and he received little professional development preparing him for the position.

No, you know, I have a Masters in Elementary Ed and at this point there's no specialized certification required. Um so no, I don't have that background myself as a teacher, but none of us do at this point.

The fact that there is no required training or curriculum for teachers of children classified as gifted suggests that much of what happens in gifted programs is a result of the social construction of giftedness, our common sense of what gifted students need, rather than an accommodation of an actual category of learner. I agreed with Scott that the kind of practical learning that comes from planning a fundraiser for solar panels is critical and important learning for kids, regardless of whether it counts as "gifted programming," and his students were clearly motivated by the process. But I did wonder why this kind of specialized, experiential learning was only available to students who scored well on certain tests, when it would so clearly be exciting and beneficial for all students.

2. Is disproportionality occurring?

Scott had no doubt that there were a number of structures in the giftedness selection process that favored White students:

Ali: And you feel like there is an underrepresentation of Black kids in the gifted (classes)*?*

Scott: Oh definitely, no question about it! It's just statistically it makes no sense. It just doesn't make any sense.

Ali: What do you think is going on with that?

Scott: Well I think the tools are probably not the right ones or we're only looking through a very narrow lens. You know, it's not a gifted and talented program it's just gifted, so it's a cognitive piece. Um I don't know enough about the WISC-4, but that's the primary tool the psychologists use and, you know, I wouldn't have any problem believing that it's got

272

biases built into it, inadvertent or advertent, but I'm sure its biased. Even the screening tools I use, there were a couple of questions in there like if you weren't, yeah you could…

Ali: "If you've never been sailing," for example.

Scott: "Yeah, right. It's not quite that bad, but it's like um you know the color under your fingernails? …I think that part of it is that some of the regular education teachers aren't sure what to look for and so if you don't maybe speak the language of power and sound like …

Ali: What gifted sounds like?

Scott: Yeah then maybe that then, you know, that doesn't capture um, that doesn't resonate in the teachers' conscious and say, "Hey, I think we better take a look at this kid."

Scott demonstrated an awareness that some gifted children may not be identified because they do not speak the language of power, or have other cultural/racial differences that do not match what teachers or tests typically look for as "gifted."

His district supervisor also tried to locate students of color who may not have been identified as gifted because of biased tests:

Our director of the gifted support program has been um taking it on herself. When the PSSA scores come out she looks for kids who are advanced who are kids of color who haven't been identified and then, at least the last couple of years, she's been contacting the building and saying "Hey, would you screen these kids?" and so I've done that and um …we haven't found any kids. We've found some kids that score pretty high. I mean we can use multiple criteria. The state says, "any kid who scores an IQ score of 130 is automatically a candidate to receive gifted support." If they're close then we can use multiple criteria and multiple criteria can be things like language issues, culture issues, you know, other things that might…learning differences, things like that that might mask their giftedness.

From his description of procedure, the program seems to have a consciousness of the weakness of typical measures of giftedness, perhaps the result of the cultural

273

proficiency work that had been done in previous years in the district. This is perhaps

what made it easier for Scott to focus on building cultural proficiency in other areas of

the school; he knew that his supervisor was already working on it. But his description

also suggests that giftedness is normed on Whiteness. He describes how students can be

admitted with a lower score if they have language or cultural issues that might mask their

giftedness. This implicitly suggests that culturally White, English-speaking students

could not be given such exemption because the admission procedures were designed

around them. The following section will examine the relationship between giftedness

and Whiteness.

3. How is giftedness connected to race?

Scott's was the only classroom that I observed with no Black students in it. I

often wondered how the class might be different, or how Scott might be different, if some

of his students were Black. In one class, Scott told me that his nose was red because he

was outside for the Junior Olympics all week and that all the students had pink cheeks

because they were outside too. Kyle said, "My sun is not new, I mostly got it over the

weekend." When Scott introduced me to the class, he said, "So we get to be part of Ms.

Michael's doctoral dissertation." And the students said, "Cool!" Then he asked, "So, it's

like watching a bunch of chimpanzees?" I laughed. And unlike with other teachers who

were trying to make their classes safe for Black students, I did not go back and mention

to him that the comments about sunburn might feel exclusionary to Black students, or

that it may be good to avoid chimpanzee jokes, given the history of Black people being

caricatured as monkeys. In the non-Black context of the gifted classroom, these jokes

became relatively innocuous. In a sense, I wrote in my notes, "everybody (including me) can relax."

Simply using myself as a barometer, I felt a lower level of tension in this almost all-White classroom around asking what is inclusive, and around the vigilance with which we needed to monitor our own tendency to centralize Whiteness, to assume the White experience is a universal one, and to overlook the ways that jokes might accidentally overlap with racial stereotypes or insults. To have a classroom in which everyone is White feels quite uncomplicated, both because that is a social arrangement that most White people are accustomed to, and because there seem to be fewer things that one doesn't know one doesn't know. I do not know to what extent this difference in tension or vigilance existed for Scott. But based on my own experience, I know raising race questions makes everything more complicated, and those complications then become associated with Black students. In turn, it is the Black students themselves who come to be seen as the anxiety-producing agent, when in actuality the agent is my own ignorance.

Interestingly, students in Scott's classroom had more freedom and a greater tolerance of noise and silliness than any other classroom that I observed. The classroom rules included, "We do not raise our hands as we speak," demarcating this space as one that is different from typical classroom spaces. Students were allowed to talk while they worked and to interrupt the class discussion with questions. The students had agency in the classroom. They also sometimes steered the class, in spite of Scott's best efforts to introduce new content. Verve, the concept that some students (particularly many African American students) work better with multiple simultaneous sensory inputs, was respected

more in this almost all-White gifted classroom than it ever was in the classrooms I observed with Black students, regardless of the class sizes.

After one of his lessons on the Great Migration, Scott and I debriefed the fact that it had seemed to go so well and Scott casually remarked that even Michael was really engaged.

> *He said that Michael is ADHD-identified and medicated for it. He said he had a good day; it's only bad when he forgets his medication.* (Field notes)

This struck me because it seemed like an experience peculiar to Whiteness that a child could have Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and still qualify as gifted. Again, this makes perfect sense to anyone who knows White children with ADHD: it does not necessarily impair one's intelligence. However, because of the way that behavioral differences in Black children are often interpreted by as deviance, Black children with ADHD are much more likely to be perceived as unfocused or not academically inclined and therefore to resist simultaneous categorization as gifted. In fact, it is not uncommon for gifted Black children to be mistaken for needing learning support, because the students demonstrate a distracted, disconnected reaction to certain material as a result of boredom (which can then be perceived by teachers as a learning disability) (Ford, 2011). Teachers, who usually make the first recommendations about who to test as gifted, might see the same behaviors in different students and draw different conclusions about what those behaviors indicate. In the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, for example, Lawrence acted emotionally immature, was distracting and insulting to his peers, was physically aggressive and harassed a classmate.

276

One has to ask, "Had he been Black, would he have been recommended for gifted education?"

Annegrete Staiger (2004) has used Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation to demonstrate the ways that schools produce both Whiteness and giftedness, and then conflate the two such that gifted programs come to be seen as the domain of Whites, and Whiteness becomes a virtual prerequisite for giftedness (Stagier, 2004). As with everything, part of why this conflict exists is that the history of gifted education and special education cannot be isolated from a history of racism in the U.S. – it influences every aspect of schooling. And so even within gifted education, we have to be consciously anti-racist in the ways that we run schools, and that includes recognizing and working against common racist patterns that manifest in schools. Otherwise our students get caught in the flow of racism that perpetually runs through our institutions.

4. What are some alternatives to the way that the program runs now?

Some of the cultural proficiency group members (parents especially) were asking, "What if all kids had access to programming like the gifted program?" When I asked Scott, who had missed the meeting, what he thought of this, he seemed overwhelmed. Whenever I asked him these kinds of structural questions, he always had well-thought-out, well-informed answers, but answers that ultimately demonstrated a sense of powerlessness in the face of the political status quo. I include the entire answer here because this kind of extended analytical response was not uncommon for Scott, who was very well read, knowledgeable and had a consistent Marxist analysis. However, as this excerpt demonstrates, his analysis sometimes got in the way of imagining how things

might be different in his district or in his classroom. He felt that the system was already

rigged in a way that he could not dismantle:

> *If we as a society valued education more, it could be possible to have class sizes like this, it would require three times as many teachers.   But it's also about – what do we believe education is for anyway? You go to some of these elite colleges and I'm thinking of old boy networks – and you meet all the guys who are running corporations, becoming politicians and stock brokers and where you went, who you meet–the privileged maintaining privilege–and they're starting to let some Black guys in, some women. But you go to college and you meet these guys and somewhere down the road they give you a job, but is the education really that much better? Are you really that much more prepared?*
>
> *I think the fundamental core of all this shit is economic.*
>
> *From this country's point of view, non-Whites and non-males can get in– it's difficult, but can–but the understanding is* we (Scott counted himself as a White male) *dominate. We still have a plantation mentality. The way our economic system is structured, it fuels and funnels so much energy into greed and we are rewarded for greed. The system's rigged, culturally, socially and economically.*
>
> *Bill Gates is giving all this money away. I don't think that's anything great – that's the least he can do for grabbing all that money for himself. He was a monopolist. He was just crushing people all along, like Carnegie, Rockefeller. Also, the guy who runs BET – I hear he's an SOB. And Don King – he screws all the boxers (Naming boxers)… I'm sorry – I'm going on a tangent here.*
>
> *The idea that education–you have to have it, there's no doubt–but we don't have that value of it from a philosophical perspective. This really elevates people. Colleges are professional training facilities. We have the corporatocracy. And then you have Bill Gates dictating what we need to improve education. He's not elevating people, he's trying to get workers who can come work for him and make him more money.*
>
> *The system now is so much about money and if you can make money, you can be in the game. Does education do that? In some cases it does. But Gates gets cited because he's a college drop out. We value creating people who will create business. What about people from privilege and power who say, "Go to a liberal arts school and study what you love"?*

Karl Marx was right–ooh, now I'm a communist–we need work that we value.

Our system has done the opposite – we break things down to these menial tasks and pay people nothing to do them over and over. It keeps profitability up but humanity disappears. If we valued education, we'd have groups of 8-10, triple the number of teachers. We can't do it here with 24, how the hell are you going to do it in Philly with 35?

It's unmanageable – here the group is small enough I can manage it.

Most of the kids think their ideas are the best – a lot of managers, not a lot of workers. How do you run a group when everyone wants to be in charge? It gives me the chance to work with them on group skills. Hire triple the number of teachers - that's a lead balloon. People are going to say, "You people don't work over the summer, don't actually do real work." Right? That's the constant message we get as teachers, a lot like the one that African-descended folks have gotten from Whites for 400 years. Teachers get that message all the time – we're undervalued. And not every teacher's a good teacher, but as we become more and more social workers, dealing with all kinds of issues….

Right now, if we had three times the number of kids, it's hard to know how that would look like – some of these guys have been with me since second grade. Not just because they're gifted, but they also know the expectations.

Scott's response demonstrates some of his sense of powerlessness regarding the question of how to get more kids of color into gifted classes or make gifted education pedagogy accessible to all students. Even though these questions addressed things that could be in his control, his political and economic analysis seemed to overwhelm his sense of localized agency. It seems that his race critique actually got in the way of seeing his sphere of influence because it always took him back out to the macro. As the gifted education teacher, he could have influenced how giftedness was defined and discussed at his school and what informal criteria teachers used to identify gifted students. He could

279

have worked to educate his colleagues about the ways that giftedness is often conflated with Whiteness, and the reasons why gifted children of color are often overlooked or misclassified. Seeing racism as only systemic, only institutional, makes it hard for individuals to contribute what they can to stopping it.

This is the inverse of the experience of many Whites learning about race, who so lack a systemic analysis of racism that they individualize and internalize their racial critique in ways that lead to strong feelings of shame and guilt. But Scott's dilemma of feeling overwhelmed by the systemic inevitability of racism and capitalism is also not uncommon. He seems to feel especially responsible for inequality because of his awareness of his social positioning as a White man, and therefore feels inordinately defeated by that same system upon which, as an elementary school teacher, he has very little influence. His sense of responsibility for the whole system ends up undermining the actual possibility of changing things within his locus of control.

Another suggestion proposed in the cultural proficiency group meeting that Scott missed was the idea of making gifted support an inclusion program in the regular classroom, rather than a separate, pull-out program. When I asked him what he thought about this, he responded:

> *I think it's fine. You know it would be nice to be able to get into the regular classroom and co-teach with the regular ed teacher. That brings some appeal seeing the gifted students in a broader spectrum… There's some really good and positive qualities to that. Getting to know more students is also interesting. On the other hand, one of the nice things about the pull-out program is it gives that grade level of students a chance to really, I think, spread their wings, and I can speak to that having come out of the regular ed program. You know setting up projects where I think kids have plenty of opportunities to stretch themselves. What I found early*

on, and I was actually a bit surprised by it, was the fact that the level of conversation and the speed went way up. Like the speed went up and the depth went way down. I mean the whole thing just stretched in every direction much more than I anticipated when I was still teaching fifth (grade regular education)*. It was like, "Oh wow we can really run." And I would hate for them not to have those opportunities too because I think it is a chance where they can um maybe say things they wouldn't necessarily say because it might seem odd in the regular group, but with us it's fine. Like I might say, "What do you mean by that? You need to build us the bridge." And they'd be like, "Oh, ok." So I think that probably the ideal situation would be a little of both.*

I had the sense that Scott was so much a part of the gifted program that he had stopped thinking about gifted education as a racial justice issue, and thought about it more as what he did as a job in between his pursuits of racial justice, which he approached through working with other White teachers and planning to coordinate a support group for Black children. I recognized what he was saying about the speed and depth of the conversation in his gifted classes. And at the same time, I wondered if that would be true for any group of six kids, if you pulled them out of their regular class and helped them get comfortable with one another and with the teacher and then started to discuss something interesting – not only academic content, but active real-life planning, such as the solar panel fundraising initiative that they were involved in. Wouldn't the pace go faster and deeper under the same circumstances with any children? Why is it that only kids who score high on early tests (usually as early as first grade) are able to access this kind of learning environment? And how does it become a self-fulfilling prophecy as the children continue to perceive themselves as gifted, high level thinkers through their participation in the program?

281

As we continued to discuss possibilities for expanding access to gifted

programming, Scott brought up gifted and talented programs which, presumably, are

typically larger than cognitive gifted programs and incorporate more students:

> *Now we have so many gifted kids already, I don't know that we'd be able*
> *to handle gifted and talented, at least not without getting more teachers.*
> *Um it would be a great idea, but I don't know that the community values it*
> *enough. If we did that, cause I have 62 kids now, and if we did talented I*
> *could easily have 100 or close to it and I wouldn't have a way to service*
> *all those kids and do all the paperwork, but we could hire another teacher*
> *and then we could do that, but that's not gonna happen.*

Scott's comments above suggest that to cast a wider net to possibly include some

Black children in the gifted program would require changing it to a gifted and talented

program, which would include giftedness in other areas besides writing and math, such as

dancing or the vocal arts. In suggesting this, he is likely just listing the typical ways in

which gifted programs get expanded to be more inclusive of other children, Black or

otherwise. But in this context, such a response seems to suggest that if Black children

qualified to be in the program, it would not be a result of cognitive giftedness, but rather

physical talent. This plays into the prototypical idea of Blacks as physically talented, but

unintelligent.

5. What helps students succeed in this gifted classroom?

> *Ali: What would be the harm in letting somebody in who isn't actually*
> *gifted?*

> *Scott: Um, the harm is that it wears them down, that they get into the*
> *group and go, "Ooh, I can't keep up," and it really does have a withering*
> *effect and it has the inverse of one of the things I would like to have*
> *happen, not kids to feel elite, but just to feel good and confident and that's*
> *one of the things that could happen for some of the students. Some of the*
> *students don't think much of themselves and when they get identified it's*

282

like, "Wow, hey, gosh, don't I feel much better about myself." You put a kid in an environment that they can't keep up in it's not gonna have that effect. It's gonna have the opposite effect where it's like, "Oh my god I'm dumb." And I have a couple kids now in the program and um you know they were like borderline types and um you know they don't want to be here. They find reasons to miss. One just simply doesn't want to participate and the parents are insisting. If there's a slightest deviation in the regular classroom - "nope can't go to (gifted class)"- because it's not having a positive effect. Um I think a way to do that would be to have a group mixed of like, like at that level and have them come, you know the high average. That would be the group because then everybody feels comparable and they can have a little enrichment and so on. I mean again that would probably have to be organized differently. I don't think I could literally do that because we would have 100 of those kids, never mind the 60 that are already identified, but that to me is one of the biggest reasons not to do it because its not like "hey this is just fun"....

Scott's concern for students who were borderline gifted was that the class would not be fun for them, they would begin to feel dumb compared to the other kids in the class, and they would start to avoid going to the gifted class because it made them feel bad. He formed this assessment by observing former students who had been "borderline." In observing Scott's class, I felt like there might be other reasons that accounted for the different levels of comfort, in addition to borderline testers. It seemed that children who seemed to feel comfortable were comfortable having informal, playful conversations with Scott, and felt secure with very little structure – two things that have nothing to do with giftedness. It seemed to me that the comfortable students were those that had been there long enough to help shape the norms of behavior and to grow accustomed to Scott's style. As Scott said, the way it is now is a result of the students' familiarity with his program,

Right now, if we had three times the number of kids, it's hard to know how that would look like – some of these guys have been with me since second

grade. Not just because they're gifted, but they also know the expectations.

Conclusion

The primary places where Scott seemed to get stuck, where he really felt constrained, usually involved his own structural racial analysis, his role as a White man in working for change and his own agency. He had a tendency to think about the big picture and to see the big picture, which sometimes frustrated and overwhelmed him. He wanted to teach and influence his White colleagues, which could be a great step toward changing his school, but he wanted to do so by helping them develop a structural analysis similar to his own. While having a structural analysis is an important first step, Scott's own experience seems to indicate that it cannot be divorced from a local analysis that takes into account one's sphere of influence.

Scott's questions focused on what to do in a race education group for White teachers, and how to go about creating a support group for Black students. His questions focused on two projects that he saw as being within his sphere of influence, and which he felt, in spite of his many questions, he could do. As should be clear from the first two sections of this chapter, he made great strides in his leadership of the White teacher group and he was beginning to find the answers that would help him begin the group for Black boys. He was challenging himself to take risks and to create structures that would support change in his local context. It seemed that virtually all of Scott's free time was filled with some kind of meeting for addressing race in the district; he was deeply committed to the struggle for racial equity in his district.

284

The fact that Scott did not raise questions about gifted education is not an indictment of him or his commitment to racial justice. I began to raise these questions, and I explored them in this chapter, because it became clear to me that there was a lot to notice about the way that Scott's predominantly White gifted classroom was racialized. As this chapter hopefully makes clear, all systemic issues have localized components. How children are perceived in the classroom, whether they are recommended for giftedness testing, whether they feel comfortable with the relaxed atmosphere of the gifted classroom, what texts they read, how those texts are taught and the unspoken norms of the classroom all contribute to the construction of giftedness and to the idea of who seems to belong in the gifted classroom. Scott did not have the agency to eliminate gifted programming, or to admit Black students who did not "qualify." But he was in a position to challenge conventional wisdom about what giftedness is, and who should have access to gifted education. Teaching White teachers to recognize their own Whiteness is important work. But it may have been even more transformative to help them see how Whiteness shaped the lenses through which they saw children and interpreted giftedness.

I write this not because I think Scott should have been challenging his local school district to disband gifted education; he was already challenging the district on a number of different levels. I write this to illustrate the expansive possibility of getting in touch with what we do not know we do not know. In order to change structures of inequality in our local communities, we have to ask questions about why they exist and how they are maintained at the local, institutional and systemic level. Scott was keenly

285

aware of racism in his school, but had not yet learned how it might affect the part of the school most within his own control: the gifted program. The following chapter follows another teacher, Sam, as he explores similar questions with regard to honors and AP English at Friends Independent School.

Chapter 11: GATEKEEPING HONORS AND AP ENGLISH

There's no reason to think that that kid can't do the same thing that my kid can do, but the honest truth is he doesn't have what my kid had, you know. It's like baseball. If you came and you had never played baseball and Hannah had played baseball a lot, ... but the coach saw something in you—willingness, athletic ability and so forth—wouldn't the coach stay after and work with you? Of course! But we're really reluctant to do that kind of stuff here. We're scared to say, "I need to give you extra help, Ali, because you're a kid of color."

-Sam Brodsky was an English and History teacher at a historically and predominantly White Quaker independent school with a predominantly middle- and upper-middle class student body.

Sam Brodsky was inexplicably called by both his first and last name by most of his students and colleagues. He was married, in his late forties and had children who attended the school where he had taught for eleven years. Before this job, he taught for four years at a school for children with learning disabilities. As a graduate student, he taught a freshman seminar on writing and later taught for a short stint in an adult English program called "Survival English." Sam had two graduate degrees, one in American literature and one in information sciences.

As the child of a Jewish Russian immigrant in the Jim Crow South, Sam felt that he was considered neither Black nor White; he was a Jew. And yet, as he grew older, and moved to the north, he noticed that his Jewishness began to be subsumed into Whiteness. During the year of my research, Sam applied to and was chosen to attend the national White Privilege Conference, where he attended the affinity group for Jews and met race conscious, phenotypically White Jews who identified as both White and Jewish. Many of our conversations throughout the year revolved around this revelation in which he began

to take responsibility for the Whiteness that he was privy to, after many years of

identifying primarily with his marginalized identity as a Jew.

At the time of this transition, Sam was already a member of the race inquiry

group. He had joined the group because he had heard rumors that members of the group

were pushing to abolish honors level English because of the racial inequities it produced.

He, on the other hand, wanted to keep it. He considered honors English a critical

component of a rigorous English program, and he resisted any changes that would do

away with it completely:

> *I mean part of the reason why I got involved in this was because I wanted*
> *to know, were people gonna say we should get rid of honors classes*
> *because Black kids at this institution don't seem to be able to get into the*
> *courses? To me that's racism.*

Chapter Theme: GATEKEEPING HONORS AND AP ENGLISH

While Sam joined the inquiry group on race because he wanted to be present if

anyone promoted the idea of abolishing honors English, as he learned more about race, he

began to understand the many different structural barriers to a racially equitable entry to

the honors program. He began to see how Whiteness influenced the books he chose, the

questions he asked, the comfort levels of his students in the classroom, the

recommendations of his colleagues for honors participation and student engagement. He

began to see how the practice of colormuteness that is prevalent in White communities

guided class discussions, so that even when race was blatantly relevant to class

discussions, his predominantly White classes would rarely engage it, leaving students of

color in the awkward position of either ignoring it, or being a lone voice in the discussion.

Sam's own inquiry questions emerged from his desire to keep honors English in tact, while making it possible for more Black students to participate in it. Balancing this with his growing understanding of the limitations of teaching from a perspective of Whiteness, he spent much of the year feeling simultaneously anxious to make changes and baffled by how to do so. He described himself as somebody who was still at the very beginning of his development of racial awareness and seemed to recognize that he could change a bit at a time: "I mean I haven't even gotten into how you teach kids of color, I'm still dealing with the curriculum part."

This chapter will explore Sam's struggle with curriculum and how it led him to the question of how best to change the English program so that more students of color could participate. This exploration includes an analysis of his growing realization of the many smaller factors that influenced the disproportionality of his honors and AP classes, which were almost entirely White.

Classroom vignette

Sam's regular tenth grade English class had sixteen students. Two of the students (one boy and one girl) were Black, thirteen were White and one appeared to be Latina. The students sat in a circle at tables, each one big enough for two seats. Sam sat in the circle by the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. The classroom itself was carpeted and comfortable with a sink, an LCD projector and one full wall of windows looking out onto a wooded grove dappled with sunlight. The walls of the room were decorated with pictures of a diverse array of authors including Sandra Cisneros, David Sedaris, Zora Neale Hurston, Sherman Alexi, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Emily Dickinson, Serena Williams, Ani DiFranco, Julia Alvarez, Jack Kerouac and Walt Whitman. Another poster featured book placards for Gone with the Wind, Catch-22, Of Mice and Men *and* The Great Gatsby. *A couple of posters featured an array of authors including one labeled "Black*

African American Authors" and "Women in Literature." One poster, entitled "American Authors," featured all White male authors.

The class was in the middle of a two week unit on Their Eyes Were Watching God *(TEWWG as Sam abbreviated it) that was organized into four sections, each section demarcated by each of the four lovers of the main character, Janie. As class began, the only Black boy in the class, Hakeem, asked, "Can I go to my locker real fast?" Sam responded, "Yeah, man, you sure have been leaving class a lot." The students were filling out homework sheets on the section that they had read for homework. Six of the White students and both of the Black students completed the sheet on their laptops rather than by hand. From the beginning of the period, the students were engaged in about 15 minutes of consecutive writing, with the periodic interruption for some contained talking or joking. About halfway through the 15 minutes, Sam said to Hakeem, who was staring at the floor, "Hakeem, you wanna fill the sheet in? That's what everyone else is doing, bud." Hakeem responded, "I am, I am."*

It was common for Sam to use different strategies, like writing or journaling, to engage all of the students in reference to a particular question. When I asked him why, he said, "To get me out of the front of the room." Without a prompting question from Sam, the conversation began seemingly organically. One student simply started talking and shared, "I kind of think with Jody her (Janie's) *search for identity is put on a standstill because she's forced to withdraw from who she is and who she wants to be and become who Jody wants her to be." Sam engaged her, "Has Janie's life changed that much?"*

The conversation continued with a discussion of Janie's identity, focused on her gender and on her relationships. Presumably this came out of the writing they did on the homework check, but it wasn't explicitly stated that the conversation would be about her identity.

Students spoke one at a time, some raising their hands, some speaking out without raising their hands. After about five comments, the teacher from next door came into the room with a cup of fresh hot coffee for Sam and silently handed it to him and then left as the conversation continued. Hakeem raised his hand, ready to speak, and then waited while Josh, a White student, spoke without raising his hand, "He wants her to be a trophy wife – we just read Great Gatsby *– a lot of similarities there." Sam called on Hakeem, who tentatively asked, "Do we have to talk about a certain thing?"*

Sam answered, "We were talking about search for identity, but…"

"Okay, yeah." Hakeem interrupted, "Well Janie – it's a new town and it's all Black, so she thinks it's going to be different, but men still felt superior, and she's still oppressed by men." This was the first time during the whole unit that anybody mentioned race, and Sam was thrilled. He picked up on Hakeem's comment right away and built on it.

"Yeah, I agree with you 100%. It's supposed to be different, it's supposed to be a quest. It's like if you guys took over the class and you said we were going to do things differently and we're not going to have tests, etc., etc. and it was just the same…She has certain expectations because she thinks an African American town is going to provide for her."

The conversation continued for about ten more minutes and nobody else referenced race. The students continued to analyze the power dynamics in the novel, comparing the book to Animal Farm *and* Mean Girls*. Sam brought it back to race again to emphasize the universality of the theme: "So suddenly she empowers them. And going back to what Hakeem and Maria said, it's like suddenly he's the man–it doesn't matter if he's Black, White or whatever–suddenly they're willing to pull him down."*

The conversation ended with a tangential, joking conversation about Mean Girls *during which the only Black girl in the class got up to blow her nose and then asked if she could use the bathroom to wash her hands.*

Choice of literature

Sam's first and primary action research question revolved around changing his curriculum in his English classes to make the literature and the authors more reflective of the students he was teaching. He began to realize that race affected not only his choices of literature and what was considered "classic," but also how he taught the literature, and how his students analyzed it.

> *A year or two years ago we wrote all our books on the board for the final exam and I said, "This is pretty pathetic." And they were like, "What do you mean?" And I said, "There's no female writers up there." …I guess the biggest thing that's changed for me this year is just this idea that I'm, and we all have different ways of viewing what we are, but in ninth grade I'm the gatekeeper for sure. But also just this idea even in honors or regular classes that there's just certain literature we have to read.*

Many different factors helped Sam come to this realization that there's no literature that English students absolutely have to read, and there are, in fact, many reasons to include diverse authors and themes. One was the testimonials he had heard

291

from students of color at the conferences on race. Hearing the sense of disconnection and alienation that they felt from the traditional White male "American authors" curriculum helped him want to change.

