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