Another experience that helped him become personally invested in changing the literature was his realization that he could empathize with the experiences of students of color from his experience as a Jew. Through conversations with other English teachers and other Jews at the White Privilege Conferences, he learned to recognize that he could use his experiences of marginalization as a Jew to put himself in the position of some of his students of color:

> *I mean another "ah ha" moment is…you can use your experience… to help you understand other people. So it's like any time I see something, I go, "Ok well if it was portraying a Jew in a negative way, how would you feel about it?" All right I've got an understanding. But it's just like I was watching some movie or something and my daughter and I were talking about this and I just said, "I don't know, I mean like what would it be like if every time you watched a movie the people you see in the mirror or you know come to your Passover or whatever it is are always the bad people and they're never the good people?"*

Sam was beginning to understand how demoralizing it might be never to see one's own experience as central in the texts they read, or to feel as if people of one's own race were consistently portrayed as the bad guys, the outsiders or, perhaps even worse, not portrayed at all. *"That doesn't mean we shouldn't read it, but what it does mean is you're the odd man out for a whole book… "*

Sam began to realize that he did not want to continue to put his students of color in that position book after book. He had the full support of his English department colleagues and his department head to begin to make changes. When he was toying with

292

the idea of reading the book *Incognegro*, he began to doubt himself because of a

comment about interracial sexual relationships in the book. His White department head,

who was also involved in the inquiry group work, pointed out similarly mature content in

books Sam already taught:

> *(The head of the department) has become this funny… support person for*
> *me because…I was saying, "I don't know if this* Incognegro *would be a*
> *great way to balance out* Blankets… *there's this offhand comment where*
> *this guy is talking about maybe if I can go down south with you, I can*
> *sleep with some White girls." She was like, "What's the big deal? In*
> Blankets *there's masturbation." So it's like she's really kinda pushing me*
> *to do that kind of stuff.*

Even with the full support of his department, however, Sam struggled with how to

find and choose what to read. He emailed some colleagues that he met at the White

Privilege Conference, but many of them did not write him back. He repeatedly asked me

to start a website where I could post resources for teachers because he felt that finding

literature, and accompanying critical essays, was one of the most difficult parts of making

this shift.

He had incorporated *Their Eyes Were Watching God* a few years earlier, but he

still felt uncomfortable because he did not have any novels with good Black male role

models:

> *I don't want to do that anymore to Dave. When you hear an individual's*
> *story it becomes different. How do I help them become the best writers,*
> *the best communicators they can be? And how to I make sure they see*
> *themselves in this literature? I mean, look, in* Their Eyes Were Watching
> God*, we finally got a powerful Black man and his name's Jody Stark and*
> *he's an asshole." Can we have some good Black characters?*

This hyper-attention to giving students "mirrors" (Sims Bishop, 1990) of themselves and their own experiences seemed ridiculous to Sam even just a few years before. He had been of the belief that characters like Odysseus and Willy Loman from *The Death of a Salesman* were universal prototypes, characters portraying themes with which everybody, regardless of gender or race, would be able to identify:

> *It doesn't have to be somebody you're literally like. Maybe you*
> *have the attributes of Odysseus, you could be Odysseus, you know,*
> *I mean think about it. We say that stuff all the time.*

Hearing the contrary from students of color, and recognizing his own periodic disconnect as a Jew, he began to realize how important it was to have many different types of authors and characters represented in the class reading. Towards the end of year, Sam received some encouraging feedback from a student on this point:

> *I asked them, "Out of everybody we read this year who would you choose?*
> *Who's you? Who did you connect with?" And then this Middle Eastern*
> *student said, "Well I really didn't feel like I had anyone in particular."*
> *And then she was like, "Wait a minute," and she chose a character from*
> The Namesake. *So I said to her afterwards… "So basically what you're*
> *kind of communicating to me is you really didn't feel like there was*
> *anyone you could identify with?" And she was like, "Well, but then I*
> *remembered* The Namesake *and I felt better about it."*

Style of teaching

Sam also realized that this exclusion of students of color was not just about *what* he taught, but *how* he taught. Over the course of our time together, he shared three different examples of realizing that by not being intentionally and consciously anti-racist, he was inadvertently gearing his lessons and questions to his White students.

> *At the end of the Great Gatsby test, I said, "Now who would you like to*
> *date or eat lunch with from Great Gatsby? And I was thinking maybe the*

294

three Black guys don't want to eat with any of those people. Where I'm at right now, I just feel like I don't have to teach the same old shite anymore. I love the classics, but it doesn't make sense that they could come in my classroom and not feel like they're connected to it.

In addition to changing the types of questions that he asked, he also realized that he may want to think twice before trying to read in a Black vernacular. A Black student of his told him that he could not read all of the parts of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* without sounding ridiculous: "A kid I taught in 11th grade went to Mt. Holyoke – she would read Janie and I would read narrator. She would say, 'Sam, you can't read this.' And she was right."

After his student who read Janie's voice left his class, Sam began using a recording of Ruby Dee reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

I came to this realization – why am I doing this? Ruby Dee is a Black woman and she's like this Shakespearean actress, or she seems like it, and she slows down and she speeds up… When Ruby Dee reads it, like level three, the kids laughed and laughed at that fight scene.

In addition to changing the books, changing the questions he asked about books, and changing the ways that he taught and read books out loud, Sam was also learning how to point out the holes and absences in different books:

Here's an "ah ha" moment. There's this great moment… in The Great Gatsby*… and Nick talks about being home again and all of a sudden he just stops and he just starts thinking about when he was in high school and coming home from college… and there was all this excitement seeing everybody at Christmas at the train …and who had the green tickets, which parties were you going to? Were you going to the Shultz's? Were you going to the Uruguay's? So the names were kind of German descent, I mean that is the Midwest. But what I said to Rula, this Middle Eastern girl, was, "You know what? I wouldn't have been on that platform, I don't know if you would have been."*

Here again, by tapping into his experience and identity as a Jew, Sam was able to point out that in this novel there was a platform full of White people, where people like him and other students of color in the class would not been found, and historically would not have been welcomed.

"Whitestream" racial dynamics in the classroom

Sam did not stop at challenging what literature he taught, or how he taught it. He also started to look at how racial dynamics structured the actual conversations among students. Sam noticed that students of color were often interrupted by White students, who felt entitled to join the conversation at will.

> *There's this one kid, African American female, who went to POCC with me and I've been just trying to reach out to her more, to celebrate her more. Not any more than anyone else, but like she's got a very low self-esteem and everything and I want to celebrate her more, I want to be more mindful of what being Black in the classroom means. And there's this one White kid who constantly interrupts her all the time and then I'm thinking well maybe all the White kids are.*

Through attending the POCC and hearing directly from students of color, Sam was beginning to see how isolating their experiences of the school were. And yet Sam did not feel that he had much recourse with the interrupting students, except to tell them they were out of line and, ultimately, to ignore them:

> *It was that asshole. And I confronted him about it so many times, like I would say things like, "Wow John, I thought it was me. I took it personal, but I realize now that you just don't respect anybody cause you just talk over anybody you want to." At the very end (of the semester) I suddenly just like did not hear him and that seemed to kind of work. Now was that a technique I should have been using all year? I guess so.*

Similarly, Sam began to be more critical of the situation of a White student whose parents persistently pestered Sam to give him extra help in English so that he could earn an A. Sam said that such parents were so powerful that it was really hard to say no, even when he knew that they did not need extra time and attention, and that some students of color needed it even more. But then he said that, ultimately, his time and attention did usually end up going to the students whose parents made the most noise.

Taking up a teacher's time and the classroom space was not the only way in which some White students eclipsed students of color. Sam also began to see the ways that White students avoided talking about race, even when it was very obviously an appropriate, and sometimes critical, point of discussion relative to the literature they were reading. In some classes the students ignored any reference to race. In others, as in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, the conversation about race stayed between Sam and his Black students. The rest of the class did not run with that topic. This is understandable, given that they live in a society—not just their school and classroom—in which colormuteness is the dominant approach to discussions of race. But it is so obviously counterproductive when a literature class is reading a book in which African Americans are the primary characters, the author is African American, and the exploration of race is a primary part of the plot. This reluctance or inability to engage the conversation is a way in which colormuteness renders White students less capable and less competent in a racially diverse society.

The avoidance of racial topics in classroom discussions is particularly harmful to the students of color, and to any other racially conscious students, who may be interested

297

in engaging in a conversation about race but do not feel that there is any response or engagement from the class when they bring it up. Accessing literary criticism and discussions via one's area of interest can be one of the hooks that helps students become passionate about literature. Though not all students of color necessarily consider race an area of interest, for those that do, this silence stymies their development in that area. It potentially stymies their engagement with the material as well. It is likely that students who are unable to talk about themes that they see in the literature, because those themes are race related, may be less able to engage fully in the class. It takes energy to constantly self-censor, or to cope with a stony response from classmates. Students experiencing this censorship might therefore appear disengaged or bored, a façade that does not communicate the whole story.

Strategies for interrupting "Whitestream" class dynamics

While observing Sam's class, I was particularly impressed with the gender analysis that one of his female students made of Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*:

> *The notion that men can be understood is an illusion. The men all use horses for the commonest things, like they all rely on them so much. I don't want to diminish the spirituality, but I sort of wonder if they like them a lot for their practical value. I don't want to be completely pessimistic, but they might not even entertain the thought that there should be a heaven for animals.*

When I commented on her profundity, Sam said that she was getting a lot of what she said from a critical essay that they had read by Jane Tompkins called "West of Everything: The Hidden Life of Westerns." The students all read different parts of the

298

essay and wrote one page on what they read. In turn, they incorporated these analyses into their conversations and their analytical writing. I imagine that some of their feminist readings of this book would not have been possible without the scaffolding of this critical essay. I wondered aloud with Sam if the same type of critical analysis might not be possible with some scaffolding from critical essays on race.

At the time Sam was not using any critical essays on race because he was not able to find them. However, should Sam locate other texts with critical racial analyses his students might be able to begin to make a racial analysis. He may also need to do additional scaffolding to break the norm of colormuteness in his classroom and to encourage his students to discuss race, in spite of their discomfort or reservations. Certainly those students who picked up on the gender analysis did so with relative ease in part because it is acceptable within mainstream or "Whitestream" (Grande, 2003) conversations to analyze gender. The critical essays also seemed to help the students situate the texts they were reading in a broader social context. Sam was able to see how the texts he was teaching were social commentary, but he needed more support helping the students to see this:

> *What I'm finding fascinating is that Jody wants to be an American male, which is a White male – And it's like Gatsby. If you don't think this is social commentary, I don't know what to tell you – he talks about kykes, Jews, Blacks. And what are the things he wears on his wrists? Those are human molars. Like, what is that book,* Class Matters*? I would love to read a snippet from that and then look at this lens. I also wanted to do a queer reading of Tom and Gatsby's relationship and their obsession over Daisy, but I didn't have enough time.*

299

Another idea Sam had for helping students see between the lines of the texts, was to have one of his writing prompts be: Who gets left out of this story?

> *How cool would an essay be… like: "Who's clearly not present in this text? Who's clearly not invited to be a part of this text?" I guess that's a new question that I can think of this year.*

Sam's enthusiasm for experimenting with different types of questions was very clear. He was courageous about trying new things with his classes, and he did not get upset when new things did not go well. Sam's enthusiasm in the two previous quotes indicates how excited he felt about experimenting with new ideas. It seems that the challenge for Sam will be to make this the first of many years in which he seeks and refines ways to achieve his goal of inclusion and belonging, rather than an aberrant year in which he experimented with difference. This requires continuously working to centralize the experiences of minoritized students, rather than treating inclusion as optional or experimental.

Finally, Sam began to see how he could use and teach students to use White privilege as a tool for the analysis of literature. He brought up this idea during a workshop at the White Privilege Conference and found an instant resource person:

> *She was in that group and she said, "Oh my god! That's what I'm doing my Ph.D. work on is the construction on Whiteness. You can see it in Faulkner, you can see it in Fitzgerald, you can see it in…" We were talking about Dorothy Allison and she was talking about gradations of Whiteness and what it all means. Well I came back to my class and I said, "You know what? I want to read* The Great Gatsby *and I want to ask questions like, "What does it mean to be White? Does this book talk about what it means to be White?" I've always talked about that Nordic stuff, I don't know if you remember the book, but like Tom Buchanan being like this Nordic savior, and they're worried about the colored empires and*

there's a Jew in there, and all these other kinds of people and like the kids
are totally getting into it.

By analyzing Whiteness in literature, Sam was able to begin to interrogate the culture of colormuteness and invite his students to consider a more complete picture of the historical moment of the books that they were reading. Just as with the essays on gender, not all students chose to take up this broader perspective as a primary lens for analysis. But it created options and opened up the possibility that for those students who wanted to, race could be a central part of their analysis, even with books like *The Great Gatsby*, in which there were very few characters of color:

> *This White privilege stuff gives you a whole other lens. Since I got back*
> *from WPC (the White Privilege Conference), I've tried pushing the*
> *privilege thing. Maddie wrote about it. Really trying to tackle it. She was*
> *trying to get the privilege thing.*

Reforming the honors and AP system

As might be obvious from the realizations captured in the above quotes ("Ah ha moments" as Sam called them), Sam had been working to diversify his curriculum for a couple of years and was just starting to feel the urgency of doing so fully, and to let the process of "diversifying" pervade his assignments and class discussions as well. He and his colleagues in the English department had also been working to make sure that the honors program was accessible to all students who qualified.

At the time of our work together, there were two different methods for getting into honors English. The first was to be chosen when moving from eighth grade to ninth grade. In this process the students write essays in response to two short stories, which are in turn evaluated by the high school teachers. Then, using the evaluations from the

301

eighth grade teacher, they make determinations of who should be admitted to honors

English and check their determinations with the eighth grade teacher to see if their final

list makes sense. Students who are new in ninth grade take the essay test and present a

portfolio of their work upon admission.

The second route to honors was for students who wanted to shift into honors

English but had not been referred upon entering ninth grade. For these students, there

was an established process in which all students were invited to take part, through

announcements at morning assemblies, reminders in classes and conversations with

individual students. Sam described the process:

> *I am proud of the way our process is. It's open, but it's still a one shot
> deal. If you wanted to go into honors… you would read The Life of Pi
> over spring break. You would then come in on Tuesday—which is a long
> lunch (an hour)—and you would discuss it with all these different kids.
> And then the next Tuesday the teacher would give you a question and you
> would write an in-class essay about it for 60 minutes. You also had to
> have a work portfolio. You also should really have recommendations from
> previous teachers, and you go sit in on an honors class. We would have
> you talk to specific kids who shifted into honors.*

The system for getting into honors seemed extraordinarily rigorous for those students

who had not been recommended upon their departure from eighth grade. Sam described

the scene in which the students came for this tryout:

> *At least fourteen ninth graders who wanted to get into honors and about
> ten of them were African American or kids of color, so the room was filled
> with about twenty some kids and it was great. They were just talking and
> talking about the book and they were all excited and everything. It was
> great—you don't usually see a regular class like that.*

From this successful process, only one student was selected to move into honors and that

student was White.

These two methods of admission to honors English had been under construction by the department for over a decade. Sam said that when he first arrived at the school, the honors admissions process was based primarily on recommendations. Sam felt that the system had been biased because teacher recommendations were only as anti-racist as the teachers themselves. He said he imagined that teachers sometimes thought, "Oh, you remind me of that really smart kid I knew in high school, and so of course you belong in honors. And oh, you remind me of that thug that beat me up in high school, so of course you don't belong in high school, right?" This statement came out of Sam's realization of his own biases, which he was beginning to recognize and analyze. He saw very clearly, in his colleagues and in himself, that racial bias could influence who was seen as a scholar and who was not.

The system had also formerly been completely impermeable so that students who were placed in honors in ninth grade stayed for the whole four years. And teachers were discouraged from giving poor grades to honors students. Students who were placed in regular English had no recourse if they wanted to try to enter honors. The department had come a long way in changing the program to be both challenging and inclusive, rigorous and permeable.

But Sam and some of his English teacher colleagues who were also involved in the race inquiry group had started to realize that there may still be problems in the program overall. They discussed the way they responded differently to failure, for example, from White students as compared to Black students.

> *It was great the way (the department head) said it. She said, "Instead of saying he doesn't get it, we just say he doesn't have it." And it's so true. We would just write a kid off like that and I never would have thought that if I wasn't involved in this process.*

In other words, Sam and his colleagues tended to assume that a White child might not understand the material and might get it with more support, whereas they might say that a Black student just might not have what it takes to understand it. This realization of their own bias helped them all to be more alert to students whom they might be misjudging. According to Sam, these two types of teacher bias: in recommending students and in teaching and preparing students, both contributed to an honors and AP admissions program that might still privilege White students and racial minorities typically stereotyped as smart (e.g. Indian American and Asian American students) and disadvantage Black students.

Disproportionality

During one day of observations, I happened to sit in on Sam's AP class and I noticed, with some surprise, that the class was entirely White. Especially given all that Sam and his colleagues were changing and analyzing, I was surprised that there were no students of color in the AP class. When I first asked him about their absence he seemed, understandably, defensive. I was putting him in the awkward position of having to question a program that he had not only worked hard to develop, but also worked hard to make racially equitable. I also doubted my own question. I knew that if the department could find qualified Black students to be a part of the AP program, they would place them there in a heartbeat. The fact that one small AP class at one small private school

304

only had White students is probably not statistically significant. And yet, given all of the ways that Sam was discovering how his curriculum, questions, class discussions and assignments privileged White students, it seemed appropriate to question whether the disproportionate representation of White students in AP English was possibly related.

After an initial defensive reaction, he said to me, "No, I want to hear what you think. Be honest with me. Let me know if I'm way off base here – I want to be honest with you, but I want to hear what you think."[15] I include Sam's response because sometimes it is only natural to react defensively when outsiders help us critically analyze our teaching. And yet, if we want help thinking about our classrooms, we need to find ways to override our initial defensive reactions so that we do not shut down the very people who we have asked for support. Sam's reaction, which was to acknowledge that he had not heard my whole point and to invite me to share, is good modeling of this kind of openness.

I told him that when I see only White kids in a higher level class within a school as racially diverse as his, I perceive it as an indication that something might be wrong in terms of how they prepare, screen and admit students to those higher level classes. I compared it to gender and said that if we had AP math or English classes that only had boys in them, we would recognize that as a problem and we would try to figure out what was going on. We would be asking the girls why they were not signing up or why they were not interested, or we would be asking why they or others might thing that they were not qualified to be in such a class. Most importantly, we would name the problem: there

---

[15] This quote is paraphrased from my observation notes as I did not record the conversation.

are no girls in AP English. Because we are comfortable talking about gender disparity, we would not be afraid to name it. The absence of students of color from AP English is just as important. But because we are afraid to name racial dynamics, it is often easier to let that go unacknowledged and unaddressed rather than to say, "I noticed there are no Black students in AP English."

By the time of my next observation in Sam's classroom a few weeks later, he had changed his action research question to interrogating how to get more kids of color into honors classes, as those classes were the pipeline to AP English. "I'm a gatekeeper," he said. And he wanted to change that.

Because Sam was focused on the question of how to get more Black students into honors, rather than whether to abolish honors all together, he eventually developed more questions about how to support Black students without marginalizing them.

> *And then I started reading that Ted Sizer book, the yellow book, the new one. And in that one there's a chapter about kids who want to get into honors and he didn't say you can't get into honors, but he said you sit down with your advisees and you say, "This is what you really need to work on and we're gonna spend this year trying to help you work on it."*

Rather than abolish honors, Sam wanted to diversify honors by giving increased support to students of color who wanted to be in honors English. But he struggled with whether a support class that primarily targeted Black students would be too controversial or bad for the students themselves.

> *See we're always leery of a room full of all Black kids, you know, especially if it is like trying to help them all write better multi-paragraph essays or whatever it is, right, because then they could be labeled or something like that instead of saying it as, which I think I heard you say,*

you don't need to look at it like that, it's like how can we enhance their opportunities I guess.

It seems there are three critical points to consider in this scenario: First, if Sam does not give students support because he's afraid of implying that they are remedial, they will not advance. According to Lisa Delpit (2006), liberal White teachers are often afraid to give students the support they need because we do not want to suggest that they are less capable, but as a result, we do not give them that support. The students, in turn, are indeed less capable. As anthropologist of education Mica Pollock writes:

> Americans are experts at thinking communally about race and achievement problems, but novices at thinking communally about race and achievement solutions – and as the battle between competing explanations of racial achievement patterns rumbles on, the connection between race and achievement remains both an omnipresent presupposition of American educational discourse and schooling talk's most anxious void (2004, p.170).

If indeed there are more students of color who need extra support in order to qualify for honors English, it would be wrong not to provide opportunities for that support simply because it would be disproportionately accessed by Black students. Ironically, while we rarely question the presence of only White students in a classroom, we take pains to avoid creating a classroom that is predominantly Black (in predominantly White schools).

However, the second critical point in this scenario is that Sam might also find that if he did create a support group for students interested in gaining the requisite skills to join honors English, he may find that non-Black students choose to access it as well. Finally, as Sam's realizations documented earlier in the chapter show, a seeming lack of

preparedness for honors level participation may be at least as much about the school, the curriculum, the assignments and the classroom dialogues, than it is about the student's actual preparedness. In such a case, support classes will only be effective as part of an overall rethinking of the program that includes changes to access, content and teaching approaches, particularly if a student is being prepared to enter honors classes in which he or she is one of only a tiny number of students of color. The entire program needs to change.

Sam started this project with questions about the English curriculum and he ended it with questions about the English curriculum. But somewhere in between, he started to recognize that from the systems perspective, the reason questions of curriculum matter is that they contribute significantly to who gets into honors classes and who excels in English. But he ultimately did not pursue the question of access or further changing the honors track with any rigor. By the end of the year, he returned to a focus on the general English curriculum as a means to better engage and include students of color so that they might be more likely to excel in English and, perhaps, to enter the AP and honors classes.

Conclusion

Sam resisted the detracking proposals of others in his department because he felt that the honors and AP English classes were the preserve of an academic integrity and rigor that would otherwise be lost. His fears were not ungrounded. In a review of literature on detracking, Beth C. Rubin and Pedro Noguera (2004) warn of the possible dilemmas created by unstrategic detracking. In detracked classrooms, teachers sometimes teach to the middle, depriving all students of academic rigor. At other times,

teachers retrack the class by assigning different work to students based on skill level.

Simply sitting together in the same classroom with "advanced" students did not

necessarily increase the educational opportunities of formerly "remedial" or "regular"

students. In fact, students often re-segregated themselves within the classroom,

sometimes even finding evidence for their racial stereotypes of one another through their

interactions. Rubin and Noguera argue that tracking must not simply redistribute

students, but resources as well:

> If detracking is to achieve its primary aims – providing the opportunity for
> all students to engage with high-level teaching and a rich curriculum, we
> argue, it must be part of comprehensive reform aimed at the more
> equitable distribution of resources and opportunities within schools (2004,
> p. 92).

Schools that have been effective at detracking, that is schools that have raised the

scores and graduation rates of all students while maintaining a challenging and rigorous

curriculum by using heterogeneous grouping, attribute their success in detracking to a

philosophy of "leveling up" rather than teaching to the middle (Burris and Garrity, 2008).

These schools provide support classes to any student whose grades fall below a certain

standard, or to students who simply opt to take those support classes. But the support

class does not replace the challenging class; it merely gets added on to a student's

schedule until it is no longer necessarily. These schools have demonstrated that

detracking is politically and logistically possible, though not easy, and that it can have

positive social and academic results.

Jeannie Oakes (2005), one of the best known researchers (and opponents) of

academic tracking suggests that tracking is hard to dismantle because it is not just a

309

system of schooling that needs to be restructured, but it is a reflection of a deep national belief in education as a sorting mechanism:

> Indeed, the social consequences of tracking—sorting students according to preconceptions based on race and social class and providing them with different and unequal access—are part of the core logic of schooling. It is that logic, far more than specific organizational structures or pedagogical practices that leads Americans to cling to this type of sorting (p. 706).

Sam's changes to the curriculum likely made life in English classes much more accessible and engaging to students of color. But that is a notably different outcome than one that finds a proportionate number of students of color excelling in honors and AP level English classes. Were we to engage in this project again, I have learned that there is a chasm of difference between questions like, "How can I change the curriculum to provide more windows and mirrors for students of color?" and "What must I do to achieve a proportionate representation of and success for students of color in honors and AP English?" or "How can we provide a challenging, high level English curriculum to all students without tracking by skill level?"

All three questions are important and all three are generative questions for an individual teacher to ask. But if an important goal is the proportionate representation of students of color in advanced classes, that needs to be the explicit question asked. Moreover, if the ultimate goal is how to achieve parity of achievement among students of different races, then that needs to be the question asked. And though changing curriculum is certainly one answer, other possible answers include raising expectations, ensuring that students of color are not isolated as the only student of color in the honors track, providing honors level curriculum and instruction to all students in untracked

310

classes, ensuring that all students have access to the resources they need to complete

projects, pushing students to have honest and open conversations about race when it is

relevant to the class discussions and—in the absence of detracking—ensuring that there is

permeability and transference between the honors and regular classes, so that placement

in one track does not become an unalterable academic destiny.

Chapter 12: GETTING STUCK AND MOVING FORWARD

*One night, at the end of the cultural proficiency session in the St. Clair
District central offices, I sat and talked with a Black parent who was
participating in the sessions. Nolena had three sons in one of the
elementary schools in the district and she was concerned that the teachers
were not learning fast enough to make school a better place for her
children. She showed me two worksheets that had been handed out in her
son's second grade classroom on World Heritage Day. She said she was
furious when she got them, particularly because of the questions: "When
and why did your ancestors come to this country?"*

*Nolena asked me, "What are you doing your research on again?" I told
her, "It's on the questions teachers ask when they are trying to apply what
they learn in this group to the classroom."*

*She then asked, "Do they ask questions?" It was still early in the year
and many of the teachers had not yet begun asking questions beyond the
instructional teaching questions. I told Nolena, "It's funny ... I generally
find some of the teachers of color asking really hard questions about
themselves and their actions and their students. But I find the White
teachers really don't ask that many questions…" Nolena said, "Yeah, I
don't think they ask questions. What I want to know is what stops them?
What are the barriers?"*

I didn't mention that I want to know that too.

- Memo written December 22, 2009

The following chapter focuses on where teachers got stuck—and what helped

them move forward—as they tried to translate their race learning into classroom practice.

They came to their inquiry groups, talked about race, tried to formulate questions about

their practice and returned to their classrooms, sometimes with new ideas and a changed

stance, often falling into the same patterns as before. Where did they get stuck? And

when they did move forward, what helped them move forward?

1. Sticking places

The sticking places for teachers were not the same as their questions. Although these two categories did overlap, particularly around logistical concerns such as resources, the sticking places for teachers were the dead ends where teachers did not know where else to go, or they thought they'd answered their question, such that they stopped moving through the cycle of inquiry. Their questions, on the other hand, were often open doors, leading teachers down new paths and guiding them towards their next steps – and more questions. The sticking places fit into three main categories: Lack of Support, Logistics and False Positives. Lack of support refers to colleagues (both White and colleagues of color) or administrators. Logistics include barriers that teachers perceived such as time, resources and knowledge. The False Positives were the answers that teachers had that did not lead them anywhere, but simply explained away a question so that it no longer concerned them. False Positives came in the form of myths and Perfectly Logical Explanations (PLEs).

Support

Support was one of the primary factors cited as a barrier to race work. Most of the teachers said that they had very few people they felt like they could talk to about race questions, leaving them isolated with their questions. This seemed to be particularly salient for both Scott and Ann, whose jobs required them to work extensively with other teachers:

> *So the struggle is, even if you know what you're doing, how do you get the other people on board? How do you get it to be right? -Ann*

*I think it has to be mandatory because just seeing on the volunteer basis
that I have, there are… a lot of Whites, who just don't see a need for it,
aren't interested in it and of course because of their privilege don't have
to be interested in it… -Scott*

Cara felt so connected to her vice principal, a Black woman who was not afraid to talk

about race, that she chose to stay at the school because of her. The resignation of her vice

principal, weeks after Cara signed her contract, meant that the school might not have the

leadership required to make some of the changes that Cara thought were necessary.

*She's the only person in a leadership position who is Black and she is
awesome in a million ways. I don't always appreciate her leadership style,
but I know that she's always doing it for the right reasons and she's taught
me a lot. She resigned. I mean it's effective at the end of the year, but I feel
a little bit like the rug got pulled out from under me. I was really excited to
work there next year. I was really excited to stay and keep like helping
build this school and build on our successes and work with her
specifically.*

Helene struggled with the school-wide expectation that she collaborate with the

other grade level teacher. Because the two were not necessarily on the same page

regarding race, Helene expressed that she could not necessarily make the changes she

wanted to make, saying, "And the other thing at FIS: like you're really expected to work

together. And have the same curriculum." Helene had had the experience in college of

learning deeply about race issues and being profoundly challenged. As a teacher, she

tried to focus on learning about race through her co-counseling and her inquiry group, but

she still wanted more:

*So then I've been like, you know, thinking about it in counseling sessions,
and then at workshops. But, not enough, still not enough…. So that's the
one place that I'm stuck with thinking about race. I mean, in terms of
school….Cause I felt like that was such a big thing for me in college, and
then after college it just kind of disappeared.*

314

At the beginning of the inquiry group process, Helene was wary that her inquiry group would not be able to challenge her with regard to race as well as her peers and professors in college had. And yet, over the course of two years, her group became quite adept at challenging and supporting one another. It seemed that Helene went into the group wanting somebody to teach her and she struggled with the design that required them to be their own teachers, and also teachers for one another. Helene was able to move past this sticking place through developing relationships and demonstrating her openness to being challenged. One lesson from this experience might be that developing supportive and challenging colleagues required building relationships and practicing the uncommon conversations required for challenging each other.

Administration was frequently cited as a sticking place for teachers. Todd, for example, felt constantly stuck around the way that his administration paid no regard to his personal qualifications as an Africana Studies major when assigning his teaching duties as a science teacher:

> *Well I had originally hoped that I would be teaching history because I thought it would fit in a lot better. I thought I would be able to tie it in more, but um it's been kinda hard. Like I really struggle with like having a lot of background knowledge of like the Civil Rights Movement, being passionate about it.*

Cara's administration, which was governed by a charter school board, repeatedly chose White principals who did not seem to understand the Afro-centric traditions on which the school was founded:

315

> *We don't seem to care that we're a school that serves a population that is mostly African American. It's not represented in our staff and leadership and I really feel unhappy about it.*

Logistics

Logistics, notably time and resources, were a commonly cited barrier to forward progress on race work. For the most part teachers had sufficient resources to teach, but they did not have sufficient resources on race to know how to make changes, or to implement new curricular materials.

Time

Sam, who had attended both the People of Color Conference and the White Privilege Conference, and had missed multiple other school days due to a death in his family and the snow days that affected everyone, was turned down for several requests for funding and time to attend more conferences. Although he understood that he could not take more time away from his teaching, he was very eager to continue learning, and disappointed that the resources were not available to support him to do so. He similarly desired more resources for accompanying literary critique in his classroom:

> *Once again it's the kind of thing where we need more snippets of things, like what is White privilege, what is intra-racism, what is, you know what I mean?*

Sometimes, time was a factor in needing to rebuild a pattern or a structure so that the whole classroom could run differently. Cara in particular felt she needed time to incorporate more differentiation for one of her advanced students or even to build more down time for emotional processing with students into her tight schedule. Notably, Cara

tended to put in 10 to 12 hour days of highly structured, efficient work time. Yet she still

tended to blame her time management rather than her lack of time.

> *At the conference I went to in Kansas City I went to a talk about what to do for gifted kids. Like what can you do for them that won't like ruin your life with extra planning and I had all these ideas and I just…my time management is in the dumps I guess.*

When teachers cited a lack of time, it was often an attempt to explain why they

had not covered certain "racialized" material. Scott, for example, had planned to use

picture books with lots of different age levels to talk about race and the Civil Rights

Movement during Black History month in February, but because of several weeks worth

of snow days, he was never able to complete that unit. Cara, similarly, was disappointed

that she never taught her students about Reconstruction because of snow days.

The false positives: myths and perfectly logical explanations

The false positives are the answers that teachers came to that explained away the

question that they were asking, or that I was asking, in a way that left the status quo

alone, and did not persist in challenging racial inequality. These, like those things that

teachers didn't know they didn't know, are places where they got stuck, but did not

realize it because they had answers that satisfactorily answered their questions.

When I first asked Sam why his AP class was all White, he responded by naming

the four or five kids of color who had been in AP the year before and he still remembered

their scores on the test (3 of them scored 2s, a failing grade, on the test). After telling me

about students of color from previous years, Sam explained the disproportionality of

students of color in the honors and AP classes by citing some of the myths about Black

students that I had heard from other teachers at the school. He cited a conversation with a former administrator, who had given him the idea that Black students were not excelling because many of them were admitted to the school for their athletic prowess, in spite of lower academic scores, in order to raise the school's diversity numbers.

As an outside observer, I had no idea to what extent these things were true, but they sounded to me like the kinds of myths that I had heard in many other schools: that the Black students actually are less qualified than other students and that the school is lowering its standards to accommodate those less qualified Black students. Though Sam did not necessarily regard these as myths, I label them as such because there was no way for either him or me to determine their truthfulness. And in the tradition of myth construction, they seemed to have been created to provide answers to a phenomenon that was not well understood. The myth suggests that the students' inability to qualify for honors classes is a matter of their innate talent (or lack thereof), and not related to the experience of being at a historically and predominantly White school with a Eurocentric curriculum. This myth is grounded within a larger narrative that persists in our society about the innate athletic talents of Blacks, as well as the innate intellectual inferiority of Blacks. And because we have many different myths about Black inferiority, one of which is the nationwide myth that schools (particularly private schools) have different admissions standards for Black students, we easily explain away that disparity without interrogating it.

Sam's answers to my question about disproportionality were intended to demonstrate that there was no bias in the pipeline to AP literature. But his explanation

showed that students of color were still notable, still memorable and still not excelling in AP classes.

In addition to myths, teachers sometimes used Perfectly Logical Explanations (PLEs) to explain why things were the way they were. In Cara's classroom, for example, all of the table captains were girls. When I asked her why, she said that was because Chris chose the table captains. This is a perfectly logical explanation. However, given that she wanted to develop the leadership capacities of her male students, it is not an adequate response to the question of why all of the leadership positions in her classroom were filled by girls.

Similarly, in a discussion with some of Ann's students, a Black girl student named Denise complained that they had to have race discussions in their advisory groups and she was the only Black student in her advisory group. Ann quickly explained that this was accidental – that advisory groups meet by homeroom and that homerooms are arranged in alphabetical order. It was completely coincidental that Denise was the only Black student in her homeroom. This again, is a perfectly logical explanation for why Black students (no doubt there was more than one Black student who was isolated, given that the high school was only 9% Black) were isolated within the school wide conversations about race. But this is not a satisfactory answer and it is not helpful to close the door on this question. If the school wants to have successful race conversations in advisory groups, they must intentionally structure the groups in which those conversations happen so that Black students are not isolated in this way. The Perfectly Logical Explanation is only logical in a society and within a school building that are

319

structured without a consciousness of the stinging effects of racism and isolation on students of color, or the entitlement granted to White students by their constant access to the racial mainstream.

2. Moving forward

As I coded the interviews and observations with teachers, I reserved one code for "moving forward," which included moments in which teachers clearly learned something new, answered their questions, moved forward in their thinking or in their classrooms with more confidence, or generally seemed to have momentum and excitement around thinking about race.   After I gathered all of these coded sections, I sorted them into nine general categories:

- **Colleagues of color**
- **Taking feedback and learning from mistakes**
- **Building relationships**
- **Books, Conferences and Workshops**
- **Knowing oneself**
- **Support outside of the inquiry group**
- **Building relationships with students and families**
- **Keeping things in perspective**
- **Inquiry group work**

These categories are striking because over half of them involve people of color; support from people of color accounted for more instances of teachers moving forward than anything else. Almost all of the categories (six of the nine) involve relationship building, and those that do not (knowing oneself, keeping things in perspective and books, conferences and workshops) are about knowing oneself and managing one's anxiety and

perspective in order to persist in learning and teaching, in spite of the personal and emotional challenges of race work.

The following section will simply explore each of these categories individually:

Colleagues of color

The single most helpful thing to all of the White teachers in this study was to have colleagues of color who think critically about race. Colleagues of color motivated, inspired, listened to, challenged, supported and educated the White teachers in this study. Their validation was often a critical component in the ongoing racial identity development of the White teachers participating in this study. Colleagues of color figured into the success and forward movement of these teachers in various other profound ways: inviting teachers to join inquiry groups, talking to students about racialized issues when the teacher felt they could not do it, correcting teachers, sharing resources and modeling effective teaching. One of the primary reasons that the inquiry groups were successful was that they helped begin conversations about race among White teachers and teachers of color both in and outside of the group meetings in a way that felt non-threatening to Whites.

Both Cara and Laurie talked about times when colleagues of color helped support conversations that they felt inadequate addressing. In Laurie's classroom, students were teasing a child of color for being "dirty." A colleague of color who worked with her class talked with the students and showed them her arm. She said, "Look at me. I'm brown. Do you think I'm dirty?"

Cara was also able to rely on a colleague of color for help in part because she had already been talking to her colleague outside of class about her struggles with discussing the "n-word" in class:

> *We've been able to talk with other teachers who are Black, like I've been able to talk to them about teaching this a little bit and like they've helped with some conversations. Like the other day I left early and the teacher who covered me had a conversation with my kids about the "N word" and he's Black. I was glad because they're going to come across it and I don't want to be the one to talk about it, if possible, directly like that.*

Cara also mentioned mimicking her assistant principal, who was Black:

> *Afia is really good at framing things in a positive, non-punitive way. I hear her sometimes coming out of me. I'm kind of taking mental notes when she corrects my kids in a way that's effective, especially when I just tried a moment before unsuccessfully.*

The teachers in this study had personal relationships with their colleagues of color, who challenged and supported them in their learning. On an individual level, such collaborations are collegial, personal and sometimes mutually beneficial. On a systemic level, however, the broad reliance of White teachers and administrators on the small numbers of people of color in their institutions to teach, support and challenge, is highly problematic. People color rarely get paid for the time consuming work of mentoring and challenging their White colleagues. It is work that often requires both emotional investment and personal risk, all of which is usually unrecognized and uncompensated. This places an additional burden on people of color, on top of the already constant work of navigating a predominantly White work place themselves.

Taking feedback and learning from mistakes

Ann was able to move forward when a Black colleague told her that she was not

expecting enough from her students. Notably, there were two things that made this

possible: 1) she had a relationship with this colleague to begin with and 2) she was able

to non-defensively incorporate feedback into her teaching:

> *During PSSAs we were talking and I'm like, "But Derrick, the kid can do
> the work if I can just have him for another hour." And he said, "You know
> Ann—Beverly Tatum I guess it was—she wrote about how we love our
> African American kids to death and how we make their lives so easy for
> them that they can't compete." And I was like, "Well, okay." And he was
> like, "Quit cutting them breaks. You're not doing them any favors. You're
> enabling them. Knock it off." And then he told the kid, "Knock that shit
> off." It comes different from him, you know. I don't know if it's a girl
> thing, a White thing, a teacher thing. I don't know what it is…like when
> he says, "You're already at a disadvantage, you're a Black man in
> America…"*

Ann also moved forward significantly from past mistakes. Again, the mistakes would not

have been instructive if she was unable to learn from them. She shared this story:

> *Years ago Chris's brother was a student of mine. This boy was a handful.
> He was good looking, knew it. Schmoozer. Could have sold ice to
> Eskimos. And he would just do whatever he had to do to get my attention.
> So one day he took the hole-puncher and he took the things from the inside
> and I had carpet in my room and he was doing this, like snow. I was so
> mad. I called the custodian and asked him to bring me a vacuum cleaner.
> And so I said to him, "You are staying here and you are vacuuming up my
> room because this is unacceptable. You're gonna make my janitor come in
> at the end of the day and clean this up because you wanted to be defiant."
> Ali, I got in so much trouble I thought I was going to lose my job because
> what they said was, "This kid of color and the White children in your
> school they see him as janitorial; this affected his self-esteem." I treated
> him like I would treat any other child. You can't come in here and make a
> shit mess and walk out. That's just wrong. They took him out of my class. I
> was "culturally insensitive" as I was told…. It blew me away when it
> happened because not in a million years had I considered that. So nobody
> ever really talked to me about it…Yes, that was a learning moment for me.*

Again, this was only a learning moment for Ann because she was non-defensive enough to learn from it. She did not resist the lesson or dispute the impact, even though it was not her intention to demean the student by making him clean up his own mess.

Building relationships

Ann already had friends of color before starting her work in the cultural proficiency group. She reports sitting and watching other White parents awkwardly ask her friend if she knows other Blacks in the community, on the assumption that all Black people know each other. Ann said:

> *I sat there the other day and I'm like here's my friend sitting in front of me and I'm like, "That's wrong."*
>
> *Ali: Yeah. Um how do you think you came to know that or came to be able to see things like that?*
>
> *Ann: I look at her face and she just…it's right there.*

Similarly, Ann had a friend who was Filipina-American, who told her about racial microaggressions that she had experienced:

> *I have a friend who works at Conestoga and she's an English teacher and she, her parents were Filipino and people would say to her, "What kind of books did you read when you were a girl?" and she would say, "The Babysitters Club, same as everybody else" [laughs]. But she would say the hardest part for her culturally was that people assumed her whole life that she was like Japanese or Chinese and then she would have to explain, "Well no, I'm American. My parents are from the Philippines."*

Just through having these friendships, Ann began to observe common racial microaggressions, which she in turn knew to avoid in her classroom.

Helene said that her work in the inquiry group made her realize that one of the things she wanted to work on was: "*Mostly relationships and friendships with people of color. I don't have any close friends of color.*" She decided to try to develop her relationship with those acquaintances of color she did have. She reached out to an interracial couple she was already friends with and they invited her to join a wine tasting group they were starting. She said that she knew they were open to talking about race and she was looking forward to having more conversations with them.

Books, conferences and workshops

Most of the teachers cited conferences, workshops and books as part of what helped them move forward. As we saw throughout this dissertation, "moving forward" often only meant moving forward into yet another question, but that still meant moving forward. Most of the teachers had lists of books they wanted to read and conferences they were hoping to attend.

> *Helene: I've just been like thinking that I want to have more ideas and some of those have come up naturally, but what I'm thinking about in terms of the summer is spending a lot of time reading, or not a lot of time, but any time would be good because the more I read…I can read like three paragraphs or something you've given me and then I'm gonna start thinking from that*

Scott found Tim Wise to be particularly helpful to his learning about race because, as he said, it was another "White guy doing this stuff:"

> *Like because Black people can see it, they are already aware. They know, I don't. So to hear from another guy who also had that same, who had to learn it, and of course Tim learned it way before I ever did, but yeah you know what I mean.*

Knowing oneself

Both Helene and Cara seemed to be aware of some of their personal triggers that interfered with the way that they interpreted events in their classrooms. When Helene was struggling with the notion of whether she could permit students to talk while doing work, she shared that somebody she was close to as a child had anger management problems and that as a result, she got very flustered by loud noises. Similarly, as Cara explored her anger and sadness about the unavailability of some of her students' dads, she acknowledged that she might be projecting from some issues in her own childhood. This self-awareness seemed incredibly valuable to their ability to recognize that the judgments they were making were not based on objective truths, but were heavily influenced by their own experiences of the world.

Support from outside of the inquiry group

Sam found incredible support among his colleagues in his department, a couple of whom were also participating in the inquiry groups. He and his colleagues collectively began to redesign the curriculum and the requirements for Honors and AP classes, as well as observe one another's teaching:

> *I am part of the history department and I am sometimes really surprised at how close or unclose those people are, but our (English) department is constantly talking about this stuff. We're always talking.*

Sam was also affirmed by his principal when he started a summer reading group on race:

> *Yeah that's what I will work on this summer and I told you we're gonna read the Kunjufu this summer. (The principal) came to me and told me he was proud. He's happy I'm doing that.*

Building relationships with students and families

Building relationships with students one on one helped teachers move forward significantly. In the following example from Todd, he really had no idea what some of his students were capable of before getting to know them personally:

> *Like T.J. for example, it was the beginning of year he was scoring like 30-40% on everything and for the first 6 weeks I was just like "well he really wasn't putting that much effort in." then I started tutoring him after school and like he just really, like you said today, he just like really…he has a really hard time, like the other kids pick on him a lot and so he's become really aggressive towards them….and then I found out after school like one on one he was really great and he really like the material and like I had not been setting high expectations for him at all the first 4 weeks.*

Cara found that she made significant progress when she took her students on an Outward Bound field trip for two days and she was able to spend time with them as teammates, facilitated by someone else:

> *Both times we've gone on Outward Bound trips, I think, "I'm in love with these kids." We're not the primary teacher, (we have) shared cabins, (we) participate in activities with kids. I had a mixed up group, so I had girls I don't usually teach. We had a talent show; we did skits. We went hiking and canoeing. Then, when we got back yesterday, we went across the street to the park to have a debriefing session and that was really nice too.*

Keeping things in perspective

It was helpful to teachers to just keep things in perspective. For Todd, keeping things in perspective meant seeing how much his students were learning, in spite of all that he still wanted to learn:

> *I mean if test scores mean anything like my kids have all moved up. I mean I feel like to certain degree each one of them did learn something this year….Even stuff today with like Amir for example, at one point today he was saying stuff to the class like, "Stop swearing" and he would never*

have done that like a few months ago even if someone was in the room.
Like he would want to show off because he thought that was funny...I think
their science fair projects were pretty good for the first time ever having a
science fair and that was really good.

For Helene, keeping things in perspective meant realizing that talking about race could be

just be an organic part of her conversations with students:

> *For the most part I think rather than trying to create a curriculum around*
> *it, it's like giving maybe more a chance for kids to share their own*
> *experiences and just having as the conversations about race come up,*
> *either bringing them up or just going with it when the kids bring*
> *something up.*

Inquiry group work

Finally, for all but one of the teachers, their inquiry groups/cultural proficiency

groups were incredibly rare and valuable spaces for them to learn more about race, to

practice talking about race with other adults, to build relationships with teachers from

other parts of their schools and of other racial backgrounds, to regularly remind

themselves to be thinking about racial issues, and to think critically about their teaching.

One of the most beneficial aspects of the inquiry group work seemed to be the way that it

helped teachers build relationships and support networks – both across race and within

race. Inquiry groups also gave teachers a reason to remember to do the work. Because

race work is not mainstream, and it is actually easier not to do it than to do it, it seems to

be easy to forget about. Inquiry groups that met regularly helped White teachers stay

plugged in and focused for the long term.

Cara named some of the lessons she took away from her inquiry group on race:

> *I think I have had some things I can take away ...viewing aggressive or*
> *you know negative behaviors in general as signs of like some kind of*

depression, and I know that's not always the case but, looking at it through that lens. Looking at some misbehaviors that seem to be patterns across boys that I teach or girls that I teach.... Seeing certain behaviors not as disrespect... and noticing if that's just a way they express themselves and that may just be because a cultural difference. That's helped me a lot with certain children that I teach this year. Like I watch other people react to it differently than I, I don't react to it at all. I mean like some of the behaviors that used to start something. Like I would start in on it and I don't do that anymore.

Similarly, Ann was able to respond to her students differently because of her work in the

inquiry group:

Ali: Was there anything in that group that you feel like you learned that you're using this year or that just helps you understand things this year?

Ann: I'll tell you what I think it made me do. So I am a crazy woman when it comes to noises...drumming, strumming, tapping...

Ali: It drives you crazy.

Ann: It makes me nuts, but I do think that for some of my students it's cultural, just that that's a hobby or their way of being who they are and with certain musical choices running through their brains that's how they revisit that, you know, that's how they participate in that. So I think I've become more patient and understanding that that's just, this is not even cultural, it's just who this child is.

Ann also felt like her work in the cultural proficiency group enabled her to respond in the

moment when her Black students were laughing at a racist picture on the internet:

I felt like I had grown to the point to be comfortable enough to sit down and go through it with them and tell them why it is wrong.

Teachers expressed that they felt more confidence trying things in their

classroom. Both Scott and Todd felt that they would be better able to bring up different

approaches to racialized topics after working in their inquiry groups.

329

Scott also felt he was better able to relate to parents after working in the inquiry group. He recognized that he had a lot of work to do with a White parent who was fighting to get her Black child into gifted education:

> *You know she's very, you know, if there's any mistakes she's gonna jump all over it I think and she's looking, but I feel much more comfortable working with her and I feel confident that I might be able to establish a rapport with her so she doesn't feel maybe so isolated from the school …*

Todd started to make his classroom more student-centered as a result of his work in the inquiry group, "I feel like I was a lot more teacher-centered before the group." Practicing discussions about race in the inquiry group gave Cara courage and material to talk about with her assistant principal about:

> *Cara: Last week I went to …a conference and my assistant principal, who is the only African American … who is not a support staff person, she and I were roommates because that's how our school does [laughs]. And we had a lot of time to talk and I brought some of the stuff that we've been talking about in our group with her and also that you know that our school's faculty is way too White. I mean that was like a point I made of things to talk with Afia about.*
>
> *Ali: Nice. When you had her trapped in a bedroom with you? [laughs]*
>
> *Cara: Yes [laughs] it was like my dream come true. And um just how [pauses], I told her about this group and I told her how frustrating it is to never feel like I will get really as connected as I would like with my students and also feeling like I'm not able to transfer my connection that I do make with them to their parents. And how in my own social life (I didn't get into this with her I don't think) but I don't have a lot of Black female friends especially. Most of the adults I'm dealing with are women, not men…I don't know how that's relevant, but it felt good that I could talk to Afia about it and that she like shared some things that she'd noticed about how I teach my kids and talk to my kids that felt affirming.*

Conclusion

Ultimately, it seems that the inquiry group model has some incredibly strong points and at least one profound weakness. The weakness is that we don't know what we don't know and therefore we cannot ask questions about it. I found that teachers really were not able to pursue questions that came from me – the questions had to come from themselves in order for there to be any follow up. And yet, teachers only began to ask the deeper, relational questions about race when they had significant input from speakers, books and professional developments. Without those inputs, important questions were asked about curriculum and instruction, but not about the racial dynamics that had a significant impact on equity and belonging in the classroom.

The incredible strength of the inquiry group model was that it was a forum for building relationships. It functioned as a support group for teachers and a forum in which they could build relationships with teachers of different racial backgrounds (as well as with other White teachers at different places in their own racial identity development). It was also a space in which teachers practiced breaking norms of colormuteness, thus establishing new patterns of talk and interaction both inside and outside the groups. It seems that this model could be powerful and transformative in the long term if it continued, so that teachers could build deeper relationships and ask harder questions about their practice. Additional structure may be necessary to avoid the tendency for the groups to rely on teachers of color to do the difficult work of supporting and challenging White teachers in their learning.

Section III. Teacher racial identity matters

Chapter 13: WHITE PEOPLE, WHITE CULTURE, WHITE INDIVIDUALS

Are White people a group?

Studying White people is complicated because there are a great many White people who do not identify as White. People do not have to identify as White in order to be identified as such and/or given the privileges of Whiteness. As stated above, until 1952, for example, non-White people (with the exception of African Americans, who were granted an inferior form of naturalization) were not permitted to naturalize as U.S. citizens because of their race (Haney López, 1996). Many people who were constructed as "non-White" fought in court to challenge the ways in which their racial identities had been legally constructed, in an attempt to be classified as White and thereby qualify for naturalization. Yet millions of people who were classified as White immigrated to the U.S. prior to 1952 without ever recognizing that it was their racial classification as "White" that made their entry and naturalization possible. "Whiteness" could not have been more obvious to those individuals classified as "non-White," whereas for many constructed as "White" it was invisible (Haney López, 2006). White people throughout history and still today in the U.S. often respond to questions about their race by answering that they are just "normal" (Sue, 2007; Tatum, 1999; Perry, 2002; Frankenberg, 1993). To be "raced"[16] in America is to be a person of color. In the 1700s, that included any person who was not Anglo Saxon Protestant. Even the phenotypically "Whitest" European immigrants, such as Norwegians, were considered people of color or "raced." Over time, the category "White" expanded to include Italians, Irish,

---

[16] I define the term "raced" to mean given a race, to be seen as having a race or to be a member of a group of people who all have race. I use the term "racialized" as the process of social construction of a racial category, racial meaning or membership in a racial group.

Scandinavians, Eastern Europeans, Syrians and Jews (Haney-Lopez, 2006). Immigrants did many things in order to become "White:" they learned English, converted to Christianity (or secularized), shed customs and traditions that marked them as "other" and assimilated into "American" culture, which was defined in large part by Anglo Saxon Protestant culture. The category of Whiteness today tends to exclude people who seem "other" even if they are phenotypically White, including Muslims who dress religiously or White skinned Latinos who speak Spanish as their first language. Though an individual may be phenotypically White, other types of difference may "race" them in a way that renders them non-White. In the minds of many White Americans, to be White means to stand outside the category of "raced" peoples.

Part of the work of diversity education in schools is helping White people to recognize that to be White is to have a race; to be White is to be just as implicated in the broader racial stratification system as one would be if one were raced as Black. Because White people tend not to recognize that they have a race, most White people tend not to identify as members of a White group. Sociologist Amanda Lewis suggests that Whites are often not seen as a racial group because racial groups have been conflated with "social problems" (Lewis, 2004). Because Whites are not seen as a social problem in mainstream society, they are not seen as a racial group. In this research, I aim to join other Whiteness scholars in problematizing Whiteness in order to show that White people are just as much a part of the racial hierarchy in the U.S. as any other racial group. This means that Whites are just as much a part of any racialized social problem, even though they are often unnamed or unrecognized as a racial group in mainstream society. The

334

advantage of this reframing is that if White people are part of racialized social problems,

then Whites might have a role in working to solve racialized social problems as well.

The limited options of White identity

In mainstream society, it has historically been true that the only White people who

acknowledge or identify with their Whiteness are White supremacists (Tatum, 1999). For

White people who did not consciously identify with the ideology of White supremacy,

there have traditionally been only two other ways to be White: one could either be

ignorant of one's Whiteness or one could feel guilt and shame about it (Tatum, 1999).

Given these three options: supremacist, ignorant or guilty, any healthy conscious

identification with one's White identity seemed impossible. As a result, very few White

people actually identify with their race as White people. Does that mean we cannot study

White people as a group? In other words, if a majority of White people do not see

themselves as part of a White group, is it legitimate to use it as a term for research?

Whites as a series

For analytic purposes, it can be useful to see Whites as a "series" or a "passive

collective" (Lewis, 2003, p. 163); they are related by a common condition acknowledged

by society, regardless of whether they claim it. Sociologist Amanda Lewis uses the term

"series" rather than "group" to describe Whites (Lewis, 2004). To distinguish between

the two terms, she offers the example of riders at a bus stop. All of the riders that meet at

a bus stop at the same time every day at 6:00 a.m. are not necessarily a group. They do

not know each other or even choose to affiliate, they simply happen to be in the same

place at the same time; they are a series. However, if those riders chose to have a

335

breakfast collaborative at 6:00 a.m., if they organized themselves into a collective that had objectives and cooperated towards those objectives, then they would be a group. White people are a series because they find themselves standing in a similar social position as other Whites, regardless of whether they consciously positioned themselves that way.

Whites doing Whiteness

Whiteness is not simply a phenotypical description. White people are "racialized," or socially constructed as White. But beyond that, Whiteness does not simply exist as a place for Whites to find themselves. They are constantly being racialized in interactions, in their own actions and by larger racial projects (Winant, 2001). Race is something that we do and that is done to us – it is not just the way we are (Lewis, 2004; Fine, 1997).

Many White people do not believe that they have a role in the construction of their own Whiteness and the meaning that it holds. Socialized into Whiteness, Whites tend to believe that their rational choices, such as choosing to live in predominantly White areas or only dating and marrying other people racialized as White, are just "natural" (Bonilla Silva, 2006, p. 276). They fail to see how they make these choices within a system that has artificially limited the range of their racial reality. And they make these choices to the exclusion of other possible choices, which might interrupt and change the meaning of their Whiteness. "All these 'choices' are the 'natural' consequences of a White socialization process" (p. 276), according to sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006). Most White people assume that the all-White groups in which they are members are completely coincidental. Lewis (2004) argues the contrary:

336

"their racial composition is not an accident but a result of Whites' status as members of a passive social collectivity whose lives are at least in part shaped by the racialized social system in which they live and operate" (p. 163). Thus many White people understand their lives as unracialized and "natural," when in fact their lifestyles and choices have all been deeply influenced by the fact that they are White.

Karen Brodkin (2001) suggests that even when White people do not consciously identify with their Whiteness, they enact their Whiteness within a contrasting social relationship to people of color through overt racism as well as more subtle self-satisfaction. Her conceptualization of the "overt racist" differentiation describes the behavior of the conscious White supremacist orientation to White racial identity discussed earlier. The more "subtle self-satisfied" differentiation is probably characteristic of both ignorant and guilty Whites. This orientation describes White people who identify as White by viewing themselves in a positive light in comparison with people of color and who see achievement and power as personal rather than institutional or attributable to their Whiteness (Brodkin, 2001).

Is Whiteness invisible?

A premise of Whiteness research from the early 1990s (most noticeable, perhaps, in anthropologist Ruth Frankenberg's early work) is the suggestion that Whiteness has for a long time been invisible, or that it has not been visible to Whites. However, those same scholars now assert that it is no longer the case that White people are unfamiliar with the term "White:" "Whiteness – visible Whiteness, resurgent Whiteness, Whiteness as color, Whiteness as *difference* – this is what's new, and newly problematic, in contemporary

U.S. politics" (Winant, 1997, p. 49). Similarly, Frankenberg (2001) writes that

Whiteness is no longer invisible, in fact people know they are White and that they live in

a racialized world, but its increasing visibility (due in part to how academics have

"marked it" and named it) does not necessarily lead to anti-racism. White people seem to

see themselves as racially White more often, but do not acknowledge the ways that their

Whiteness conveys privilege or evokes oppression, a phenomenon Frankenberg calls

"power evasive race cognizance" (2001, p. 91).

Learning to be White

Early scholars of Whiteness such as Abolitionists Noel Ignatiev and David

Roediger promoted the idea that White people should abolish their Whiteness. They

believed that White people have two choices: they can either fight their Whiteness, or

live as oppressors (Ignatiev, 1997 and Roediger, 1998). These bold statements led to a

foundational conflict within Whiteness studies over whether one can stop being White, or

abolish one's Whiteness. Howard Winant (2001) argues the impossibility of abolishing

Whiteness:

> Like any other complex of beliefs and practices, "Whiteness" is embedded
> in a highly articulated social structure and system of significations… The
> abolition of Whiteness is unthinkable without the eradication of the
> concept of race itself, an outcome as undesirable as it is impossible (2001,
> p. 107).

If we cannot abolish Whiteness and its attendant privileges, what can be done

about it? Henry Giroux (2007) suggests that we create possibilities for White people to

claim their Whiteness in an anti-oppressive way. How can you teach students about

Whiteness productively, he asks, if you can only teach it in terms of "domination and

338

racism"? He writes: "Much of the current literature fails to capture the complexity that marks 'Whiteness' as a form of identity and cultural practice… Being White in this context appears to make one a racist" (Giroux, p. 383). Similarly, psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum suggests that in order for White people to be able to take part in anti racism, they have to be able to identify as White in a way that is not psychologically hurtful, requiring a conception beyond the three traditional categories: White supremacist, ignorant White and guilty White. She suggests a fourth way to be White: the option of the anti-racist White (Tatum, 1999).

With regard to privilege, critical theorist Gayatri Spivak (1996) suggests that people of privilege work to "unlearn our privilege as our loss" (Danius, Jonsson and Spivak, 1993). Landry and MacLean (1996) call this a "double recognition," that privilege not only limits what one *does* know about others but also what one *can* know, because one's positioning in society makes certain kinds of knowledge unavailable to them. Landry and MacLean describe the work of unlearning our privilege as our loss, as "working critically back through one's history, prejudices, and learned, but not seemingly instinctual, responses. If we can learn racism, we can unlearn it" (1996, p. 4).

Finally, race is something that shapes people's lives in both positive and negative ways (Winant, 2001). It is not necessarily something people want to abolish:

> (R)ace is not simply the product of racism, of centuries of exploitation, exclusion and domination, of the denial of freedom and even identity. No, it is also the product of centuries of *resistance* to racism, of determined refusal to accept racial oppression, and of wildly imaginative efforts to *create* identity… So there is much to honor, much to preserve, in the concept of race. Beyond that, to deny the significance of race in the modern world must be seen as willful blindness: it would be as absurd as repudiating, say, the importance of religion (2001, p. 111 in footnote 25).

339

White teachers must understand race, not only to prevent racial inequalities and account for cultural differences in the classroom but also so that they can fully acknowledge and celebrate their students' identities.

White culture

Is there such a thing as White culture? Much like the question of visibility or invisibility, the answer to whether there White culture exists may depend on who is asked. I asked my friend Mathu, who is middle-class, Indian American, and has a very similar educational background to me. We have so many similar ways of speaking and acting that come from graduate school and from middle class public schooling that I thought she would suggest our cultural similarities were more about class and education than race. She replied, "Are you kidding me? Culturally White is summer camp. It's turkey on Thanksgiving. It's eating with a knife and fork. It's thinking your co-worker's little brown Indian children are cute because they eat with their hands. It's hugging people you don't know well because they came to your house for dinner. I have spent my entire life trying to learn White culture" (M. Subramanian, personal communication, March 15, 2008).

There are two primary pitfalls in asserting the existence of White culture. The first is that identifying things as belonging to White culture would somehow preclude them from being a part of the culture of someone who is not White. To say that valuing time is part of White culture, for example, says nothing about whether members of other racial groups value time. It is also not to say (this is the second danger) that all White people are the same or that there is a culture that can describe all White people. Stacey

340

Lee writes that "there is no single expression of Whiteness or White culture in the United States, but multiple cultures of Whiteness that vary depending on the ethnicity, religions, region and social class of the community" (2005, p. 23). However, she notes, "(a)lthough there are diverse White cultures, all Whites do share racial privilege" (2005, p. 24).

That White culture exists is a challenging theory to demonstrate. A few authors have tried to define White culture in concrete terms. Judith Katz (1999) characterizes White culture as focused on the individual and self-reliance; competitive; action oriented and hierarchical in decision making. She says that White culture involves an avoidance of emotion, intimacy or conflict, and an emphasis on the Protestant work ethic as well as an emphasis on the Scientific Method. White culture strongly adheres to strict chronological time, values people with regard to their wealth or job, is future-oriented and values a nuclear family structure. Christianity is the norm in White culture and bland aesthetics are preferred, according to Katz.

One effective way that scholars have theorized the existence of broad White cultural trends (meaning they are shaped both by White culture and by a culture of a privilege) in education is by demonstrating how the experiences of people of color are impacted by those cultural trends. This comparative approach is effective, given the fact that Whiteness only exists in the context of racial difference. Winant writes: "Whiteness is a relational concept, unintelligible without reference to non-Whites" (2001, p. 107).

Two works have effectively illuminated Whiteness in schools using this method of examining what Whiteness looks like from the point of view of people of color in a given context. Stacey Lee's (2005) book *Up Against Whiteness* is an ethnography of a

341

city high school in Wisconsin which focuses on the experiences of Hmong American

youth. As her title reflects, what may seem like innocuous White culture to some

participants or in a monoracial context is a great challenge to kids who do not grow up

with White culture. She focused extensively on how the school defined who was a "good

student":

> "Good" students are on friendly terms with faculty and staff (Eckert, 1989). They engage in witty banter with teachers and administrators inside and outside of class. In classes, "good" students express their opinions and feel free to challenge the teacher's ideas… The ability to engage in witty conversation with teachers requires not only fluency in English, which all the second-generation Hmong American students have, but a specific style of speech that reflects middle-class norms (Bourdieu, 1984; Heath, 1983). It also requires a certain level of entitlement to assert this type of speech. (2005, p. 29)

Lee studied Whiteness by studying its effects on students of color. The boundaries of

what is White in her research are defined, in large part, by those aspects of school life

that are available to White students and not available to students of color.

In the same way, Hurd is interested in how "the institutional practices of

normative Whiteness can impede the school involvement and educational opportunity of

Mexican-descent students" (2008, p. 293). He regards race and Whiteness as locally

contextually bounded and is careful to restrict conclusions to his research site. Hurd's

study looks particularly at racializing events, situations in which the celebration of nation

(Mexico) led to a polarization of White American students and students of Mexican

descent (many of whom were also American). Lee and Hurd's works demonstrate the

ways in which cultural Whiteness excludes students of color not only from the

mainstream of the school, but from the mechanisms that make for success within the

school, thereby alienating students from one of the greatest machines of social mobility that the U.S. offers. Importantly, both of these studies also include treatment of language as part of race (and English as Whiteness), which makes sense given the ways that language use and English as a Second Language (ESL) categorizations are often used to justify the marginalization of students of color.

In Lee's research site, there was substantial disparity between the way the White residents and residents of color perceived the school:

> Most White, middle class residents praise UHS for its academic excellence and for its socially tolerant atmosphere. In contrast to this positive view of UHS, many Lakeview residents of color assert that UHS is an elitist and racist institution that has not done enough to accommodate the specific needs of the racially and economically diverse students. (p.25)

These contrasting perspectives between White residents and residents of color are reflective of two common perceptions of racism. White residents thought that because UHS was diverse and there was no overt racial conflict, racism must not exist. Residents of color, however, incorporated institutional racism (and unequal performance by students of color as a manifestation of it) into their definition of racism. Given that both groups defined racism differently and that they were interested in the success of different groups of students, they did not agree on what type of school UHS was. For parents of color, it was clear that Whiteness shaped the norms of the school, as Lee discovered. For many White parents, however, no "culture of Whiteness" was visible; it simply all looked "normal" to them. In this way, one's relationship to racism can also shape one's perception of White culture.

Anthropologist of education Pamela Perry suggests that context, or space, influences whether or not Whiteness is visible in schools. Whites are less invisible *as Whites* in all White spaces. Perry's work finds that Whiteness was not only more recognizable from a researcher's point of view but also more recognized by participants, in the racially diverse school that she studied. In the racially diverse school, Whiteness was more bounded, defined and recognized/recognizable than in the predominantly White space, where Whiteness was everywhere, unrecognized, "unmarked, undefined, and taken for granted" (2002, p. 24). This seemed to be true for the teachers in my study as well; the teachers who were racial minorities in their classrooms were more acutely aware of the cultural differences between themselves as White people and their Black students. The teachers in predominantly White schools tended to be less cognizant of the racial culture that they carried.

White Racial Identity Development (WRID)

Ruth Frankenberg suggests that not only is there tremendous diversity within the category of "White," but that every individual racialized as "White" has a wide ranging relationship to their understanding of that Whiteness. She writes:

> I am struck by the extraordinary ease with which (especially White)
> individuals can slide from awareness of Whiteness to the lack thereof and,
> related to that slippage, from race-consciousness to unconsciousness and
> from antiracism to racism, whether from year to year, situation to
> situation, or sentence to sentence. (2001, p. 77)

Frankenberg demonstrates that racial categorization should not be taken for granted, nor should be Whites' racial consciousness or awareness, because it is constantly changing.

Psychologists have tried to categorize these varied ways in which White people relate to their Whiteness. Dr. Janet Helms posited a theory of White Racial Identity Development to explain the different relationships Whites have to their racial identity at different times in their lives and even at different times in any given day. She suggests that White people pass through six statuses as they move from having no knowledge or understanding about race or racism towards having an autonomous and healthy anti-racist identity. The first status is Contact, in which White people first learn that they have a race or that racism exists. Contact is followed by Disintegration during which one's worldview disintegrates because the reality of racism interrupts one's previously held beliefs about the world being fair. Sometimes the process of Disintegration (which is critical for continuing to live with a conscious acknowledgment of the realities of racism) is so painful that people try to reintegrate their former reality in which an awareness of racism was completely non-existent (or repressed); that status is Reintegration. When White people blame people of color for racial disparities or feel that talking about race is what causes racism, they could be psychologically in the Reintegration stage. This is where most race conversations stop, and where many White people refuse to engage.

These first three statuses are the process of becoming aware of racial realities in the U.S. If one is able to get beyond Disintegration and Reintegration, one can begin to build an anti-racist White identity. The statuses in this second half of racial identity development are: Pseudo-Independence (during which one still may not recognize the meaning of one's own Whiteness), Immersion (during which one immerses oneself in literature on Whiteness and racism in order to learn more about what it means to be

White in a racist society) and Autonomy (during which one has unlearned one's privilege as one's loss (Spivak, 1990) and learned how to be a part of an anti-racist, multiracial community).

Helms' theory of racial identity development has been critiqued for being too linear and too focused on an *anti-racist* trajectory as opposed to other ways that one might be White. Other competing theories have developed in response to those critiques. But the important aspect of all theories of racial identity development for this paper is simply the idea that not all White people have the same relationship to their Whiteness. Through learning and experience, White people can become conscious of their privilege and positioning in a racist society in ways that contribute to a slow shifting of what their Whiteness means to them.

Helms' model cannot help us qualify the racial identity of each teacher in this study; the tool is not meant for such use. What it can do is help acknowledge different experiences of stuckness as reflective of racial identity development processes. This categorization helps to normalize the experience of stuckness, and to acknowledge that it is a natural part of the development of an anti-racist White identity. Furthermore, it may help individual teachers understand that their particular experiences of getting stuck might be much more common than they think.

The teachers in this study tended to be in the Immersion/Emersion status, during which Whites try to *immerse* themselves in learning about race and Whiteness and *emerge* from a prior state of ignorance. This makes sense because they all joined their inquiry groups and my study voluntarily; they had mostly been through Contact,

346

Disintegration, Reintegration and Pseudo-Independence, and were trying to learn more. Of course, nobody is only ever in one racial identity development status. Many people go through all the different statuses every day and are often in more than one at any given moment. Because the teachers in this study were learning about aspects of racism about which they had not previously known, most of them found themselves in the Contact status at different moments throughout the year. But all of the teachers had been through the first few statuses enough to be familiar with them and, overall, were most intensively and regularly experiencing the immersion/emersion status. For the sake of narrowing in on the ways that their racial identity development statuses contributed to their stuckness, I will look at the common patterns that manifested for teachers within Immersion status.

According to Helms' theory, in the Immersion status White people tend to immerse themselves in learning about race and racism as well as what it means to be White. They experience high levels of anger and embarrassment about White privilege, which they tend to take out on themselves and other Whites. They also tend to move from trying to help people of color fit into "Whitestream" norms and start trying to change White people and White institutions instead. In addition to these common characteristics described by Helms, I saw other trends, specific to teaching, that seem typical of teachers in the Immersion status. The teachers in this study were all highly motivated to learn about race, both in their groups and on their own, and had already done a fair amount of learning about race on their own. Common pitfalls in Immersion status included:

- Fear of making mistakes and thus being a hypocrite, or betraying the trust of people of color

- An attachment to one's self image as anti-racist such that critical feedback threatened that self image
- Competing with or not trusting White colleagues
- Having extensive knowledge of structural racism, but not being able to apply it
- Discomfort with uncertainty

Fear of making mistakes

Scott repeatedly expressed fears that he was going to expose his ignorance and, in doing so, violate the trust he had earned of people of color. He took his racial awareness very seriously and because of his awareness of all that he did not know, he feared embarrassing himself and/or hurting somebody unintentionally:

> *There are still spots of ignorance that I still have and I think am I gonna make a total fool of myself? Will I expose that to somebody in a really idiotic way? Or you know will I be fortunate enough to somehow figure that out without being hurtful to someone else? –Scott*

An anti-racist self image

A few different teachers (including teachers who were not case study teachers) seemed to be so attached to their identity as liberal and anti-racist that they seemed unable to take in information that threatened that identity. I contrast this with Ann, who seemed wholly unattached to an anti-racist identity and therefore seemed particularly open to critique and questions.

Not trusting White colleagues

A trend in racial identity development that came through with many of the teachers was a general mistrust or critique of White colleagues. The teachers in this study seemed to have the sense that other White teachers would not have anything to teach them about race or that they would be called upon to educate their White colleagues and that they would not know how to do so. Their colleagues' ignorance threatened their

348

own precarious new learning and growth. In the Immersion status, it is common for

White people to rely on the perspectives of people of color and to be extremely

judgmental of themselves and of other White people, which is a trend that manifested

among the teachers in this study. A White person in Immersion is only just beginning to

see other White people as potential teachers or anti-racist colleagues.

This may be the reason that Scott wanted his group for White teachers to focus on

their Whiteness and their privilege (in contrast to his co-facilitator, who wanted them to

learn how to close the achievement gap):

> *We'll have courageous conversations, but we also need to look at White*
> *dominance and White privilege. That's what they need to see because you*
> *don't see it and why should you? You just get up everyday and exist and*
> *it's given to you. So you know we're really, I think our goal is to try to get*
> *to Tim (Wise), just because he's so right in your face and I think when*
> *people are ready to hear him without freaking out then we've made a huge*
> *step and that opens up all kinds of things. –Scott*

Throughout the year, I encouraged Scott to move towards a stance of supporting

White teachers and helping them develop localized race understandings, rather than

trying to get them to develop a critical systemic analysis like his. I did this not only

because I felt it would be more productive, but also because I knew that his systemic

analysis was still making it hard for him to act locally.

Helene had a White colleague who offered her support on developing her

curriculum about Africa, which actually intimidated her.

> *Helene: And even Diana, who is in our group … she emailed me, like, "If*
> *you ever want to think about the Africa unit, let me know." And I've been*
> *like nervous to actually, before I knew her I was really intimidated by*
> *her… What are we gonna do, like have coffee? And talk about…I mean*
> *what?...But I'm like, "I really should!" I mean, she's White but she's*
> *really thought about this.*

349

Note how Helene suggests that Diana's Whiteness made her *a priori* less qualified to teacher her about Africa, by saying, "She's White *but* she's really thought about this." This is not an altogether misguided hesitation; Whiteness remains a major indicator that a person likely has not thought or learned very deeply about racial issues. However, there do exist White people who have thought extensively about race and how racial issues manifest in schools.

Sometimes the very White people who had thought the most about race were in competition with one another over how to best move the school and their classrooms forward with an anti-racist agenda. This kind of competition is not uncommon in anti-racist White activist circles. I see this as a manifestation of our White supremacist training, which causes us to want to be the best at whatever field we are in, even anti-racism. This type of White group level behavior (competition vs. collaboration) can be extremely destructive and it is one of the ways in which White people sabotage their own anti-racism efforts. It can stand in the way of productive collaboration with other White people and it shifts the focus away from working towards racial equality to simply attempting to keep the focus of recognition on the White person who is acting in anti-racist ways. As a White facilitator in the Philadelphia group said, "Sometimes I forget that it's not about me being the best White anti-racist in the room, but that it's about ending racism. And that requires that we have as many competent anti-racist White people as we can find."

Becoming effective White anti-racists means not only working to create anti-racist classrooms but learning how to collaborate with (and not alienate) our White allies and potential allies, who make up the majority of the teaching force.

Knowledge of racism a surprising barrier

Scott and Todd both encountered points of stuckness that, surprisingly, were directly related to their extensive knowledge of African American history. As was explored in Todd's case study, Todd had extensive knowledge about African American protest history and the history of oppression in the US. Because of this, he often readily excused bad behavior on the part of his students because he felt that they should not have to be held accountable for behavior that was shaped by such inconsistent and unfair circumstances. He had not yet learned how to apply what he knew about racial inequality to teaching in a way that would empower his students by giving them the tools they needed to be successful, rather than further punish them by keeping them, and their peers, uneducated.

Scott, similarly, had not learned to apply his extensive knowledge of structural racism to a localized classroom context. Although he knew volumes of African American history, as well as critical political and economic theory, he did not seem to know how to apply that in his school in order to change patterns of inequity. In fact, he seemed to feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issues and therefore convinced himself that he could not make any changes without a sea change in society's attitude towards schooling and race. As a result, his incredible knowledge seemed to distract him and weigh him down, rather than empower him to make changes for students.

Discomfort with uncertainty in race conversations with students

Cara recognized that her students experienced conversations about the Civil

Rights Movement very differently from how she experienced them. But she often forgot

to simply ask them what they thought or felt:

> *Cara: It's frustrating for me because I feel like I'm sure on some*
> *level it's different. It must be different.*
>
> *Ali: For them than for you?*
>
> *Cara: Yeah.*
>
> *Ali: Yeah definitely.*
>
> *Cara: It feels weird because I'm like I don't know what you're*
> *feeling right now exactly. I guess "What are you feeling?" would*
> *be a good place to start. And I also know kids are, we talked about,*
> *on a spectrum of racial identities so that would also impact who's*
> *feeling what and how they're processing what they're watching.*

Cara also struggled with not having the confidence and background knowledge to

react to difficult material on race off the cuff. When she accidentally showed her

students a segment from *Eyes on the Prize* about Emmitt Till, she was immediately

disoriented because it did not fit into her lesson. It is also a highly traumatic piece of

history that she felt unprepared to discuss. Her students were excited to see Emmitt's

body, which disturbed Cara, who quickly turned off the video. She felt that she was

being more sensitive to it than the students, but also realized it might never affect her as

much as it did them. She did not process it with the students because she did not know

what to do.

Similarly, when Cara read *The Watson's Go to Birmingham* aloud to her class,

she realized that she was unprepared for the emotional impact of the book:

352

Cara: This is why pre-reading is good because I had no idea even though it says on the back of the book—it spells it out for me—that the whole story ends up with the bombing of the church… I was like choked up when I was reading. It was like a little bit too much for me. That's the second time this year that I was surprised by something and I didn't handle it very well.

Ali: And how did it play out with your students? Did you just move on or?

Cara: Yeah I think we just moved on but um…. Now that I know what that book is about, if we study that next year, which we probably will, I'll place that book strategically in my teaching plan. I mean when I get upset about stuff I usually share like what's upsetting me.

Todd's discomfort with uncertainty about race made it hard for him to lead classroom discussions about race:

Like when I've done it before I think I wasn't going deep enough or like when kids would say offensive things or say maybe racist things maybe like stopping them instead of like acknowledging that that wasn't okay to say and like, you know what I mean. Like making that a part of the conversation in like a productive instead of a negative way and then continuing with that because like there were a couple of things that I was like I don't know what I would say to that.

Case study examples – Sam and Ann

Not surprisingly, there is great variety among people who identify as White, and even among the participants in this study. To illustrate some of that variety, I will share stories from Sam and Ann, who both related to their own Whiteness in ways that were distinct from the other teachers and that had implications for their learning about race.

"Becoming" White - Sam

Unlike many Whites, including most of the other teachers in this study, Sam's membership in Whiteness was not implicit or taken for granted. As a Jewish child growing up in the south—where the rules governing membership in Whiteness tended to

353

be more explicitly enforced—he had to work at becoming White through a process that was largely unconscious and that he recognized only in hindsight. I did not realize it until our work together ended, but Sam only started identifying as a White man the year that we worked together. Until then, he would have identified as Jewish, not White.

> I've been busting my ass to—not get where I'm at because I'm just
> a high school teacher—but like I mean like I studied what it was
> like to be a White person like I'm sure a lot of Black people do…
> it almost feels like it's a different language and there are times
> when I'm reminded of that.

In elementary school, he was friends with Jewish kids from Hebrew school and Black kids from public school. He felt closer to the Black kids than the White kids at his school because the White kids were so anti-Semitic. For a few years in middle school and early high school, he was only friends with Jews, as he felt the anti-Semitism "coming from both sides, the Black and the White." With the terrain of Whiteness shifting underneath him in the 1960s and 1970s (Brodkin, 2004), it stands to reason that he did not feel that he fit neatly into any racial category. As he got into high school, he started distancing himself from both his Black friends and his Jewish friends, and started to become friends with White students, dating only White girls. In retrospect, he realized that he had started actually studying how to be White and found himself "code switching," as he put it, in order to fit in:

> *I spent massive amounts of time learning what it meant to be a southern*
> *White person… And my mom even said that I would choose these*
> *girlfriends with dads that like knew how to be Southern White men and I*
> *would try to learn from them.*

Even as an adult, Sam was regularly reminded of the ways that he did not belong within the White mainstream. However, as a teacher in a Quaker school in 2011, he felt

pressure from other teachers at the school to recognize that he did receive privileges

because he was seen by most people within the school as a White person.

As we began interviews and observations, Sam reserved many of his thoughts and

questions for discussion with me, rather than with his inquiry group. He did not find the

inquiry group useful and he preferred to be challenged by colleagues outside of the

group. There are many possible explanations for this, but at least one has to do with

racial identity. Sam went through so many changes in his racial identity during that first

year of the inquiry group that he was significantly changed by the time he and I worked

together in the spring. And yet, especially at the beginning, Sam slowed down the

inquiry process for other teachers, sometimes deliberately. As he said, he joined the

group in order to find out if they were going to try to abolish honors – and to protect it.

Early in the process, he positioned himself as an outsider to the race inquiry group, or

possibly as an irritant within it. He had a real transformation over the year, but many

people who worked with him were not close enough to his process to see this

transformation and had already written him off because of past interactions. The

following quote demonstrates how much Sam valued the one-on-one interactions we

shared outside of his inquiry group:

> Sam: *Do you realize what you're doing for me? Do you understand that,*
> *like the role that you play in my life?*
>
> Ali: *No I'm curious to hear [laughs].*
>
> Sam: *Well I mean look, you're at U Penn which is an Ivy league school,*
> *you're working on your PhD, you presented with Dr. Stevenson. If I throw*
> *out anybody's name you know it or you know a book like it… we showed*
> *up at White privilege together, so you've got all these street credentials to*
> *make (the other racially aware teachers) feel like you know what you're*

355

doing, but you keep saying things to me that validate my own like intuition about the ways things should be done, but you're a smart person and everything…

Ali: So you're feeling affirmed?

Sam: Absolutely. I'm like feeling a triple gazillion affirmed because …I say like, "Oh I've got a meeting with Ali today for 2 hours," and somebody was like, "Oh god, you're like really committed to that (race inquiry group) stuff aren't you?!" [laughs] And I was like, "Yeah yeah yeah." I mean I love talking to you, or talking at you.

Ali: [laughs] Answering all my questions.

Sam: Although sometimes it's a true conversation.

Ali: It is.

Sam: But it's like I feel like I can say whatever I'm gonna say and it's like, it's not just me being a southern racist or blah blah blah.

Sam was joking when he referred to himself as a "southern racist," but it was true that he did seem to be perceived as "less racially aware" by people who were known within his school to be the "more racially aware" teachers. I put that phrase in quotes not to mock the distinction, as the "more racially aware" teachers that he referred to were teachers I had great respect for, and who moved the entire race inquiry process forward with their persistence, knowledge and experience. But I want to denote it as a classification that creates a binary in which some people are seen as "racially aware" while others are deemed "unaware." In actuality, even those most racially aware teachers still have a lot to learn and others, like Sam, may have racial epiphanies that go unsupported because they have been pigeon-holed as the "racist" or the "clueless ones."

During inquiry processes like this one, we have to expect people to change and we have to learn how to relate to them anew when they do. In Sam's case, he had offended

356

his "racially aware" colleagues at different points in the past so that they were unavailable to him as allies in his newfound learning. How do school communities allow for growth among our colleagues and accept that they might be different people (or might be trying to be different people) from year to year, even when they have previously offended us? This is especially difficult to do given that White people tend to get outsized recognition for their (our) minimal efforts to learn and change about race, while people of color constantly shift and learn and change with very little outside acknowledgment of the emotional energy that it takes on their part. In fact, that kind of racial and social flexibility tends to simply be expected of people of color, while White people tend to get (want and need) recognition for even the smallest changes.

Political affiliation - Ann

In our last interview, Ann outed herself as a Republican. Very nonchalantly, she said, "I think that for our faculty we are a pretty educated group and mostly liberal. I know of two Republicans and I'm one of them." By this point in our time together, she had shared so many of her thoughts about race and education that I had definitively typecast her as a liberal democrat, like the six other teachers in my study. Beliefs like hers did not seem congruent with my perception of Republican politics. Looking back on her interviews, it became clear that her values differed in slight, but significant ways, from the other participants as well. Ann was aggravated by the fact, for example, that the students did not say the Pledge of Allegiance – "there's nothing that unites the students." Also, in bemoaning the fact that the school did nothing to observe holidays such as Black History Month, she mentioned that they did not do anything for Veterans Day or 9/11 as

well. She expressed outrage that the one speaker on racism brought into the school was a guy from a rural area, who suggested that people from rural areas are all racists. She said, "It misrepresents people from rural areas." In discussing affinity groups for Black students, she said she understood that need, because of her own experiences with affinity groups, but she still struggled with it:

> (B)elieve me I totally get it. I belong to groups that are just for women, you know what I mean, Daughters of the American Revolution. Girls night, I get it. I'm a Girl Scout leader. I understand that within our culture we have to find our niche and our group that we're comfortable with, I just have a hard time in my mind having that be delineated by race.

At the time, I thought little of these comments, seeing them as mere examples, albeit examples that I would not have immediately chosen; I do not necessarily believe that 9/11 or Veterans Day should be observed in schools and I tend to see organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution as both elitist and conservative. But I did not realize that some of her examples were reflective of some very real differences between us. After learning she was a Republican, I began to see all of these parts as reflective of a whole person who differed in substantial social and political ways from me and from the other teachers in the study. And yet she had more fully integrated her race learning into her teaching than any other teacher I worked with. Indeed, my own stereotypes of White people from rural areas who are patriotic, support the military and lead Girl Scout troops inexplicably precluded being aware of issues of race. Ann's case helps demonstrate, once again, how complicated and diverse anti-racist White people can be.

> Like I'm very proud of the fact that in my Girl Scout troop I have two children of color. I'm very proud of that because um when…the mom of the one girl is so involved and she and I are more like co-leaders… she's a single mom and she works at a prison…. My other mommies are not really

358

> *happy. They were like "well…" the first two years they didn't speak to*
> *her at meetings and stuff. They didn't know what to say to her.*

Ann's case demonstrates that racial awareness is not necessarily a political stance, even though it is frequently conflated with liberalism. This is a misconception on two points. First, as Ann's case illustrates, White people who vote Republican can be strong teachers, colleagues, friends and Girls Scout troop leaders to people of color. Second, many liberals who are White believe that their liberal politics disqualify them from being racist. In fact, the two matters are largely separate and yet this misconception often hinders White liberals from asking questions and learning about racism. Steve Biko, W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin and Richard Wright all warned against the insidious danger of the racism of "White liberals" who are not trustworthy allies because they believe that a liberal political agenda will right racial wrongs when, in reality, racial justice requires a consciousness of the inequities upon which the entire society has been built, and a willingness to restructure that foundation. Our schools are actually full of liberal White people who believe they are not racist, and who do very little to intentionally support children of color. In fact, there were even teachers in this study who seemed so tied to their self image as anti-racists that they were less receptive to feedback or indicators that they may have room for improvement. Because her self image was not tied to being an anti-racist White person, Ann was particularly receptive to feedback, making her a more responsive anti-racist White ally.

Conclusion

Teacher racial identity played a prominent role in teachers' abilities to address racial dynamics and dilemmas in their classrooms. Many White teachers do not even

realize that racial identity is something they have, or that it is something that can be developed. If conversations about race make us uncomfortable, we tend to avoid them, rather than realizing that we can become more comfortable with them through practice. Teachers' racial identities are the most powerful tools they have for addressing questions and dilemmas about race in their classrooms. They need to be sharpened, honed and maintained just like any other tool. By virtue of the work they had done to become ready to participate in inquiry groups, most of the teachers in this study tended to be in the Immersion status, with moments of every day in the other statuses. Ideally, the work they do in the inquiry groups would take them even further, into Autonomy, which is characterized by a much deeper integration of racial concepts with one's everyday actions, as well as a security that allows teachers to work collaboratively with people of color and other White people without intimidation or competition, and to take critical feedback as a gift, rather than a threat.

The final two case study chapters that follow demonstrate the importance of racial identity in the classroom. The first chapter in this section features Cara, who taught 5th grade in a predominantly Black charter school in Philadelphia. In spite of her extensive knowledge of race, she tended to feel inadequate and inauthentic as a White person teaching Black students. This self-doubt made it harder for her to follow her instincts, which were actually quite reflective of her extensive knowledge and awareness of complex racial dynamics. The second chapter features Ann, a Special Education Support teacher at a high school in suburban St. Clair Township. Ann was not a perfect teacher, nor did she feel like she had all the answers. But she seemed to spend most of her time in

360

Autonomy status, generally feeling comfortable enough with racial issues and with students and colleagues of color to be able to demonstrate competence and admit incompetence without extensive emotional processing. She was comfortable asking questions, saying when she was wrong and making mistakes. As a result, she was able to communicate with students and colleagues from a place of authenticity, in which she did not tend to constantly second-guess herself.

Chapter 14: FIGHTING WHITENESS WITH WHITENESS

I'm so concerned that they will think that I'm just this White person who is trying to impose more things from her White perspective on their kids and now I'm teaching about their history to their kids. I have all these concerns about that. But what's the alternative – not teaching it? I mean that's stupid.

–Cara taught 5th grade at a predominantly Black Charter school in an urban center, which drew students from lower- and middle-class families from all over the city.

At the time of my study, Cara taught 5th grade at a predominantly Black charter school in Philadelphia, which drew students from lower- and middle-class families from all over the city. She had been a head classroom teacher two years before working at this school, and was in her second year of teaching at this school. The school was a well-respected charter school serving grades K-8. It had been founded and run by a well-known Black educator, who founded the school on Afro-centric principles and styles. This was part of the attraction of the school to Cara. The year of my study, the school had a new principal, a White woman who tried to continue many of the traditions started by the founding principal, but who was not Afro-centric in her leadership or her philosophy.

Cara was a petite, blond-haired, blue-eyed White woman in her late twenties. It was not uncommon to see her in a dress, pearls, gold earrings and heels. She wore her blonde straight hair just beyond her shoulders and tucked behind her ears. She also wore glasses. She was usually professionally and impeccably dressed. She grew up in a predominantly White, rural community in upstate NY, but she had more experiences with people of other races than the average White person in her town. She attended the nursery school at her local JCC, where she had classmates who were Black and Jewish. She identified as "vaguely Presbyterian." As a teen, she went to a camp where some of her friends were from Flatbush, NY, and she went to visit

them in the city. She generally knew that her peers in Syracuse were sheltered and that many of

their ideas about cities and people of color were racist. When asked about her first experiences

of racism, she remembered getting lost on a high school field trip to DC and being mortified by

the anxiety of her classmates, who thought they were lost in the ghetto and were afraid that they

were going to be attacked. But she says she did not really begin thinking about race explicitly

until her first teaching job in a Jesuit school in New Orleans, where all of her students were

Black. In all of her prior teaching experiences (in New Orleans, in Syracuse, and then at another

school in Philadelphia) almost all of her students were Black.

At her most recent school, she was one of only a few White teachers. According to Cara,

there was a Black cultural influence on the faculty culture there. They had line dancing[17] at their

Christmas parties.

> *I felt like it wasn't as comfortable for me there for sure…I didn't know*
> *'Lift Every Voice and Sing' and I soon found out that I should. I was this*
> *weirdo – I felt like not part of the group.*

She said that at her old school there were more teachers that could connect to Black students and

their families. Although it was more difficult for her to fit in there than at her current school,

which has a predominantly White faculty, she had felt more authentically a part of the

community in ways that felt impossible at her new charter school. Rooted in her friendships with

other Black teachers, she gained acceptance. Her students at her old school told her she was the

only White teacher that they listened to. Looking back at that time, she regretted that she did not

---

[17] Whether a given tradition is culturally White or culturally Black is not straightforward. There are White subcultures in which line dancing is common. However, it is not usually performed at predominantly White school events as part of the culture there. In Philadelphia, many Black communities have line dancing at predominantly Black celebrations, including block parties, weddings and, as in this example, Christmas parties. This does not mean all Black people like to line dance, or that White people do not. It simply means that in this context, certain cultural traditions that were rooted in the Black community of Cara's school helped her realize that she was a cultural outsider, and that her culture was related to being White.

maintain her friendships with some of the teachers there. When she was at that school, she also

felt that it was impossible for her to be a part of her principal's inner circle because she was

White. She said she knew her principal loved her and was happy to have her teaching at her

school, but that she would never be in the inner circle.

Realizing how conscious she was of not fitting in at her old school helped her realize that

she was part of the racial mainstream at her current school. And yet she realized that in many

ways, she did not fit in with the other White teachers there either. She did not feel like she could

talk about race with her White co-workers and she often found herself in the uncomfortable

position of wanting to confront racist comments, but being unsure how.

> *I guess I feel like I'm accommodating of differences in a way that I don't*
> *see some my colleagues being accommodating or respectful. Like I don't*
> *engage in conversations. There have been some really negative*
> *conversations that I'm thinking of about kids who wear khamiz, girls who*
> *wear khamiz and like Black Muslims… What is that? Like that's not my*
> *business to get into! Or like names, like names for children, that's a really*
> *common like White-teacher-get-whipped-up-in-a-frenzy-about-something-*
> *crazy kind of thing. I don't want to go there. That's not for me to talk*
> *about.*

Chapter Theme: FIGHTING WHITENESS WITH WHITENESS

Cara had lots of questions about race and her classroom, but the salient refrain that

repeatedly framed each of her questions was, "As a White woman teaching Black students…?"

The main questions that preoccupied her were: As a White woman, how can I connect with

Black parents? Is racial socialization something that I, as a White woman, can do? How do I

support my male students (all of whom are Black) to be more resilient? Cara was hyper-

conscious of her own Whiteness and of her students' Blackness. She took seriously her

responsibility to teach the whole child, which included the work of supporting her students'

racial identity development. But there were times when her awareness of her own Whiteness

seemed to lead primarily to self-doubt and uncertainty. By the end of the year, it seemed clear

that those moments were temporary and transitional, and that it helped Cara to talk with me to

see her way out of them on her way to a more confident and racially-aware place. Cara

eventually seemed to gain more confidence to be able to use her Whiteness strategically to run an

anti-racist classroom and be an anti-racism advocate within the school. I call this strategy

"fighting Whiteness with Whiteness."

Classroom vignette

*The school was set on a street in center city Philadelphia among parking garages and
apartment buildings. On my first visit, I was surprised to find a school there. From the
outside, it could have been an office building. Inside, there was a bright, clean, spacious
lobby decorated with student artwork, with a large, red, C-shaped reception desk. I was
asked to sign in using their computerized system. I slid my license into the card slot,
which in turn shot out a nametag with my picture and personal information on it. The
Black receptionist looked up and asked whom I was here to see. "Ms. Almquist? You
can go right up."*

Kids streamed past me in lines, wearing blue or khaki pants and white polo t-shirts.

*As I approached Cara's fifth grade classroom, there was a Black boy sitting outside the
room looking in the window of the classroom. He was there because he was being
punished. He looked up at me and asked shyly but politely, "Is there something I can
help you with?" I told him I was there to see Ms. Almquist and he nodded his head
towards the door. I asked if I should just go in and he said, "Yes." This was a typical
interaction with Cara's students. Even while being punished, they seemed polite,
respectful of adults, and agentic in their environment.*

*Inside the classroom sat 20 other students with their desks pushed together in three large
table groups. The chairs had tennis balls on the bottom of each leg to minimize noise
distractions when the chairs scraped on the floor. This lent an air of care to the
classroom, that someone had thoughtfully considered how to make it a quieter space.
The classroom was colorfully carpeted and there was a rug in the front of the classroom,
where students could sit during read-alouds. Cara's desk was in the back of the room,
behind the students. On one wall there were big windows with red frames facing outside.
The room felt like a nice space for learning. The walls were decorated with posters of
values, charts about math, daily schedule, sentence types, strong intelligent young*

365

readers, a jobs list, a reading word wall, planets vocabulary, and a math word wall. On the board, there were announcements about tryouts for a Talent Show and permission slips for an upcoming camping trip.

Cara stood at the front of the classroom, holding a timer, looking out at her students, ready to start math. "Ago"[18] she said. "Anay" a few students responded. "Ago" she said again. "Anay" a few more students responded. Students busily put things away and got out other things for math, a few of them darting back and forth across the classroom to get one last thing they had forgotten.

A boy named Caleb said, "Pluto has a moon – I never knew." Cara responded, "I love that you guys are reading those books because it's adding information we're not getting while we're studying for PSSA. I'm waiting until students are ready. Please make sure your shirts are all tucked. I'm going to start the timer in a minute because I think some students are taking advantage of the transition."

One student who had been grading papers stood up to put the graded papers on Cara's desk and returned the pen to the pen jar.

Cara asked, "What have I asked students to get out?"

They responded, "Math notebook and workbook."

She said "We're not doing something new, we're doing what we did yesterday to start with."

The "Do now" was written on the board:
Rename the fractions using the LCM as the denominator

1. *1/2 ,1/4, 5/8*
2. *4 2/3, 5 1/6, 3 5/12*

Cara asked, "What would the least common multiple be between 2, 4 and 8?" Students shouted "8."

She began a new problem while they worked on that one.

The room was quiet as all of the students busily marked up their answers. She pushed on. As she wrote the next problem on the board, Cara said, "You guys are doing a good job so far concentrating and doing the work on your own."

Write in order, least to greatest: 3/4, 2/5, 7/10, 8/15

---

[18] Ago/Anay is a call and response method that Nora used to get students' attention.

A student with a bloody nose raised one hand while catching the drips of blood in her other hand. Cara said to her, "Get a tissue and pinch it. I'm not sending you out during instruction."

Mr. Chris, Cara's assistant, came in and sat at his desk in the front of the room.

Cara said to a student who was reading non-math-related material, "Caleb, I'm starting to feel a little disrespected."

There was a girl kicking her male tablemate under the table. He said "Agh!" quietly. Cara didn't notice. Wide-eyed, he said to the girl who kicked him, "It left a mark."

As the lesson proceeded, a few students started to have questions. Cara asked if there were any tutors who would be willing to help. Cara called on the girl who was kicking to be a tutor. In her new role as tutor, she went over to the boy who first asked for help and leaned over to look at his work.

Cara knelt down to work with two students who were working on the rug in the front of the room. She asked two other students to circulate. One asked, "Anyone need any help?" The tutors wandered for a few minutes, but eventually got called over for help by some of their classmates. Mr. Chris, the assistant, also started walking around the room to offer help.

A few minutes later, Cara said to the class: "I've asked you to work on page 80. If you're finished, you can do the mixed review on page 81. I've asked you to work silently – not quietly. That would be different. Mr. Chris and I both know the expectation is for working silently." While she spoke, Mr. Chris took a watch from one boy. The boy tried to explain that he finished his work, which is why he was playing with his watch.

A few minutes later, Cara said, "If you're an early finisher, go to the mixed review on page 81. If you're a really early finisher, you may go back to page 78. Zion, please sit up. If you'd like to stay on the carpet, I'm going to be observing you and making sure you stay on task. My goal is for you to finish page 80 in 10 minutes."

Mr. Chris left the room to photocopy the reading packets.

"You must whisper," she whispered. The students responded by whispering loudly.

When she wasn't looking, one or two students would roll their eyes at each other or stick their tongues out. Then they would locate Cara to make sure she didn't see and then get back to their work.

Cara reminded them, "Some people to do not know how to whisper." She demonstrated whispering, "This is whispering." And she demonstrated what is not whispering, "This is not whispering."

At 2:10, Cara's timer went off. She said, "I'm giving you 1 minute to be seated with your workbook out and everything put away." She set the timer. "Silently, not quietly. And I'd like to do this quickly so we can be ready for –"

A student filled in the blank, "Expedition!"

Students quickly transitioned from math to their Civil Rights Movement expedition work. Once the students had their workbooks out, Cara began, "Raise your hand if you did not finish the text about the Little Rock 9." As she spoke, Mr. Chris set up the video.

"I want you to infer the feelings of some of the students you've watched and read about the Little Rock 9. Think about your life – you get up and ride the bus and your experience is pretty different from these students. Compare and contrast your experience of going to school and learning – and know that they were not unique. There were students all over the country integrating schools and experiencing similar situations – not the same as having mobs outside, but maybe having mobs inside."

A boy student asked, "Can I talk about the guy we saw on the DVD yesterday?"

Cara said, "Today we're going to focus on education. Most of the things we saw yesterday were not about education and school – so you could use the videos about schooling from last week."

While the students wrote in their workbooks, Cara came over to me and said, "This is a question – I am not being very intentional right now, I haven't scripted it out – and that's an instructional issue. But I feel like - it's not my property, I don't own this like I should to be able to teach it."

Cara went back to the front of the class. She said to her students, "One thing I worry about when I teach the Civil Rights Movement is that people will think this happened a long time ago and it doesn't have anything to do with me."

Students shout: It does.

Cara: Okay, I'm glad you agree.

Cara: And another thing I want you to understand –

Justin shouted to the tall girl sitting in front of him, "I can't see, you're too tall." Cara responded, "Justin, sometimes you also have to adjust your seat. There are lots of other seats that would offer you a better view than where you're sitting."

Cara: A big idea that we decided when my team was planning this exhibition is that it was everyday people–they weren't superhuman heroes, they were everyday people who had to decide—I could continue going to my regular school, or go to a school where people are rude to me everyday. Because I've got to be able to keep my eyes on the prize, and the prize is justice, it's about getting education, it's about getting the job I want. There's still a lot of inequality in cities like Philadelphia. I want you to think about what inequalities exist today and what role might I play some day or now – to fix that, to make a difference, to work with other people to make a difference.

Student: I think if they wouldn't have done that, people would have thought it was still alright to make schools segregated and unequal.

Cara: Why was it a problem that the schools were segregated?

Student: It would have been a problem because Whites would have still been prejudiced about the Blacks.

Cara: There are two words on our word wall that are antonyms that make me think of this.

Student: Discrimination?

Cara: They're antonyms.

Student: Separate but equal?

Student: Inferior and superior?

Cara: Inferior and superior. Whites felt they were superior and wanted to make Blacks feel inferior.

At the end of class, after all the students had packed up their things and left in groups to take different busses to their various parts of the city, three students were left waiting for a later bus. One of the boys asked, "Ms. Almquist, do you want to see my dance?" She said, "It depends, which dance?" He said, "It's Crank that Soldier Boy" and proceeded to crank. She laughed and told him she liked his dance.

As the vignette clearly shows, Cara had confidence in herself and her methods as

a teacher. Students excelled in her classroom, both in their grades and on their

standardized tests. She spent time in the race inquiry group, and at professional

development programs on race offered by her school, trying to become more competent,

specifically as a White teacher of Black students. However, as this chapter will show, an

increase in racial knowledge did not necessarily lead directly to a sense of competence or

confidence. She spent a lot of time in our inquiry group and in my conversations with her

doubting her role in her relationships with students and their parents, and doubting her

own assessment of what her students needed to learn and how they needed to learn it.

Inquiry group work

Because the Philadelphia teacher inquiry group only had two teachers, we were

able to structure the group in response to the specific questions that Cara and Todd asked,

rather than broadly addressing race and education. Both teachers taught Black students in

Philadelphia. Since both Cara and Todd taught Black children almost exclusively, we

were also able to focus in particular on the research on Black children and education.

Throughout the inquiry group, we read about and discussed the following topics:

- o Black cultural mistrust of Whites
- o Afro-cultural styles of learning (Cunningham and Boykin, 2004)
- o Playing with anger/Depression mistaken for aggression in Black boys (Stevenson, 2003)
- o Black Racial Identity Development
- o Resiliency (Spencer and Tinsley, 2008)

Because both Todd and Cara (and two others in the group) were White, we also

tried to study issues related to White teacher development, such as the White Racial

Identity Development Model (Helms, 2008), and discuss typical group-level behaviors of

Whites. This focus on the White teacher as one interactional element of any "racialized"

situation, such as a multiracial classroom, was meant to help White teachers begin to see

the ways that they, like their students, have been "racialized" by our society and that they play a role in any "racialized" interaction. This can help teachers ask broader questions. Rather than ask, "Why don't my Black parents trust me?" a racially self-aware White teacher might ask, "What can I, as a White teacher, do to help my Black parents feel that they can trust me?" The first form of question blames any conflict in interactional style on the person of color. The second form acknowledges one's own racial positioning, and one's unique role within multi-racial interactions. When White teachers can be confident in themselves, as White people, they are better able to use themselves and their Whiteness as a tool for effective teaching, relationship building and school leadership, rather than accidentally or absent-mindedly tripping over it, sometimes not even realizing that it is there.

White Racial Identity Development theory as a roadmap and a blockade

When she came into our group, Cara already had a greatly heightened sense of her own Whiteness and the ways in which it might limit her effectiveness as a teacher of Black children. Cara had been conscious of her identity as a White woman for a few years. In fact, she had, for a short time, been a member of the Uhuru Solidarity Movement, a radical Black nationalist group which only allows Whites to participate in the group by raising funds. She saw the rationale for Black-only spaces and her appreciation for such spaces contributed to her self-doubt concerning her own role as a White woman teaching Black children. Her participation in the inquiry group marked the first time that she learned some of the academic concepts regarding Whiteness and White

identity. This section is dedicated to looking at some of the ways that the academic

theories of Whiteness were confusing to her as she tried to apply them to her situation.

One of the main theories of Whiteness that we discussed in our group was that of

Janet Helms' model of White Racial Identity Development (WRID). Helms' model is

one of the first for White people and it has been criticized and revised since its first

release in the 1990s. However, the main concepts behind the WRID model are incredibly

useful, and underlie all of the other models that succeeded it. One of these foundational

concepts is that racial identity is separate from a person's race. As explored in the

previous chapter, a person's racial identity describes their relationship to their race, their

knowledge of it, their feelings about it and their competence in having interactions with

others of their own race and others of other races. This model can generally be very

helpful because it can help White people understand their own developing racial identity,

and that the painful or uncomfortable aspects of learning about race and racism as a

White person might not be permanent. It explains why Black people do not all think or

feel the same way about being Black, or about any given question about race. It is also

helpful for working with White people and understanding their reactions as they learn

about or confront race in ways that might be new for them.

One of the advanced statuses of anti-racist White Racial Identity Development in

Helm's model is called "Autonomy," in which White people no longer feel that they have

to rely on People of Color to validate their opinions about race. Being autonomous in this

way can be especially important for teachers because they often have to make decisions

about what resources (books, movies, posters) to use in the classroom, and they should

372

not have to run to a colleague of color each time they choose a new book, to ask whether

it might be seen as racist – to name one example. That does not mean, however, that

White teachers should never ask People of Color what they think; on the contrary, White

people should constantly be checking in with colleagues of color about issues of race.

But according to Helms' model, a White person who gets to the point where they do not

have to validate their own opinions on race by getting affirmation from a person of color,

has achieved a measure of autonomy.

Learning about Helms' model was confusing for Cara, in part because she seemed

to be looking for answers to some questions that she had been asking for many years.

She seemed to look at the White Racial Identity model (Helms, 2008) as an answer,

rather than as a general theory. She started to treat it like the list of race rules that she

had been hoping to find. In the following example, it seems clear that she was using the

model as a guide to how she should behave, rather than as a more general description of

her current developmental status. When I asked her, in our final interview, what her

plans were for the following year, she said that she wanted to get to know the parents of

her students better:

> *Ali: Would you do anything differently next year knowing how it went this year?*
>
> *Cara: …I want to have conversations with my kids' parents one-on-one or whatever before we even get there because I want to know, you know, what do they think is important, what were things that…but that's deferring to Black people. That's one of those things I'm not supposed to do.*
>
> *Ali: Well they're very specific Black people. It's not just anybody. They're your kids' parents. I mean that's an important resource.*

In this conversation, Cara was referencing the Janet Helms' model of anti-racist development as a rule that delineated what she was and was not "supposed" to do. The model, however, does not say what an anti-racist White person *should* or *should not* do, but rather that a person with a more highly developed racial identity will not rely on People of Color to form their opinions about race, but rather will start to develop her own opinions.

Cara was not just trying to figure out where she fit on the model, but trying to imitate the typical behaviors of an "autonomous" anti-racist White person, in order to fit herself into the place on the model where she thought a good "racially-aware" White teacher would be.

The model was not helpful to Cara in this scenario because she was in a stage in her own racial identity development where she tended to see people in only one dimension: race. Because the model similarly analyzes human development only along racial lines, it played into Cara's tendency to do the same. The model led Cara to begin to think of her students' parents only as Black people and herself only as a White person. She did not want to have to rely on Black people to teach her about racism, which seems consistent with wanting to be at a particular place on the model. However, she would not be asking her students' parents to teach her about racism; she would be asking them to help her better understand her students and the curriculum in her classroom. This is something that any parents should be consulted about, regardless of race.

The model also does not account for the ways in which White people who want to be anti-racist White people must be in relationship with People of Color in order to know

what racism to fight in the first place. In actuality, in order to be effectively anti-racist, White people need to be in constant communication with the People of Color in their lives so that they 1) understand how localized racism affects the People of Color, 2) check in with People of Color about what kind of action or resistance is already in place and 3) check in with People of Color about how any potential action or resistance might negatively affect them. White people working in isolation from People of Color risk either disrupting the racial status quo in ways that have negative unintended consequences for the People of Color they work with, or overlapping or undermining the efforts that are already in place. Helms' model says that White people gain autonomy when they find that they do not feel they need to be validated by People of Color in order to express an opinion about racism; but that does not suggest that White people should work against racism without informed support from People of Color, or that teachers should refrain from asking parents about their children. Particularly in a classroom, a teacher should be working in collaboration with students' parents.

In another conversation of our inquiry group, it came up that one typical group-level behavior for White people is that we often take over conversations without realizing we are doing so. After this conversation, Cara spent a portion of the year second-guessing herself as a teacher, fearing that she was too domineering in her classroom. When we spoke about it at our next meeting, and she mentioned this fear, I reminded her that as the teacher, she is supposed to control the conversation. The reason why White people tend to take over conversations is because White people tend to have more social power in predominantly White spaces. It is about power. Just like in any work setting,

for example, it is not uncommon for the boss to talk the most in meetings. People tend to expect that the boss might interrupt them. But it is not acceptable for the new guy to take up a lot of air space and interrupt the boss. [19] What determines whether it is considered socially acceptable to interrupt is how much power one has in a given situation. In classrooms, whether teachers are White or Black, they tend to dominate the conversations because they are the teachers and the facilitators. If it was a meeting among equals that Cara was dominating, it might be received differently.

After this discussion, Cara said she stopped worrying about the way she took up space in the classroom, but she started realizing that when she spoke to parents, she often did all the talking and did not leave much space for the parents. Again, as the teacher, this may be an expected arrangement, given that she had power over the child and therefore the family. But in other ways, teachers work for the families. Certainly this dynamic is more straightforward in private schools, in which parents are literally paying a teacher's salary. But either way, if teachers want to have influence over the child *in collaboration* with parents, they have to treat parents like partners, which means asking questions and leaving space for them to talk. In this case, Cara's newly developed reserve as a White person seemed to be a healthy development in her relationship with students' parents.

Both of these examples demonstrate how keenly aware Cara was of her Whiteness, and how she very consciously tried to avoid behaviors that were typical of domineering or even racist White people. In so doing, she undermined her own

---

[19] Sarah Halley taught me this analogy.

confidence and her instinct to consult her students' parents until we further discussed these issues. Unfortunately, there are no clear rules that delineate appropriate behavior for White people.

Impression management

One of the great challenges for Cara was learning to accept that the parents of her students of color would likely notice her race before they got to know her well enough to know what her race meant about her. And depending on their prior experiences with White teachers, they may have more or less negative notions of what her race meant about how much they could trust her, how much they expected her to work for the best interests of their child and how willing they were to engage with her, particularly when conflict arose.

One concept that has been useful to me in understanding my own identity as a White person (and that I shared with Cara) has been to recognize that when People of Color see me, they may not see the face that I think I am putting forward. People who already know me might see me as Ali when they look at me. They see me as an individual, and if they know me, they tend to know my racial politics. People who do not know me only see what they can see on the outside, which is my White face – the face of a White person, which could be any White person. They do not necessarily know how I enact my Whiteness or whether I am even aware of it. If they have had multiple negative experiences with White people in the past, they may automatically (and unintentionally) exercise caution around me.

Sociologist Erving Goffman's (1986) theory of stigma is useful for understanding these two different identities, which he calls "a virtual social identity" and an "actual social identity" (Goffman, p. 131). Where there are discrepancies between these two identities, it is the result of incorrect expectations that a person's membership in a given category will necessarily indicate how that person will act. Goffman writes that there is a discrepancy "between virtual and actual social identity…that causes us to alter our estimation of the individual upward" (p. 132). Presumably it could cause us to alter our estimations downward as well.

I have heard White teachers say, "If Black parents are just seeing me as another White teacher, then they're being racist towards me." On the contrary, this is not racism and it is not unfair. It is one of the many negative ramifications of living in a racist society. In reality, skin color is one of the first things we know about a person. And even though this can be hard for White teachers to reckon with, we have to acknowledge that our Black students and their parents are likely very familiar with the idea that when they walk around in the world, most White people likely see them as Black before they see anything else. This is a reality of living in a world where race has so much power over the way that we see one another. But for White people living in a predominantly White world, this is not always obvious because many of us have been allowed to think of ourselves as "normal" or without race (Perry, 2002) for most of our lives. It is only within a multiracial context, such as a classroom, where White people cannot escape reckoning with some of these uncomfortable realities of racialization.

Signifying behavior

During one of our inquiry group meetings, Cara sheepishly admitted that she sent the information about a Black Male Symposium at a local university to teachers and parents at her school. She said that she felt awkward about it because on some level she knew she was just doing it to let them know that this was a field that she was interested in learning about and that she was knowledgeable about some resources on Black boys.

I answered her that this type of action is not necessarily shameful behavior; in fact, it can be valuable signifying/distinguishing behavior. Cara wanted to be a teacher that taught the whole child, and she wanted her students' parents to know that she understood that their children's needs, as Black children, were unique. Clearly, if sending out an email about a Black Male Symposium was the only thing that Cara did that differentiated her from the mainstream majority of White teachers, then parents might put little stock in it. But to the extent that it encouraged parents to ask about or look out for other signs of knowledge and understanding about race, it may be a window that helps parents start to see a little bit more Cara and a little bit less "White woman." The faster that can happen in both directions, the sooner they can build authentic relationships based on who they really are rather than on preconceived notions based on past experiences. Sending a notice about an event focused around race is a way of breaking the norm of colormuteness.

Simply finding ways to break the norms of colorblindness and colormuteness within one's school is a significant way to signify to parents that one is willing to break what might be called "Whitestream" rules. *Indígena* scholar and professor of education,

379

Sandy Grande (2003) coined the term "Whitestream" to more accurately describe "mainstream" feminism, which "is not only dominated by White women, but also principally structured on the basis of White, middle-class experience" (p. 330). The term also seems apt for many "mainstream" practices in education that are informed by the White, middle-class experience, such as colormuteness, which Cara was trying to challenge.

One of Cara's main questions was, "As a White woman, how can I connect with the parents of my students in a more authentic way?" In the following quote, she explained how she struggled to have one parent trust her without coming right out and saying, "I'm trustworthy:"

> *I'm really sensitive to the presumptions they might have about me and how I'm treating their children and the idea that maybe on some levels they could be right you know, so…I think that's when I'm communicating with parents or preparing to communicate with parents knowing or feeling like I know, ok so I'm getting the sense from this parent already that she has some trust issues about me as her child's teacher, you know. What do I do with that? [laughs] And I don't want to be lumped with other teachers and I am lumped with all the teachers this kid has ever had (or this parent has ever had) and I understand that. And I don't want to be apologetic cause I think I'm trying to do a good job here and I'm trying to be cognizant about all these things. …But I don't feel like I could openly have a conversation like that that I'm different or that I think about these things at least, you know.*

There is no easy way for anti-racist White teachers to signal to parents that we might be different from other Whites. There is indeed no way to actually know whether we are qualitatively different from other Whites. But given that we think we might be, as Cara suspected she was (in fact, as all the teachers in this study suspected they were, as did I suspect they were), signifying behavior requires knowing the common, unthoughtful

380

White reaction to a given scenario, and intentionally reprogramming so as to have a different response. For example, a common reaction from White teachers who think that they are not going to be trusted because of race might be to blame the parent (maybe call the parent a racist or talk about them behind their back), to build up anxiety and resentment when talking to that parent, or to try to say explicitly, "you can trust me." But if the teacher knows that these are typical behaviors of Whites, and one understands why a Black parent might have trust issues with a White teacher, signifying behaviors might include respecting the parent's space while not taking personal offense to behavior indicative of a lack of trust. In the meantime, one might try to assert oneself in ways that help build trust, realizing it might take longer than usual because the parent is still seeing the teacher as a White person more than as an individual. By the end of the year, Cara did seem to become more agentic in racial matters, both with her class, but also with her students' parents.

How do I support my male students in developing resilience?

Another one of Cara's questions was, "How do I support my male students in developing resilience when faced with adversity in the classroom?"

> *How do I support my male students in developing resilience when faced with adversity in the classroom? I know I teach some students who display signs of hypervulnerability. When I redirect some of my boys, they consistently melt down, cry, get angry and display other ineffective, disruptive and distracting behaviors. I know they respond best to private, one-on-one conversations, during which I explain the reason for the correction or consequence. I also know a big part of my effectiveness is managing my own frustration toward them enough to be able to have these types of conversations. At the same time, I sometimes feel like I'm coddling them when I treat them that way, and that I'm not doing a good job of preparing them for the real world, in which few people will be able to or want to take the time to help them problem-solve. I want to know*

381

how I can support them, honor their needs as male children who are about to enter puberty and still set and maintain limits in my classroom that help all of my children get the most from instruction. I know I've mentioned this in conversation before, but I don't seem to have the same issues when working with female students. – from an email from Cara

Cara pursued her question about supporting Black boys in the classroom throughout the end of the inquiry group and beyond. A number of the readings that we read in the inquiry group were selected to serve this question. Truthfully, it was not visible to me as an observer until Cara brought it up, which is when I began to look for it – and see it. Had she not brought it up, I may not have seen it. Was that because I was expecting less of Black boys? Was it because I was only using a racial lens in her classroom, and not a gendered one? It could be a lot of things. But importantly, Cara did see it, and therefore, so did I. Cara saw her Black boys as a group, which is something that many White teachers struggle to do. In an attempt to project an attitude of "colorblindness," many White teachers will not recognize that their students might have different needs based, in part, on race and gender. Cara was very willing and able to see this.

Valerie, the only Black member of our group, affirmed our decision to talk about Black boys as a distinct group. She said:

> *I'm just really of the firm belief that young Black boys are in a different position than any other group and they are so threatening – people are so completely threatened by them and when they start sliding into a zone of offenses, it's just like a cycle. I don't think, in my life, I can't name you a single boy who started getting in trouble in elementary and middle school and that didn't continue into high school and maybe two or three of them graduated from high school – it's like cycles that perpetuate and snowball. And I think it kind of illuminates the obstacles you face in even wanting to address it…Who of any of us would know how to teach resiliency to little Black boys? I couldn't teach that.*

Cara seemed to be keenly aware of the risks for Black boys that Valerie described. She did not feel threatened by her students, but she was aware that other Whites' fears of them made it even more necessary for them to experience success so that they did not enter the downward cycle that Valerie described. It seemed that part of the issue for Cara was not just wanting to teach resiliency, but wanting to feel like she really understood her male students. Another way that she framed it was, "I've told you this – I have so much less patience for the boys I teach – it gets under my skin, whereas for the girls it's totally different." Cara had the sense that she knew a secret formula for Black fifth grade girls, such that she did not get annoyed by them in the way other teachers did. She understood them; she was able to see them clearly; she was able to get them to perform at high levels and to cooperate. She did not just want boys to develop resilience; she wanted to "get" boys the same way that she "got" girls.

I responded to her request to watch for patterns in how she interacted with boys and girls. There were a couple of patterns that I noticed.

The first was that all of the table captains were girls. When I told Cara that, she acknowledged that it was a problem, but that Chris chose the table captains and he usually chose girls. This is an example of a Perfectly Logical Explanation (PLE). The PLE goes like this: the table captains are not girls because Cara is prejudiced against boys, but because someone else chose the captains and he happens to choose girls for an unexplained reason. I suggested to Cara that in a classroom where you feel the boys are disempowered, it seems essential to achieve parity among the leadership roles in the classroom. Boys should not be given the honor of being table captains if they do not

383

seem capable of accomplishing the task, but surely there must be some boys who could handle the responsibility. Being proactive about achieving such parity requires designing guidelines for whomever is choosing table captains, which may stipulate that at least one of the captains at any given time be a boy. Although the PLE explains why the situation is what it is, it does not justify it.

Similarly, the math tutors were usually girls as well. On the days that I observed the math tutors in action, they were girls helping boys. Before I saw this situation through a gendered lens, I was impressed with the way that Cara had students help one another when they were stuck in math. Through a gendered lens, however, I was disturbed by the ways boys were disempowered, particularly in contrast to the powerful girls who were helping them. How might it have changed their sense of empowerment to be helped by another boy, even if the other boy had not yet mastered the material, but merely understood it marginally better?

I asked Cara what she thought was causing her boys to check out in class.

Ali: When I was in your classroom, I was constantly writing down, like she will not let them sleep, she will not let them put their heads down – that's so good, she has high expectations, she's not tolerating this, that's great. I think you do a really good job with that. And, what's going on with that? Why are they putting their heads down?

Cara: Not many boys have fathers in their lives – maybe 3 at most, 4 have fathers. So in the back of my mind, I'm thinking I'm yet another woman telling them what to do. That might be annoying. A lot of the boys more than girls have flat out said they're angry their dads are not around. Their dads have been dragged in a few times and the kids want them around and the dads say they can't be on the street with them like they want to be and I want to say "Get the fuck back into your kids' life." They want you here and they need you.

As Cara said this, it felt clear to me that she was angry and sad. She seemed like she was

384

on the verge of crying, and yet she kept smiling the whole time.

> *I say things I probably shouldn't say like "man up" – "you're going to be a man some day, let's work on that now" – "pick your head up, stop crying" – compared to girls that don't require the same babying, spoon-feeding. Maybe I'm a misogynist and don't feel like men step up – including my father. Apparently. Sorry, this isn't therapy.*

A number of great things happened in this segment. First, Cara consciously associated her frustration with the emotional neediness of boys with her anger at their dads, as well as her anger at her own dad. She said she knew this was not therapy, and yet, in a way, it was. Most of the teachers in my study referred to our interviews as a form of therapy at some point. Realizing that her anger at her students' fathers might be related to anger at her own father is powerful, and can help her to more effectively manage her anger towards them without projecting the depth of her own anger onto her relatively tenuous and shallow relationships with her students' fathers.

Realizing that she is angry at fathers is useful. If she is able to acknowledge her anger, and recognize it is rooted in her own experiences, then she can be conscious not to let it interfere with her relationships to her students and their fathers. Another way to use her anger would be to connect to the sadness of father loss that her students have, and identify whether that loss influences her view of the boys, either through coddling or distancing. This may help her gain a better understanding of the resistance she feels to her authority and instructions.

Ultimately, whether or to what extent her students' fathers were involved in their lives was not something Cara should or could concern herself with. That was tied to a whole host of social and economic factors that were unrelated to her, and likely unrelated

385

to whether their fathers actually wanted to be separated from their children. And though

her job may have been easier each time a student had two parents at home, or a student

came from a financially stable household, teachers have to teach the students they find in

front of them. And in Cara's case, this included a number of male students who wanted

their fathers to be a part of their lives, and whose fathers were not part of their lives.

When stereotypes pervade evaluations

During one of our inquiry groups, I pointed out to Cara that the way she talked

about her girls and boys seemed to fit stereotypes of Black men and women.

> *Ali: I don't know if this is useful, but I want to just notice that in what*
> *you're saying there are stereotypes about lazy Black men, and tough, self-*
> *reliant Black women. I'm not saying you shouldn't say these things*
> *because you're stereotyping.*
>
> *Cara: I might be.*
>
> *Ali: Right, you might be. But there might be a lot of other things going on*
> *with it too – like maybe your kids are filling a role they think they're*
> *supposed to be playing and maybe you're angry at the boys because you*
> *don't want them to play that role.*
>
> *Cara: When we have transitions, especially during testing, the expectation*
> *is that you read your independent reading book – boys find 99 ways not to*
> *do it and girls, I rarely have to remind them. The boys, they're lying*
> *down, they're pretending to read. A lot of times they're lying down, head*
> *under blazer.*

In pointing out the stereotypes, I was not suggesting that Cara should stop saying

them. A fear of falling into the stereotyping trap is part of what makes White teachers

loathe to make any generalizations based on race or gender. If we are unable to

recognize any trends based on race or gender, we may be missing some of the most

important dynamics that we need to work on. But I also wanted to point out to her that

her generalizations did align with stereotypes. When I realize that my interpretation of someone's actions aligns closely with stereotypes of their racial group, this is usually an indication to me that I might have stumbled upon some unconscious racism. And though that does not necessarily mean that the interpretation is wrong, it should certainly merit a second look.

Infusing Afro-cultural styles into the classroom

With the help of our readings on Afro-cultural styles in education, and resilience for Black males, we generated a number of ideas for Cara to try in her classroom. She decided to stop referring to her boy students as "cry babies" and to stop asking them to "man up." Part of the strategy was just to start seeing her boys as boys, rather than as the men they were going to become. Cara thought of the possibility of introducing African drumming, which she had some training in. The Cunningham and Boykin (2004) article on Afro-cultural styles had suggested introducing more movement and more verve into the classroom. Cara thought she could do that at a transition time and perhaps train a few boys in African drumming so that the drumming was both a leadership position and a chance to learn skills.

> *Cara: I'm just trying to like realize that they're very different. Okay, I have to stop saying that. They need different things and they're not bad for that, you know. They're great and they're hilarious. Most of my boys have really great senses of humor so I'm trying to like enjoy them a little bit more and it's been better recently.*

> *Ali: That's nice. You had said you might try to do some drumming and like transitions and stuff. Is that stuff you're going to start next year or have you tried it?*

> *Cara: No I haven't tried it. I need to remember it. I need to write this stuff down. No, I haven't done it. But I did take your suggestion into*

387

*consideration. I'm trying to like consider boys for helping jobs and
leadership roles more and I've definitely been doing that more and I think
it helps and sometimes you know when a boy's having a hard time I'll
specifically ask him to help me with something. It feels a little
manipulative but it seems to get them on board.*

Cara did not ultimately start the African drumming as we discussed. It is not clear

why, but from our conversation, it sounded like she simply forgot the idea after we talked

about it. I saw this as a loss because she had everything she needed to make this

profound shift: she had been taking lessons, she had a drum, and she was looking for

ways to create different forms of leadership opportunities for some of her students who

could not be academic leaders. Months later we found ourselves in a race workshop

together in which the leader suggested that rather than teach drumming herself, she could

also consider writing a grant for an artist in residence that would pay a local African

drummer to mentor her students. She could facilitate the racial socialization, mentorship

and instruction that this would provide, without engaging in cultural appropriation. This

would provide more opportunities for local artists, and it would get Black men into the

school who might not otherwise have the opportunity.

This suggestion demonstrates one way that Cara could access her sphere of

influence to create opportunities for her boy students to have more Black male role

models in school. She could not change her students' families, but that does not mean

that she could not create opportunities for them to work with Black men in the

community. However, this suggestion also places a number of logistical hurdles in front

of her idea to infuse Afro-centric style and student leadership opportunities for boys in

her classroom. In reality, Cara did have the training and the equipment to initiate this

project independently. It is possible that the suggestion that doing so could be a form of cultural appropriation may have also undermined her confidence when making the change herself would have been a powerful change in the cultural style of her classroom.

When giftedness does not correspond with focus or good behavior

One of Cara's boys appeared to be particularly academically oriented, and yet he seemed to get in trouble an awful lot, usually for being distracted or getting off task. Even from a distance, I could see that Caleb seemed bored. He did not seem to be intentionally getting off task; he just did not have enough going on to keep him engaged. When I brought this up to Cara, she confirmed that Caleb qualified as gifted and she said that she had even attended a conference about engaging gifted Black students. She said she got lots of good strategies for engaging him, but that she had not had the chance to really start implementing them. Actually, she responded by saying:

> *That's because I've been a bad teacher this year and I haven't challenged him and he needs like a lot of, he needs more enrichment than I've provided and I can't say anything more than that. He has to meet expectations but sometimes when he's like fidgeting or acting out it's because I haven't challenged him… The thing about him, I've tried a few times to like have independent projects that are definitely like more challenging than things I provide for the other kids and he still needs a lot of supervision. It's a weird combination of like, maybe it's not that weird, but a kid that's very, very intellectually capable and yet I'll sometimes have him do things at the table outside my room or on the computer and like he'll be doing something else.*

The problem with Caleb might just be the problem with one boy. But I wonder to what extent it might motivate other boys if they were to see one of their male classmates having success? How did the way that other boys succeed or fail in their classroom motivate or demoralize all of the boys? These questions should not eclipse the many

successes that Cara had in her classroom, but nor should they go unaddressed, as they might actually lead to answers to her other questions, such as those related to supporting boys in her classroom. The following section, which addresses Cara's relationship to her assistant teacher, may similarly be related.

Assistant teacher

The first two times I visited Cara's classroom, I was struck by the fact that she had a Black assistant that she had never mentioned in our interviews or inquiry group meetings. A Black man in his late twenties, "Mr. Chris" had a desk in the front of the room. He frequently made photocopies for Cara or set up the TV and VCR. They would sometimes consult on lessons or how to use class time, but he was clearly an assistant. I noted that students called him by his first name, "Mr. Chris," while they called Cara "Ms. Almquist," using her last name. She also seemed to be clearly in charge of things. If he taught a lesson, she sometimes intervened to correct him. If he had a suggestion, she rarely took it, insisting instead that she had thought it out and knew how she wanted to do it. She did not hesitate to interrupt him. Witnessing these dynamics, I felt like he clearly occupied a position of less respect in the classroom and I wondered what effect that had on the students. This may affect the class more broadly, but it also might send an indirect message to the Black males in the room about how much she respects them.

On my third visit, I brought up these concerns with Cara. It did not make sense to me that someone with such a strong consciousness about race would have such an imbalanced relationship with a classroom assistant of color. Cara was very receptive to

my feedback and she clarified the situation by telling me that Chris was her boyfriend

(now husband).

Although there remained countless issues to unpack, many of the dynamics

between Cara and Chris seemed to make sense all of a sudden. She was interacting with

him in ways that seemed eerily familiar to me when viewed through the lens of an

intimate partnership, rather than a professional partnership. And with a little insight into

their relationship, it all seemed quite harmless. Except, of course, for the fact that her

students did not know they were dating. So what her students continued to see

throughout the year was a White female teacher discounting the contributions of a Black

male teacher.

There was a Perfectly Logical Explanation (PLE) for why Chris went by "Mr.

Chris" and Cara by "Ms. Almquist." He had started out at the school as an assistant of

the principal, and he had never intended to stay as long as he did. When he started as a

very young assistant, it made sense for him to be Mr. Chris. As he moved into positions

of more responsibility within the school, the name stuck. Chris did not want to be called

anything else. I wrote to Cara in an email:

> *It was really great to find out that Chris was your boyfriend – I think that*
> *explained a lot. I was so confused about why he went by his first name*
> *and you by your last and I think your explanation made sense – although I*
> *think it would be good for everyone if all the adults in the building had the*
> *same naming code. Otherwise, it may send unintended messages about*
> *rank. It sounds like he's leaving soon, so it won't really make a difference*
> *this year, but it may be something to think about with teaching fellows in*
> *the future.*
>
> *Because he's your boyfriend, I understand more about how easily you*
> *guys talk to each other and even contradict each other. In general, I felt*
> *that he didn't seem to have much space in the classroom to be an*

authority, or to lead the class according to his ideas or style. It makes
sense that since he's your boyfriend, you feel comfortable interrupting him
during a lesson. But this might be sending messages to the kids that you
don't want to send about how much you trust him. It makes perfect sense
to me, knowing that you two have a close relationship. But since the
students don't know that, they may see it as a lack of trust. I think in
general it would be good to decide ahead of time what he's going to do
with the kids and then give him complete autonomy to do it. Does that
make sense? Let me know if you want me to say more on this point.

Cara and Chris disagreed about things the way couples do. Chris gave her flack

for being too uptight and emphasizing academics too much. She felt that he did not have

the same pressure because he was not responsible for test scores. She felt like her

methods of discipline were most effective, yet she admired the ways that he could just

"bust on" kids in a way that pulled them into line in a way they appreciated and

respected. He was a Black man who was a mentor and an example to the Black boys in

her classroom. But it was my observation that she needed to give him the space to fully

develop himself in this role, without being held to doing things her way. Her way was

not bad, but part of acknowledging her Whiteness was also about realizing that she could

not be all things to her students. Chris could be many things to her students that she

could not, but not if he had to do things her way.

Part of living in a White supremacist society is that White people are regularly

affirmed for our way of doing things. Part of undoing our White supremacist training is

realizing that our way is just one of many, and that it is not necessarily better than the

other ways. Cara may not have thought her way was better than Chris's simply because

she was White and he was Black. She was certified to teach and he was not; she was a

more experienced than he; she had a master's degree. All of this evidence might suggest

that she is the better teacher. She was also accountable to the system in ways that he was not. But all of this suggests that competency is only a matter of what can be certified or practiced, rather than something that comes with a person's life experience. This kind of imbalance happens in countless schools, where the assistant teachers (made assistants by a lack of certification) who are often trying to fit into a "Whitestream" faculty, do not get to teach in the ways that they feel are most effective and that might be the most effective for students.

I only saw Chris a few times outside of Cara's classroom, but each time it was clear to me that he was an extremely effective teacher, and that his style was culturally relevant to his students in ways that I had heard Cara hoping to be. He took the chess club he ran to a tournament in Atlanta and then gave awards for this trip to the students at an all-school assembly. He gave all the students nicknames and praised their accomplishments while also teasing them for their missteps:

> *Khalil, checkmate, Nelson. Deon, here he comes, Harris. Andre, don't play, Hunt. Haley, tough stuff, Hunt. Ryan, jump shot, Meager. Ryan, drop a queen, Washington – he got that name because in the last round of the tournament, we needed every single student to win the game. And he's winning and then I see him drop his queen – I went downstairs, I yelled and screamed and I said we're going to lose. And he came downstairs and said, Mr. Chris, I won. After he dropped the queen.*

Chris wrote a play on sit-ins set during the Civil Rights Movement that he performed with the students at the end of the year in front of the whole school. The play and the student acting were both powerful. The performance was outstanding and certainly a reflection on his skill in working with the students.

393

It seemed clear that as an assistant teacher, Chris was probably not getting to use his full potential, not only because of his dynamic with Cara, but because he did not have his own classroom. He did not have a Masters degree or a teaching certification, but he clearly had many experiences that contributed to a certain type of knowledge about being Black and being male, about teaching the Civil Rights Movement in interactive ways and in creating a successful chess club, that also served as a place where students were known, loved and humbled. One way for Cara to "fight Whiteness with Whiteness" might be to protect opportunities for him to teach and engage with the kids even though he did not have all of the qualifications to be a lead teacher.

It is generally problematic when most of the teachers in a school are White and most of the assistants are Black. Because assistantships pay less and carry less accountability than full-time teaching positions, the same role dynamic tends to play out, even among dyads that are not intimate partners. It is a dynamic that perpetuates a racial hierarchy as well as stereotypes about both Whites and Blacks. And yet, it is clearly better to have assistants that are Black, than no Black professionals in the school at all. But it would be best to have Black professionals in teaching and leadership positions as well. And if, for whatever reason, most of the assistants are Black, it is critical that mechanisms are in place to ensure that the assistants are treated with the same respect and authority as the White teachers. A White-Black teacher-assistant dyad that challenges those hierarchies and stereotypes could be extremely powerful.

394

Conclusion

Some people might ask: if racial education made Cara doubt herself more, would it not have been more effective simply not to bother with the inquiry group? As this chapter hopefully makes clear, the inquiry group helped her work through doubts that she had held long before she joined the group. Her doubt was a side effect of the process of reorienting oneself within a world that looks different through the lens of race. By better understanding the range of ways to be anti-racist and White, Cara was eventually able to develop her own power as a White woman without trying to be somebody she was not.

One of the powerful ways that Cara used her Whiteness to fight Whiteness was in her role on hiring committees within the school. She said she always looked for signs that an applicant had experience studying race and education, or working specifically with Black or urban populations. When the committee got excited about an applicant with study-abroad experience, she pointed out that studying abroad is not a sign of qualification for the position; it is a mark of privilege. She tried to keep the process focused on candidates that would better serve their particular population of students. And as a White woman on that committee, her words may have been received more openly than they would have been had she been Black. As Michelle Fine (1997) has written, the common perception is that "White people speak for the common good, and People of Color speak for self-interest" (p. 61). The predominantly White hiring committee likely perceived Cara to be speaking for the common good and therefore listened to her more than they would have if they thought she was speaking from a self-interested desire to have more Black colleagues. This kind of intervention can only be made when one feels

395

confident in oneself as a White person who is unafraid to break norms of colorblindness or colormuteness. And it is the kind of assertive allyship that can be incredibly important to sustaining (and hiring) a network of colleagues that thinks critically about race.

At the beginning of the year, Cara was cautious about being too White, acting too White, or being seen as White, rather than as an individual. And yet, there was nothing she could do to erase her Whiteness. When we, as White people, change, even if it is to include more Afro-cultural styles in our classrooms, or to make racial socialization a more significant part of our teaching, we are going to change slowly; even how we make those changes (scheduling more time for spontaneous discussions, for example) might reflect our Whiteness. As teachers, we are our primary tools for teaching, for building relationships, for making change. No matter how much we learn about African American history or Afro-cultural styles of teaching, and no matter how much we work towards racial socialization or we try to code switch with our students, we will always be White. The way I do things, some of which are "White" ways of doing things, some of which are "middle-class," some of which are unique to me, are a part of who I am. I need to acknowledge the racial and class background to my actions and expectations. The point is not to feel ashamed of our Whiteness, to distance ourselves from it, or to hide our "White" ways of being. It is not bad to be White. But the point of anti-racism is to realize that neither does Whiteness make us better than anyone else.

Chapter 15: RACIAL MICROPROFICIENCIES AND MICRO-PROGRESS: HOMEWORK CLUB

I think the people that live here value education and to have kids in high school who have been in the district ... their whole lives and in tenth grade are reading on the fourth grade level. There's something wrong there. And is it that the policies and the bureaucracies are getting in the way of the learning? I mean around here a big part of it is, "Well we can't do that with the schedule." I mean studies show you that if I worked with kids intensively for thirty minutes a day one-on-one they would be learning to read faster. Why can't we make this happen? I work with twenty-eight kids. Surely somehow you can block out thirty minutes twenty-eight times a week. I mean that's fourteen hours, right? Are you kidding me? Give me the kids! Give me the kids. I'll teach 'em to read. -Ann

-Ann taught high school special education at a predominantly White suburban public high school, in a community in which there was a small, but vocal Black community that had lived in the area for many generations.

Ann grew up in a rural area of Pennsylvania that she described as "a place where there wasn't anybody who wasn't White, Protestant, Catholic." A Sociology major in college, Ann's first job involved working with incarcerated youth. From there she worked briefly at a prison, and then at the parole board, where her job was to help people find jobs. A lot of people she worked with had been in special education, so she started taking classes in teaching special education, which is how she ultimately ended up teaching special education in this predominantly White, predominantly upper middle class suburban school district. She had been teaching here for seven years (out of eleven total years of teaching) at the time of our work together.

Much of Ann's early learning about race took place at her first job, where she took flack for being only one of two White people, and for taking a job away from a Black person who would have understood the youth better. She had to learn quickly in

order to fit in. One colleague named Sissy acted as a cultural interpreter, helping Ann

understand the cultural differences between herself and her clients:

> *We had a secretary in my building and her name was Sissy and Sissy was*
> *one of those, you know, she had 13 grandkids and she always looked like a*
> *million bucks and she um annunciated her words so clearly and so slowly.*
> *She would speak to you with this loving grandmother approach and she*
> *took very good care of me and she would say to me, "You are an old*
> *soul." I had never heard that before. And she said, "In our culture we*
> *believe that an old soul just means it's not your first go around" and she*
> *would explain it. And I would say, "Sissy, I don't understand what is….",*
> *like um I didn't know what the stuff that they put in their hair, Afro-Sheen*
> *or whatever. I had no idea what that was. Someone had to explain that to*
> *me. Um pork rinds, I didn't know what they were. I had never seen them*
> *before. I had no social context for that.*

When Ann first started teaching in this suburban school district, the district did a

day long professional development for new teachers on race in which Black parents from

the district told the teachers about the main different struggles they had in the district.

The presentation was overwhelmingly negative and many of the parents said that they

actually had begun sending their children to private schools because of their negative

experiences with the district. At the time Ann felt frustrated to be given such a negative

portrayal of where she was about to start work, and yet she said that over time she

realized that everything the parents had told them was true.

She joined a reading group led by a colleague of color in which a multiracial

group of teachers met monthly to discuss *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in*

the Cafeteria? When Ann joined the cultural competency group a few years later, she felt

eager to learn more and eager for the space to be with like minded colleagues. She talked

about herself as a "cultural competence geek":

When I sit there I feel like a big dork because I'm totally into it and I don't know why other people are there but I know why I'm there. I wish that I could have a sabbatical and just read the literature…. I learn better that way…. Give me the study, let me read the study, let's talk about the study, let's figure out what we have to do.

Ann joined the inquiry group to try to better understand why her tenth grade students were reading on a fourth grade reading level; her questions were investigative more than content or process driven. She was not asking, "How do I teach students of color?" She was asking: "Why won't they let me teach students of color? Why are my Black students so far behind when they are obviously competent? Why won't they give me the time we need to make sure they are meeting their learning goals?"

She also used the group to calibrate her own competence:

I think that it's helping me to understand that it's okay to talk about it and that it's like a touchstone for me like, "Okay, that part's right? Okay, good. This part - I need to work on that? That's cool too." It's helping me with self-assessment I guess. 'Cause I'm perfectly fine with someone saying to me, "Hey Ann, that's not right."

The main reason Ann joined the group was her already present awareness that the school district needed to change in order to more effectively educate Black students.

This comes around full circle for me because this is why I want to teach. This is the whole nut for me. Why do African American males typically choose to not engage in school? The majority of students that I have for reading are African American and I don't know why that is. I mean I know all the theoretical factors. When I talk with them and I say to them, "What was reading like for you in 1ˢᵗ grade, 2ⁿᵈ grade, 3ʳᵈ grade?" I want to get a feel for why do they hate reading? Why do they like reading?

Ann could see that the school and its systems needed to be completely overhauled. But she did not let structural thinking overwhelm her to the point where change seemed impossible; the changes that she wanted to make were entirely

399

reasonable. She primarily wanted to adjust her schedule so that she could run a

homework club after school, specifically targeted at students who did not complete their

homework at home.

Chapter Theme: RACIAL MICROPROFICIENCIES AND MICRO-PROGRESS: HOMEWORK CLUB

Other chapters have introduced the idea of racial microaggressions, which are

defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental

indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or

negative racial slights and insults toward People of Color" (Sue et al., p. 271, 2007). This

chapter will focus on the inverse, which I am calling "microproficiencies." These include

Ann's many tiny actions, statements and understandings that contributed to a supportive

and challenging environment for Black students in her classroom. This chapter

enumerates the many aspects of race and education that Ann seemed to have assimilated

so fully that they seemed second nature to her. I hold them up as examples of how

simple some of this work can be, demonstrating that interventions around race do not

necessarily have to involve race-explicit conversations or major structural changes.

Because Ann taught special education, all of this takes place within the context of a

special education classroom, the racial implications of which will also be explored here.

Ann's primary goal was to create an after school homework club to support

students who had difficulty completing their homework at home. Some of her wealthy

students had private tutors four days a week, which meant that they never failed to

complete their homework. But many of her lower SES students who did not regularly

complete their homework would have been able to do so more regularly if they had more

support. Ann already regularly stayed after school to help students and she sometimes met students in coffee shops before big exams to help them study. This chapter will explore her efforts to implement such a support structure.

The only other questions that Ann asked about her own practice were related to communication and sarcasm. The limited nature of her questioning within the scope of this study was not representative of Ann's general attitude toward race, which involved constant inquiry in which she read books and solicited feedback from colleagues of color. This chapter will look at her questions about communication, but Ann's case provides multiple opportunities for analysis beyond her questions because of the many microproficiencies that she demonstrated, through both her knowledge and her skills, that helped her be an autonomous White teacher.

Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of political affiliation. Unlike the rest of the participants in this study, Ann identified as a Republican. I will end with a brief discussion of how a strong racial analysis does not necessarily have to correspond with liberal politics, and how the ease with which Ann assimilated knowledge about race may be related to the fact that her self-image did not seem to be connected to her racial knowledge. Perhaps she was not threatened by critical feedback, in part, because she did not self identify as a liberal.

Classroom vignette

The classroom filled slowly as the students (two Black boys, one Black girl and two white boys) drifted in one at a time. There were so few of them that the informality that pervades most classrooms at the beginning and end of the period, when only a few students are in the room, remained throughout the period.

The classroom was a bright corner room at the end of two long identical White hallways, with big windows onto a field of dust and construction equipment. This was the first year in a brand new school building and the field outside had yet to be seeded with grass. Everything seemed clean and new, if a bit sterile. All of the students and teachers were provided with brand new Mac laptops for use in school and at home.

On the board, there was a drawing of a multicolored birthday cake. Ann said she had been absent the day before, but she came in to leave plans for the substitute and drew the birthday cake for one of her students so that she could tell her, "I made you a cake!"

Chris, one of the Black boys in the class, was a paraplegic and sat in an electric wheelchair. He was accompanied by a White male aide to all of his classes. Ann told me that if it were not for his disability, he would not be in special ed; he was mentally very bright. She redirected him early in the class by saying: " Chris – no crap – this way." She instructed his aide to work with two other students for the period. This particular period, the adult to student ratio was 2:5. The highest I saw the teacher: student ratio get in Ann's class was 3:8. The room never felt full.

Throughout the course of the hour, Ann worked with different students in small groups, as well as with all five students as a whole group. She read passages and asked them questions. She gave them pens and pencils if they did not have them. She intervened when they insulted each other. And she tried to inspire them to come up with interesting and relevant essay topics.

When Chris teased Denise about being dark-skinned, Ann stepped in:

Ann: Stop. It's bullying.

Chris: You can write me up if it's bullying. Then you [to Denise] *can tell her what you tell me every night when we talk on the phone.*

Denise: We don't talk on the phone every night.

Chris: She's lying.

Ann: She's a bad liar and that's a problem. But you do understand that that makes her uncomfortable and it makes her feel bad. We've talked about this before that you need to honor your friends.

Then she changed the subject back to their work on the Exxon Valdez oil spill.
Ann: This article that we read yesterday. Are we clear on that?

She looked at a student who wasn't writing and asked, "Need a pencil?"

After a few more minutes of reading and answering questions, she said to a White student, "Why do you think this matters? You look so incredibly bored right now."

Student: I don't think this matters.

Ann: What part, the oil spill?

Student: No, I think it's important to know about, I just don't know why we're doing this.

Ann: I'm trying to teach you to be a better test taker and if you apply good test taking skills, you can take a test on something you know nothing about and still score decently. When you take the SAT and you're pressed for time, there are still ways that you can increase your opportunity for success if you infer, using your knowledge of English language, etc.

A few minutes later a Black male teacher came to speak with Ann and she stepped out of the room to speak with him. While Ann was out of the room, Chris motored his wheelchair over to Ann's desk to get the lotion and took it back to the table where he had been sitting.

Denise said, "I need lotion too."

Chris answered, "I know you need lotion, why do you think I brought it over?"

Denise: I'm not dry today.

Chris: You are. Back of your neck is.

Denise: You can't see the back of my neck.

Later in the conversation, Ann tried to motivate students around the essay writing portion of their work by reminding them that they have opinions and topics that they could write about passionately. She said to Denise, who grew up in New Orleans and moved to this school district after the flood, "You know what could be fun for you is writing about how Louisiana is just overcoming the hurricane and now it's about to be struck by this oil. They won't let the shrimp boats out, which is driving the shrimp fisherman crazy because they're like 'there are shrimp out there and they're just going to die when the oil comes in because they're very sensitive to changes in the water.' You could even make it your love of Louisiana, everything you love about Louisiana."

Denise looked at Ann without reacting, then went back to her work.
Ann said to the others: I have this long weekend ahead of me and I need some seriously fabulous writing to read.

Student: I thought you were reading a book.

Ann: I am reading a book – two books – but one is scary, though. It's about writing essays.

Student: Why would read that? It's like reading an instruction manual.

Ann: It's about how to teach writing an essay.

The entire class was a constant back and forth of informal discussion, joking, instruction and some teacherly reprimands. Ann teased and cajoled the students, who in turn pretended to be unamused while continuing to do their work, asked questions and began conversations with Ann. It seemed very obvious that her students liked her, and that they felt ownership and belonging within the classroom.

Ann's classroom did not seem particularly radical. She did not have images of famous people of color posted around the room, nor did she integrate alternative histories into her curriculum. In describing her action project (starting a homework club), which she had conceived of in the context of working for racial equity, she did not mention race. At first I perceived this as an unwillingness to name or talk about race. But it quickly became apparent that Ann was willing to talk about race when it mattered. But she also felt comfortable leaving it out when it did not seem to advance her cause. She demonstrated a confidence and a fluidity of cultural competence that came across in many different tiny actions, which I have come to call microproficiencies.

Racial microaggressions, defined at the beginning of this chapter, derive their power from both their cumulative effect and their rootedness in socially acceptable racist ideas. If a racial microaggression only ever happened once, it would not qualify as a microaggression because it would be easily excusable as strange or anomalous. But they are powerful because they show up frequently, and from many different people and

places. They amount to a form of racism in the way that they cumulatively deliver a message of exclusion.

Ann's microproficiencies were powerful because they were rooted in her deep and thorough respect for her Black students and their families, her background knowledge from formerly working with a Black population, as well as her high expectations for her students' performance. The cumulative effect of these microproficiencies was a classroom in which students seemed to feel cared for, challenged and understood. This chapter will look at her many different racial microproficiencies as they relate to communication, having and conveying high expectations, having knowledge of and relationships with Black students and their families, her ability to continue to develop her skill set around race and her competence in her job skills.

Special Education

Because teachers only see what happens in their own individual classrooms, they sometimes forget the extent to which they are arbiters of a bureaucracy, which, once in motion, is difficult to reverse. In Ann's case, she was constantly navigating the bureaucracy of the school alongside and on the behalf of her students. Her microproficiencies made it possible for her to act as a cultural translator between the school and the families, just as Sissy had once done for her. The following vignette about a boy named Matthew demonstrates the importance of these microproficiencies to supporting one of her Black students with the help that he needed:

This particular boy has been in special ed since first grade so have we not expected enough from him? Did we not put enough in place? Did we put too much in place? Like, you know, so you're armchair quarterbacking.

Matthew was a Black boy, who came to Ann's classroom as a ninth grader testing on a second or third grade reading level. After one year of working with Ann, he was reading on a "sixth, seventh or eighth grade reading level." She said it was not hard to move him forward, but it required really holding him to the expectations and forcing him to sit down and focus. When Matthew was in middle school, he spent half the school day in a special education support classroom. In high school, he only had one period of special education support. There was no district wide structure to help the students transition from the middle school to the high school, nor was there a system to ensure that the students were getting what they needed. Ann said that he never did homework – and his teachers did not penalize him for it. She said she believed that teachers saw his baggy pants and his flip flops and just pitied him—or feared him—and thought that he could not do any better. She said, "I think they found it easy to blame it on him and I wonder if he was White, how would they have handled this? We have district policy – he was late for classes a number of times and he didn't get the detention or calls home he was supposed to get."

When she asked teachers if they had called home to talk to his parents, she said they said that they were shy to call. They said it was awkward when they called and they felt like it seemed like the families did not want to talk to them. Ann said to the other teachers, "They're sitting in their kitchen just like you're sitting in your kitchen. Just call them, ask them if they're free… I always ask, is this a good time to talk? It gives them a

406

chance to say, no actually, I'm in the middle of dinner, it's not a good time." She said she always calls in the evening or around dinnertime, but she always gives parents the chance to say they are unavailable.

This is where Ann's micro-proficiencies seemed to matter most. Because she felt comfortable calling Black parents, and because she had a rule of calling parents at the beginning of the year before the students had the chance to be in trouble, and because she understood that Black parents may misinterpret her intention as a White person (i.e., she was prepared for some mistrust and felt comfortable disarming it), her anxiety about calling Black parents was minimized to the point where she was able to make contact when it mattered for the student. This, combined with her confidence that she could teach students to read, her expectation that students who grew up in the district should know how to read, and her willingness to work extra to help her students meet academic goals, all made the difference for this one boy. The fact that he had not had a teacher with such microproficiencies as Ann's until ninth grade meant that his reading skills had been severely delayed.

Ann seemed to know how to make school approachable for students in special education. She had computer programs that could produce "parallel texts" for students reading on a lower grade level so that they could read the required material at a grade level that was not overwhelming to them. She also tried to work with teachers to create tests that actually measured what students knew, rather than whether they could navigate complicated testing procedures. But she found that other teachers were often cynical

about these support measures for students in special education. Both colleagues and

administrators did not seem concerned about the progress of students in special ed.

> *Does the kid read better today than he did yesterday? Does his, you know…does their ability to navigate the curriculum…the process, are they making progress on that or are they shutting down? I've got kids who I could show you who are failing everything, but they're still doing their homework. I don't know about you, but when I was in college and I had statistics and I wasn't passing I dropped that bad boy and I got out of there and I tried it again, right. You know what I'm saying? Fight or flight right, most of those kids are out of there. If I was the principal I would be coming into the classroom and be saying, "How's it going today? What are you reading? What's going on?" I've never seen anybody.*

In spite of his progress with Ann, Matthew still continued to have problems. One

particular teacher constantly resisted when Ann asked her for materials so that she could

work with Matthew one-on-one. When she refused to give her materials, Ann suggested

that she should just let her know what would be on the test so she could help him study.

The teacher responded, "Oh, so you want to just teach to the test?" Other teachers were

upset because Matthew did not do the homework. Ann's response to this was:

> He doesn't do homework. If he could focus enough to do homework, he would not be in special ed. If he were able to do homework on his own, he wouldn't need extra help. He doesn't necessarily have people at home who can help him when he gets stuck on homework. So we can't make homework the deciding factor in his grade.

Ann did not blame Matthew's parents for his lack of homework completion, but noted

that they, for whatever reason, were unable to help him. Another microproficiency that

she demonstrated was that she worked to accommodate students like Matthew as they

were, rather than change his family. She knew that Matthew did not complete homework

at home and for that reason, she wanted to create a place where he would be able to

complete it at school.

408

Creating homework club

From a critical race theory perspective, achieving racial justice in schools may demand that we tear down the entire educational system as it stands today and rebuild it from the ground up. There is so much inequity built into the ways that schools are structured, run and funded, that small changes will not be sufficient for achieving true racial justice. And yet, for any individual teacher working within schools today, such a solution is completely untenable. Ann seemed to recognize that she was working within a flawed system, and that there were many things that needed to be changed throughout her district (not to mention the entire metropolitan area) in order to give her specific students a fair chance at success. And yet, she did not seem to become overwhelmed by the enormity of the issue, but rather stayed focus on her sphere of influence.

Ann's main project for cultural competency was actually quite small. She wanted to create an after school homework club. Perhaps what was most surprising about this change was that it did not appear to be racialized in nature. Even though racial justice might indeed require a complete overhaul of the system, many things can be accomplished when individual teachers make small changes within their sphere of influence, especially given the fact that much of what is wrong, or unequal, is the result of the accumulation of many very small things. Ann seemed to understand this and she put her energy toward making change on her local school level.

> *There are things I think the district needs to work on as far as services and taking responsibility for 100% of the education and that often colleagues in a conversation will say… "Well the kid doesn't do homework. Well what are the parents doing?" Well that's not the question. The question is the child doesn't do homework - do we offer homework club? Do we stay after school with them? What do we do outside of school to help support*

409

them? What do we do during the school day to help support them? Do we have an environment where that is encouraged or is the lack of homework seen as a penalty? You know what I mean? Just looking at homework as a whole and I would imagine the statistics on certain groups you would find that some kids do far more homework at night.

Ann seemed to know many of the strategies that would improve circumstances for her students, but the school district did not support her to implement them. The after school club that she wanted to create would be there to support students who had difficulty completing their homework at home. Some of her wealthy students had private tutors four days a week. But many of her students of lower socio-economic status would have been able to do their homework more regularly if they had support. Ann already often stayed after school to help students and she sometimes met students in coffee shops before big exams to help them study.

> *You know, what am I supposed to do? Go home with them at night? 'Cause I'm a dork I have them meet me at Starbucks to help them work on their essays, but I have my own two kids at home.*

But none of this was supported by the school:

> *Ann: If I had my dream I would work 'til 430 everyday. I would come in at 10 and work 'til 430.*
>
> *Ali: But you usually have to leave earlier?*
>
> *Ann: Well everything from 2:40 on is on my own time and what they really need is help after school.*
>
> *Ali: But nobody is going to pay you to stay later. Is that a union thing?*
>
> *Ann: Well it is. We had um a meeting set up and I said to Steve I wanted to do some after school, like the library is open, the help center is open so that if they need help they can come in and get help so that someone could say to a parent, "We have an after school club and I'm going to sign your kid up. He will call you everyday that he's with me to let you know that he's here." Because I like to make it that the children have to call, but in*

my plan the phone call or the email to mom with an email back that says, "Sure you can stay. You're getting help, what are you working on?" um because then it puts the homework business out of the home and is still the school's responsibility, but all kids are welcome. Well we got shut down because certain people said, "You can't offer that and offer your services because you're not getting paid for it." So if you did it and I was the only person who said that I would be after school everyday 'til 4:30 then parents count on that and then if I wasn't here, where would they go? So it's like the absence of a system prevents support even though we know support is what they need. So my dream job would be that.

Ann pointed out that, "They pay teachers to do detention, but they won't pay them to do homework enrichment." And yet, because she was required to teach five periods a day, but she did not have enough students to fill all five classes, she was required to attend another class in the mornings and listen to another teacher teach. She said that he was a great teacher, but it was a waste of her time. Why could she not do a homework club after school as her fifth period of teaching, rather than going to sit in another teacher's classroom?

The cultural competency group that Ann was a part of was part of a larger effort organized by the Superintendents of her district to catalyze change. Ann seemed to be an ideal person to participate in the changes that the district was trying to make. She thought in terms of systems, but not at the expense working locally within her own classroom to be culturally competent. She had internalized so much of the learning about race that she had authentic relationships with students of color and their families and she seemed to be in touch with the needs of her students. As somebody who came from a working class socioeconomic background, she understood how to support lower SES students both financially and emotionally without ostracizing or alienating them. But in spite of all of this hard-earned knowledge, the district did not seem to want to listen to

411

her. She was simply one of many special education teachers at one of the district's more than ten schools. Except for the inquiry group, she was not chosen to participate in any of the district's projects on race. She said, "'Yes-people' get to go on things like that. 'Feather-rufflers,' we don't get to go on those things." She felt that since she was a "feather-ruffler" and pursued actual change, her ideas would not be considered by the district.

Communicating with students

> *I used to think that being culturally competent was about treating everybody the same. Now I'm clear that that's not quite right because obviously everybody needs something different. And yet, I want the students to know that I treat them all the same – that I have the same standards and the same expectations for all of them.*

Ann's microproficiencies were not only race related, but they were related to her skills as an experienced teacher as well. She seemed to have two key communication strategies that she used effectively with students. First, she constantly maintained control of the conversation with her students while keeping them engaged and entertained. Second, she seemed to be able to hold and communicate high expectations for student achievement and behavior while acknowledging their different learning needs.

To stay in control of the conversation, Ann consistently joked with her students and engaged them in the conversation, in spite of their best efforts to show that they were not interested. In such a small classroom setting, such friendly inclusion seemed important, lest some students feel like they did not belong.

In the following scenarios, Ann directly engaged the students' comments and then either made a joke or stated a message in a way that consistently redirected the students.

412

Student: Can we have the class outside today in the courtyard?

Ann: Don't I wish. Let's just go to the beach. Listen, I have enough trouble keeping you guys focused in here, you think I'm going to take you outside where there are Frisbees flying around?

Ann: I'd like for you to tell me three things you'd like to be involved in. It might be chess, it might be drama, it might be yearbook…

Chris: None, none, none.

Ann: Might be the negativity club. You could be the president.

Ann did not immediately contradict her students, but she picked up the conversation where they were and steered them back. This may not necessarily have anything to do with race, but it was a strategy that worked with all of her students. The Black students in her classroom appeared to feel some centrality and agency within the classroom and they certainly must have felt comfortable enough to joke because that was one of the main activities in the classroom.

The following example shows Ann mediating between two students – a White boy named Nick and a Black girl named Keisha:

Ann: What's wrong?

Keisha: I'm sick

Nick: You're always sick.

Ann to Nick: Come here – I want to talk with you for a second. Remember how hard it was to be in the same room at the beginning of the year? You… have so much in common. You've done such a good job not paying attention to each other this year.

Ann consistently managed to change the subject in this way, which redirected students rather than reprimanding them. I was expecting her to tell Nick why he should not hurt

Keisha or why it is rude to tell somebody "you're always sick." But she just reminded

him of how well he had ignored his classmate previously and asked him to continue to

ignore her.

In spite of the informal setting of the classroom, Ann still had to maintain

boundaries for students. When one student got up out of his seat while he was supposed

to be working, Ann said, "Stop – stop, stop, stop, stop, stop. Sit." She did not stop

saying "stop" until he stopped. Then she gave him further direct instruction. Sit. He

smiled, looked at the ground and reluctantly sat. This is important, in part, because she

was talking to a boy who had been ignored by most of his other teachers and allowed to

fail. She would not let him walk away from his work.

Although these communication strategies were not directly related to race, I

believe that Ann was able to implement them because she was not preoccupied with self-

doubt about whether she was treating her Black students differently from her White

students, or whether she should. She had thought about race critically and for a long

time, so that when she went into the classroom she was able to pursue her first instinct in

communicating with and disciplining students, regardless of race. At the beginning of

the school year, two of her students accused her of being a racist. She was defiant in her

response to them in a way that helped her maintain her authority so that she could

continue to hold them to high standards:

> *Ann: So in the beginning of the year two kids… were both like, "Oh you're racist." And I was like, "You can call me a lot of things but that's not one of them because that's just not true." And I don't know which administrator they talked to but they got support on that and they've never again said…*
> *Ali: Got support on they can't call you that?*

Ann: Yeah like, "You don't even know her. You don't get to pull that one out nowhere."

Communicating high expectations

Ann taught special education, which is a place in the school stereotypically known as a place of low expectations. And yet she managed to have and to communicate high expectations for both behavior and achievement. Maintaining high expectations for behavior generally involved insisting on a particular type of behavior until students complied. But it also involved the agency to set boundaries.

> *Denise took off her sweatpants and had shorts on underneath. Ann came back in the room and said, "Denise – that's a little short – pull 'em down, pull 'em down, sissy."*

In this example she took it upon herself to decide what pant length was appropriate for Denise and to enforce that standard. Although this was a very small gesture, it is in line with what Franita Ware (2006) calls a "warm demander pedagogy," which is a pedagogy that combines exercising authority, "other-mothering" and warm demanding (among other things) in order to support the success of African American students.

In a one-on-one meeting with a student, she held up an example of that student's work that demonstrated competence and then demanded that he continue to meet that bar.

> *Ann: So, what I need to know, like this writing sample, which is fabulousity – why isn't there more like this? I love you and I'm here for you, but your behavior is your business. Academically, you're right on target. You spend 10x more energy trying to look like you don't care when I know that you're capable. You're a grown man. Anyone who can write like this can give me more across the board. Don't tell me no. It's all here. This all goes in your file. 'Kay?*

While I do not believe in telling teenage boys that they are grown men, I hold up these examples of Ann expressing high expectations because in my observations of Todd (see

415

chapter 8) it became clear that teachers often do not know what holding high expectations looks like. In this excerpt, Ann did a number things: she showed the student she cared, asked him for more, demonstrated that he had proven himself capable of meeting a higher bar and insisted that she would not accept anything less. This is not to say that simply doing those things would change things in Todd's classroom. Ann usually had a 1:3 adult: student ratio while Todd often had a ratio of 1:16 or more. She did not have to do extensive classroom management, which freed her up to have conversations with students and to respond to them individually. Even if Todd knew what to say, he might not have the time to say it. But knowing how high expectations get expressed is part of unlocking the puzzle, as well as knowing that Ann spent most of her time everyday, like a broken record, reinforcing students' competence even as they constantly undermined themselves and their own ability.

Having high expectations within a special education context seemed particularly tricky for Todd because he did not want to set the bar so high that the students became frustrated or demoralized. Ann notably had high expectations while simultaneously recognizing that there were certain things she could not expect from her students. She often had to advocate for them with their other teachers, as in the following example from my field notes because, as she said multiple times during our work together, "If they could do this, they wouldn't be in Special Ed."

> *The teacher was upset because the test went from number 31-60 and she wanted the students to fill in the answers beginning with #31, not with #1. The student had started with #1. She said she couldn't grade it because was it was on the Scantron sheet. Ann said to me after the teacher left, "You know this is so typical. If the boy could follow the directions to fill it in from #31, he wouldn't need to be in special ed. But he took the test, he*

answered the questions about the material. What do you want to know – if he understands the content or if he can take a test?"

It seemed that a large part of Ann's work was helping students navigate school. They often could handle the material, but not the way it was presented, or the way it was tested, or the organizational skills required to remember when to study for the tests. It was instructive for me to see that if a student did not have a pencil or a pen, Ann simply supplied it. In Todd's classroom, I interpreted his students' persistent need for a pencil or pen (and his compliance in supplying it) as a reflection of his low expectations for their participation. In Ann's classroom, it seemed that she considered it part of her job to provide those small things that got in the way of her students being able to complete their work. The reason it seemed untenable for Todd to constantly supply his students with pencils was that there were 20 of them rather than 5, as in Ann's classroom. Perhaps that example demonstrates the unreasonable situation he was in rather than a reflection of his low expectations.

Racial microproficiencies

The following is a list of the skills and knowledge that Ann demonstrated in our interviews and in my observations that I count as racial microproficiencies. Some of them seem quite significant while others seem so basic they may even be silly. But the simple ones stood out as microproficiencies because they were things that Ann knew about race that some of her White colleagues did not:

Knowledge:

Kids need to have the space to be themselves and race is part of who they are.

Cultural proficiency work includes examining rates of disproportionality in special education.

Family structures that extend beyond the nuclear family are a resource, not a deficit.

Students who do not get help with homework at home need a place to do it in school. This does not apply only to Black students.

There is great diversity among Black students, just as there is among White, Latino and Asian students.

Black children may not have the same skin tone as their parents, even if both their parents are Black.

Black students need to know their teachers care for them and love them, just like all students. And they need non-Black mentors. But they also need Black mentors and White teachers can help make those connections.

Everybody has culture and it influences how we relate to school.

Just because a student calls me a racist does not mean I have to second-guess myself.

Not all Black people know one another.

White privilege makes it easier for White teachers to fit into predominantly White school environments, even if they come from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Race and class are linked, and certain district practices are exclusionary for students from families from lower SES backgrounds.

All students should have access to copies of books they are reading and teachers should be conscious of the racial and economic stigma they might trigger if they try to provide books in an unsystematic way (i.e. publicly targeting the students who they think cannot buy their own books).

We cannot always treat Black students the same way we would treat White students because we are constantly embedded in larger historical circumstances. What might be a normal, reasonable punishment for a White student may be excessively shameful for a Black student.

Microproficiencies were not just about Ann's knowledge, but her skills, which

helped her learn that knowledge.

Skills:

Fall and recover: Ann was able to solicit and assimilate feedback, to
constantly inquire, and to continue to engage with students and colleagues
even after she made mistakes or received critical feedback.

Local application of racial ideas: Ann seemed to be able to take certain
ideas from the cultural proficiency group and use them to ask different
questions about her students. She did not automatically apply new
concepts to all of her Black students. Nor did she disregard concepts when
she found students to whom they did not apply.

Observing and naming racialized trends: When a Black female student
stood up to a White male student, she acknowledged the magnitude of it, as
it challenged so many trends she had observed in which Black female
students deferred to White male students.

It may be self-evident that most Black teachers would have had most of the micro-

proficiencies that Ann had. These are not terribly complex skills, but they seem to be

harder to acquire for White people, especially given that we live in such a segregated

society. Ann was able to learn them over time, but she was clear that her primary

teachers of racial knowledge were Black colleagues and administrators.

Conclusion

Ann had lots of different types of race knowledge. Some of it was superficial,

like her knowledge of Afro Sheen; some of it was cultural, such as appreciating, rather

than criticizing, different family structures; and some of it was common sense

accompanied by a critical analysis of stereotypes, such as her understanding that many

Black families have traditional two parent family structures while many White families

do not. She understood the nuances of racial difference in a way that helped her to be

non-judgmental. Ann learned all of this from experience, but her case raises the point that race knowledge can be taught. Ann's colleague Sissy acted as a cultural agent for Ann in many of the same ways that we ask teachers to act for students. Lisa Delpit (2006) writes that White teachers need to similarly act as cultural agents for students, explicitly teaching them the culture of power.   Sissy was explicit about Black culture in a way that helped Ann be open, and feel *competent* in her role as a teacher of Black students.

Microproficiencies, like microaggressions, are small and barely perceptible, but they can make a big difference to the lives of individual students as they navigate our educational system. Ann was receptive to learning these microproficiencies because she was willing to learn from, and ask question of, Black colleagues; her self image was not significantly threatened when she realized that there were things she needed to learn; and she continuously pursued professional development opportunities on race, such as the cultural competency group and the teacher reading group at her school.

Chapter 18: CONCLUSION

Like many other white teachers in the United States today, the teachers in my study believed that race mattered in their classrooms, but at the beginning of this process they were not sure quite how. Throughout the course of the year, we discovered that race mattered even more than we could have foreseen at the beginning of our work together. Teachers needed to be able to translate a general understanding of structural racism to their classroom and recognize the ways that it affected themselves and their students. This did not necessarily mean teaching about racism (although sometimes it did), but understanding the way that racism shaped their schools and their classrooms. This included the ways that Black children were under-recommended for honors, AP and gifted classes, and how that in turn affects everybody's image of what a gifted or smart child looks like and how that in turn affected how children acted, and to what they aspired. This included recognizing how unwritten rules excluded and marginalized children whose families were new to the school culture and how racist notions of who is good and who is bad shaped the ways that students related to one another and to themselves in the development of their self images. It included working with White colleagues and building a network of anti-racist teachers that was bigger than each individual.

My data support the notion that schools are places where race gets constructed. It is striking, in hindsight, that three of the seven case study chapters address the gate keeping roles that teachers played in gifted education, special education and honors classes, and the conflicts that teachers had over their roles in facilitating these classes and

deciding who got in and who did not. Sam felt the idea to abolish honors classes was misguided because he felt it limited the possibilities of academic challenge for all students. Scott liked being able to teach a fast paced class for students classified as gifted and he felt that the students benefited from being able to work in a small group quickly. Ann was able to see that she had students who did not belong in special education, but also that they were there, and needed to be there, because of how they had been treated by other teachers over the years so that they ultimately did not have the skills to be in the regular education track. What Ann could do that the other two teachers were just starting to do was see the ways that the system, as it stood, shaped the students and the classroom she saw before her. Sam was just beginning to recognize how the literature selection and the honors system channeled White students into his honors classroom, such that the disproportionality in his room was not entirely accidental, nor was it an accurate reflection of student potential.

It is incredibly difficult to transform a system while it is in operation, particularly because the students within the system manifest the symptoms and skills of their placement within the system. Students do not necessarily stick out as obviously misplaced in regular education because they are always already being shaped by their location in the system. They may have the potential to be honors students, but they are currently not honors students—not necessarily because of their capacity, but because of their skill level and their current level of challenge, their current regular education peer group expectations and their self-perception as regular education students. The weight that these themes of gate keeping took on demonstrates the importance of the systems

422

within which we work. Teachers are simultaneously gatekeepers and advocates, reformers and maintainers of the system.

This research also demonstrates the importance of studying—and teaching—white people as a group. Whites not only have a race and are part of the racialized structure of the U.S., but because of their shared location in that racialized structure, White people share similar obstacles to learning about race. The racial contract (Mills, 1997) for example, which enforces colormuteness, is held in place by the majority group in any given institution. Because most schools have a majority of White teachers, this colormuteness tends to guide the conversational norms of most schools. But it does not have to. If more White teachers learned how to break the racial contract, business as usual could change.

As Giroux (1997) has suggested, we have to provide White people with possible ways to be White that are not oppressive. Whiteness should not simply be synonymous with oppression, but also "a form of identity and cultural practice" (Giroux, p. 383). White culture is not inherently oppressive, but when White people believe their way of doing things is superior, Whiteness easily becomes oppressive. And when our cultural Whiteness is "invisible" to us, we stand the greatest risk of uncritically using it to impose norms of behavior, interaction and achievement on others.

My research illustrates the particular challenges inherent in building the racial proficiency of White teachers. Theories about structural racism were not sufficient for helping White teachers make decisions with regard to individual students in their classrooms. Teachers required extensive personal coaching to support them in their

necessarily experimental and iterative processes of applying theories of race and education to their classrooms. Teaching a White person, for example, that White privilege exists and that they have received it throughout their lives (one of the main objectives and main sticking points of many anti-racism trainings for Whites) is only marginally useful compared to helping White teachers use the concept of White privilege as a tool for understanding classroom dynamics. This might involve learning to ask which students are in the margins or on the periphery in terms of race, and asking how a teacher can help to facilitate the experience of being central in the classroom— geographically, emotionally, in terms of achievement or in terms of social relationships. The goal of teaching about privilege is for people to see it as shaping their lenses, contributing to how they judge others, influencing what they think they should be able to do and how they think children should respond in particular situations. The goal is not to make people feel guilty over the fact that they have had racial privilege.

Collaborative observations were particularly useful for helping teachers construct a new anti-racist lens for seeing their classroom, their students and their curriculum in terms of race. As the data show, teachers do indeed have many important questions about race, but they required a certain amount of safety and background knowledge to ask those questions out loud. This study also shows the importance of creating racial proficiency trainings for experienced teachers, both because of the great need for it among even veteran teachers like some of those in this study, but also because experienced teachers have a much deeper sense of the myriad race questions that they already come up against daily.

Teaching White people as a group can also be important to supporting them through their specific, race-related anxieties. The "untouchable" questions that White teachers asked in this study are particular to White people, who have internalized the idea that talking about race in certain ways will make them racist. When Helene asked her questions about Wendell's African American Vernacular English (AAVE), she did so only after I disclosed the conflicts and issues that I have had as a White person and a teacher. Supporting White teachers to learn about race involves an awareness of the unspoken rules and conventions that hold them back, and a willingness to break through those one's self.

White teachers have a distinct process of racial identity development—distinct as White people, but distinct as teachers as well—which involves the difficult and radical work of filtering racial theory and applying it in practice, while bending it to accommodate it to the developmentally appropriate level for children of many different races. In order to be autonomous anti-racist White teachers, many discrete skills, pieces of knowledge and personal competencies must be developed. Teacher racial identity matters because teachers themselves are the primary tools they use to teach. More than any book, curriculum, classroom activity or school policy, teachers are what construct the experience of the classroom for students. Being a person of color does not guarantee that a person will be racially proficient, just as being a White person does not preclude racially proficiency. All people have a racial identity, and the more time they spend exercising and cultivating that identity, the more racially proficient they become. White

teachers can become racially proficient, but it requires that they spend time learning skills and knowledge specifically related to race and to teaching.

My research confirmed the general consensus in the literature on inquiry groups, that it can be a highly effective way for individual teachers to grow and change while exploring difficult issues in community with other teachers. The inquiry group model was an incredibly powerful vehicle for bringing teachers together to break norms of colormuteness and to build relationships in a space where discussing race was welcomed and normal, a stark contrast to most of the other social spaces that teachers usually occupied in their schools. My findings also suggest that inquiry groups cannot be purely inquiry-based if they want to foster learning about race. Race specific inquiry learning requires input from outside sources for teachers to begin to ask questions about those things that they do not know they do not know.   In the case where the inquiry group was not effective for one teacher (Sam) it was partly because he alienated members of his group early in the process and they were subsequently unsupportive to him as he began to think about his own racial identity differently and ask deeper questions about honors and AP English. This is not necessarily a failing of the inquiry group model, although it does pose a challenge to all transformative educational processes in which teachers do change, and thus their relationships with colleagues and students are transformed as well. If we expect teachers to change through these processes, we have to foresee conflicts that will emerge when teachers hurt one another early on in the process. How do they then support one another as the changed people they become throughout the process?

Throughout our work together as consultants to the Friends Independent School inquiry project, Dr. Chonika Coleman-King and I found that the teachers of color participating in the groups generally did so with great urgency, operating under the belief that many things were wrong in their schools and that they could not rest until they were fixed. The White teachers, on the other hand, tended to see their inquiry work as a project and often cited lack of time or resources as an excuse for not being more aggressively involved. This urgency differential seemed to occur repeatedly and it can lead to discontent and frustration with the inquiry groups.

As described in the chapter entitled Getting Stuck and Unstuck, the single most helpful resource to White teachers was relationships with colleagues of color. Inquiry groups fostered these relationships, not only by helping white teachers build relationships with teachers of color, but by doing so in the context of a group which was working to break the norms of colorblindness. This engagement with teachers of color can be incredibly important. Lisa Delpit (2006) writes about the importance of valuing the voices of Black adults and educators in the education of Black children. In many schools and schools of education, teachers of color (and specifically Black teachers) are not regarded for their particular experiences with race and how those experiences might apply to the education of children of color. However, an overreliance on teachers of color can be problematic. First, because there are so few teachers of color in the schools that I studied, White teacher reliance on teachers of color placed a disproportionately large burden on the teachers of color to educate and support their White colleagues; a burden that was not remunerated with either time or money. In this way, it does not take

long for a teacher of color to acquire multiple extra duties while White teachers shed them. Second, solving racialized conflicts and engaging racial dilemmas is a required skill for any teacher; an overreliance on colleagues of color can be akin to asking a colleague to do one's work for one. Third, if White teachers do not engage in the racialized work in their classrooms, but instead relinquish it to colleagues of color, they do not build their own capacity for racial proficiency. In short, engagement and relationships with colleagues of color is an important aspect of the work of racially proficient White teachers. But depending on the support of colleagues of color can be damaging to both teachers, and, in the long run, to the school.

In summary, as I argued in part I, teachers can have a multicultural curriculum and still not have an anti-racist classroom. Race affects every aspect of what happens in classroom and thus can only be addressed through a comprehensive approach that looks beyond curriculum. Inquiry group models for learning about race are insufficient without outside input because teachers can only ask the questions they are ready to ask, all of which is shaped by their racial identity developmental stage and their knowledge base. As I argued in part II of the dissertation, the questions we ask shape the answers we find. If we are not doing the necessary background work to be able to ask radical questions, we are not going to get radical answers. Finally, as I demonstrate in part III, teacher racial identity matters. Having and maintaining an autonomous racial identity is the most powerful tool that teachers can employ, and yet most teachers do not even realize that they have a racial identity, or that it can be developed. My research suggests that supporting teachers to develop autonomous racial identities can be critical to helping

them ask questions that will lead them to engage in comprehensive anti-racist

restructuring in their classrooms. White teachers are part of the problem of racial

inequity in schools today and therefore can—in fact, must—be part of the solution.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexander, M. (2010). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

Aronson, J., Lustina, M. J., Good, C., Keough, K., Steele, C. M., & Brown, J. (1999). When White men can't do math: Necessary and sufficient factors in stereotype threat. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 35,* 29-46.

Ahram, R., Fergus, E. & Noguera, P. (2011). Addressing Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: Case Studies in Suburban Districts. In *Teachers College Record 113*(10).

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (1999). A movement against and beyond boundaries: "politically relevant teaching" among African American teachers. *Teachers College Record, 100*(4), 702-723.

Bartoli, E., Michael, A., Stevenson, H., Bentley, K., Shor, R. & McClain, S. (in press). Chasing Colorblindness: White Racial and Ethnic Socialization.

Berthoff, A.E. (1987). The Teacher as Researcher. In D. Goswami & P.R. Stillman (Eds.), Reclaiming the classroom: Teacher research as an agency for change (pp. 28-39). Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Blanchett, W. (2006). Disproportionate Representation of African American Students in Special Education: Acknowledging the Role of White Privilege and Racism. In *Educational Researcher 35*(6): 24-28.

Bolgatz, J. (2005). *Talking Race in the Classroom.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without Racists: Colorblind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States* (2nd 3ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (2002). Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited. In *Sociology of Education 75*: 1-18.

Brodkin, K. (2001). Comments on "Discourses of Whiteness." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 11*(1): 147-150.

Brodkin, K. (2004). *How Jews Became White Folks and what that says about race in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Bronson, P.O. & Merryman, A. (2009, September 14). See Baby Discriminate. *Newsweek, 52-60.*

Burris, C. & Garrity, D. (2008). *Detracking for Excellence and Equity*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). *Walking the Road: Race, Diversity, and Social Justice in Teacher Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cohen, S. (2001). *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering*. Cambridge: Polity.

Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches:* (2nd Ed.)*.* Thousand Oakes: Sage Publications.

Cummins (2000). *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Cunningham, R.T. & Boykin, A.W. (2004). Enhancing Cognitive Performance in African American Children: Infusing Afro-Cultural Perspectives and Research. In Reginald Jones (Ed.) *Black Psychology: Fourth Edition*. Hampton, VA: Cobb and Henry Publishers.

Danius, S., Jonsson, S., & Spivak, G. (1993). An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *boundary 2*. Vol. 20, No. 2.

DeCuir, J. T., & Dixson, A. D. (2004). "So when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it is there": Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher, 33*(5): 26-31.

Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical Race Theory: an Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

Delpit, L. D. (2006). *Other People's Children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*: *Second Edition.* New York: New Press.

Delpit, L. (Ed.) (2003). *The Skin That We Speak*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Devos, T. & Banaji, M.R. (2005). American = White? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 88*: 447-466.

Diamond, J. B., Randolph, A., & Spillane, J. P. (2004). Teachers' expectations and sense of responsibility for student learning: The importance of race, class, and organizational habitus. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 35*(1), 75-98.

Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race, Ethnicity & Education, 8*(1), 7-27.

Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2006). *Critical Race Theory in Education: All god's children got a song.* New York: Routledge.

Donaldson, M. & Johnson, S. (2011). Teach for America teachers: How long do they teach? Why do they leave? In *Phi Delta Kappan 93*(2):47-51.

Dovidio, J.F.; Kawakami, K.; Johnson, C.; Johnson, B. & Howard, A. (1997). On the Nature of Prejudice: Automatic and Controlled Processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 33*: 510-540.

Dovidio, J.F. & Gaertner, S.L. (2000). Aversive Racism and Selective Decisions: 1989-1999. *Psychological Science, 11*, 315-319.

Dovidio, J.F., Gaertner, S.L., Kawakami, K. & Hodson, G. (2002). Why can't we all just get along? Interpersonal biases and interracial distrust. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 8, 88-102.

Dovidio, J.F., Gaertner, S.L., Kawakami, K. & Hodson, G. (2002). Why can't we all just get along? Interpersonal biases and interracial distrust. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 8, 88-102.

DuBois, W.E.B. (1961). *The Souls of Black Folks*. Greenwich: Fawcett Publications Inc.

Ferguson, R. F. (2003). Teachers' perceptions and expectations and the Black-White test score gap. *Urban Education, 38*(4), 460-507.

Fine, M. & Ruglis, J. (2009). Circuits and Consequences of Dispossession: The Racialized Realignment of the Public Sphere. In *Transforming Anthropology 17*(1): 20-33.

Fine, M; Weis, L.; Powell, L. & Wong, L. (1997). *Off White : Readings on race, power, and society*. New York: Routledge.

Fine, M. (1997). Witnessing Whiteness. In Fine, M.; Weis, L.; Powell, L. and Wong, L. (Eds.) *Off White: Readings on race, power, and society* (pp. 163-172). New York: Routledge.

Ford, D. (2011). *Multicultural Gifted Education, 2ⁿᵈ Edition*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Foster, M. (1997). *Black Teachers on Teaching*. New York: The New Press.

Frankenberg, R. (2001). The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness. In B. Brander Rasmussen; E. Klinenberg; I.J. Nexica and M. Wray (Eds.), *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (72-96). Durham: Duke University Press.

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White Women, Race Matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Giroux, H. (1997). White Squall: Resistance and the Pedagogy of Whiteness. In *Cultural Studies 11*(3): 376-389.

Goffman, E. (1986). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Good, T. & Brophy, J. (2002). *Looking in Classrooms: Ninth Edition*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Grande, S. (2003). Whitestream Feminism and the Colonialist Project: A Review of Contemporary Feminist Pedagogy and Practice. In *Educational Theory 53*(3): 329-346.

Greene, J. P., & Winters, M. A. (2006). The Effect of Residential School Choice on Public High School Graduation Rates. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(1), 14.

Haney Lopez, I. (2006). *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York: New York University Press.

Helms, J. (2008). *A Race Is a Nice Thing to Have*. Hanover: Microtraining Associates.

Hernstein, R.J. & Murray, C. (1996). *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. New York: Free Press.

Holbrook, C. (2006). Low Expectations are the Worst Form of Racism. In Landsman, J. and Lewis, C. W. (Eds) *White Teachers / Diverse Classrooms*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Hughes, D., Rodriguez, J., Smith, P., Johnson, D., Stevenson, H. & Spicer, P. (2006). Parents' Ethnic-Racial Socialization Practices: A Review of Research and Directions for Future Study. In *Developmental Psychology 42(*5): 747-770.

Ignatiev, N. (1995). *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge.

Ignatiev, N. (1997, April). The Point is Not to Interpret Whiteness But to Abolish it. In *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*. Conference conducted at the University of California, Berkeley.

Kailin, J. (2002). *Antiracist education: From theory to practice*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Kim, C. J. (2004). Imagining Race and Nation in Multiculturalist America. *Ethnic and Racial Studies 27*(6), 987-1005.

Kugler, E.G. (2002). *Debunking the Middle Class Myth: Why Diverse Schools are Good for All Kids*. Lanham: Scarecrow Publications.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995a). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal 32*(3): 465-491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995b). But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. In *Theory into Practice 34* (3): 159-165.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a *nice* field like education? *Qualitative Studies in Education 11*(1): 7-24.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing Teachers for Diverse Student Populations: A Critical Race Theory Perspective. *Review of Research in Education 24*: 211-247.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children: Second Edition*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Landry, D. & MacLean, G. (1996). Introduction. In D. Landry and G. MacLean (Eds.) *The Spivak Reader: selected works* (pp. 1-14). New York: Routledge.

Lee, S. (2005). *Up Against Whiteness*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Lewis, A. E. (2004). "'What Group?' Studying Whites and Whiteness in the Era of 'Color-Blindness.'" *Sociological Theory* 22(4): 623-646.

Lipsitz, G. (2006). *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White people profit from identity politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Loewen, J. (2008). *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbooks Got Wrong*. New York: The New Press.

Luft, J. & Ingham, H. (1950). The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness. *Proceedings of the western training laboratory in group development*. Los Angeles: UCLA.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research*: 3rd Edition. Thousand Oakes: Sage Publications.

Marx, S. (2006). *Revealing the Invisible: Confronting passive racism in teacher education.* New York: Routledge.

Maxwell, J.A. (2005). *Qualitative Research Design*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oakes: Sage Publications.

McInstosh, P. (1997). White Privilege and Male Privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies. In Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (Eds.), *Critical White Studies* (pp. 291-299). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Mills, C. (1997). *The Racial Contract.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

National Center for Education Statistics (2009). *The Condition of Education.* Washington D.C.: Susan Aud.

Neal, L.; McCray, A.D.; Webb-Johnson, G. & Bridgest, S. (2003). The Effects of African American Movement Styles on Teachers' Perceptions and Reactions. In *The Journal of Special Education 37*(1): 49-57.

Nieto (2009). *Language, Culture and Teaching: Second Edition*. Mahwah: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.

Noguera, P. (2008). *The Trouble with Black Boys: And Other Reflections on Race, Equity and the Future of Public Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Oakes, J. (1985). Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality: Second Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Oakes, J. (2008). Keeping Track: Structuring Equality and Inequality in an Era of Accountability. In *Teachers College Record 110*(3): 700-712.

Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial Formations in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*. Routledge: New York.

Omi, Michael & Howard Winant. (2002). Racial Formation. In Philomena Essed & David Theo Goldberg (Eds.) *Race Critical Theories*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Palmer, P. (1999). *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Perry, P. (2002). *Shades of White: White Kids and Racial Identities in High School*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Pollock, M. (2004). *Colormute.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pollock, M. (2008). *Because of Race.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (2006). *Handbook of Action Research: the Concise Paperback Edition.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rickford, J.R. (2005). Using the Vernacular to Teach the Standard. In J. David Ramirez, Terrence G. Wiley, Gerda de Klerk, Enid Lee and Wayne E. Wright (Eds.) *Ebonics: The Urban Education Debate: Second Edition* (pp. 18-40). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Roediger, D. (1994). *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness.* London: Verso.

Roediger, D.R. (1998). Introduction. In D.R. Roediger (Ed.) *Black on White*. New York: Schocken Books.

Rubin, B.C. & Noguera, P.A. (2004). Tracking Detracking: Sorting Through the Dilemmas and Possibilities of Detracking in Practice. In *Equity & Excellence in Education 37*: 92-101.

Sleeter, C. E. (1993). How White Teachers Construct Race. In McCarthy, C., & Crichlow, W. (Eds.), *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*. New York: Routledge.

Sleeter, C.E. (1995). Teaching Whites About Racism. In Martin, R. J. (Ed.), *Practicing What we Teach: Confronting diversity in teacher education*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Smitherman, G. (2005). Black Language and the Education of Black Children: One Mo Once. In J. David Ramirez, Terrence G. Wiley, Gerda de Klerk, Enid Lee and

Wayne E. Wright (Eds.) *Ebonics: The Urban Education Debate: Second Edition* (pp. 49-61). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Spencer, M. B. (2008). Lessons Learned and Opportunities Ignored Since Brown v. Board of Education: Youth Development and the Myth of a Colorblind Society. In *Educational Researcher 37*(5): 253-266.

Spivak, G. (1990). Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution with Elizabeth Grosz. In S. Harasym (Ed.) *The Post-Colonial Critic* (pp. 67-74). New York: Routledge.

Spencer, M.B. & Tinsley, B. (2008). Identity as Coping: Assessing Youth's Challenges and Opportunities for Success. In *The Prevention Researcher (15)*4:17-21.

Staiger, A. (2004).Whiteness as Giftedness: Racial Formation at an Urban High School. In *Social Problems 52*(2): 161-181.

Steele, C. & Aronson, J. (1998). Stereotype Threat and the Test Performance of Academically Successful African Americans. In C. Jencks and M. Phillips (Eds.), *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press.

Stevenson, H.C., Davis, G.Y., Herrero-Taylor, T. & Morris, R. (2003). "An Hour of Play": Theoretical Frames for the PLAAY Project. *Playing with Anger: Teaching Coping Skills to African American Boys through Athletics and Culture.* Westport: Praeger Publishers.

Sue, D.W. (2004). Whiteness and Ethnocentric Monoculturalism: Making the "Invisible" Visible. *American Psychologist 59*(8): 761-770.

Sue, D.W. (2007). Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life. *American Psychologist 62*(4): 271-286.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. (1994). Teaching White Students about Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope. In *Teachers College Record 95*(4): 462-476.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. (2003). *Why Are All the Back Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* New York: Basic Books.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. (2007). *Can We Talk about Race?* Boston: Beacon Press.

Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality. http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/programs/TACD/publications.html, accessed September 23, 2009.

Thandeka. (2000). *Learning to be White.* New York: Continuum.

Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2001). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement.* Report prepared with funding from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE), a national research center funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education, under Cooperative Agreement No. R306A60001-96 (July 1, 1996-June 30, 2001).

Tyson, K. (2011). *Integration Interrupted: Tracking, Black Students, and Acting White After Brown*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Valenzuela, A. (1999) *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Ware, F. (2006). Warm Demander Pedagogy: Culturally Responsive Teaching that Supports a Culture of Achievement for African American Students. In *Urban Education 41*(4): 427-456.

Watson, S. (2001). Recruiting and Retaining Teachers: Keys to Improving the Philadelphia Public Schools. Consortium for Policy Research in Education. http://www.cpre.org/images/stories/cpre_pdfs/children01.pdf

Wetherell, M. (2003). Racism and the analysis of cultural resources in interviews. In Harry van den Berg, Margaret Wetherell and Hanneke Houtkoop-Steenstra (Eds.) *Analyzing Race Talk*. (p. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wiley, T. (2005). Ebonics: Background to the Current Policy Debate. In J. David Ramirez, Terrence G. Wiley, Gerda de Klerk, Enid Lee and Wayne E. Wright (Eds.) *Ebonics: The Urban Education Debate: Second Edition.* (pp. 3-17). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Wimsatt, W.; West, C. & Ignatiev, N. (1997). I'm Ofay, You're Ofay. *Transition 73*: pp. 176-203.

Winant, H. (1997). Behind Blue Eyes: Whiteness and Contemporary U.S. Racial Politics. In M. Fine; L. Weis; L.C. Powell and L. Mun Wong (Eds), *Off White: Readings on Race, Power and Society* (pp.40-56). New York: Routledge.

Winant, H. (2001). White Racial Projects. In B. Brander Rasmussen; E. Klinenberg; I.J. Nexica and M. Wray (Eds.), *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (pp. 97-112). Durham: Duke University Press.

Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity & Education, 8*(1), 69-91.

Yosso, T. (2002). Toward a Critical Race Curriculum. *Equity and Excellence in Education 35*(2): 93-107.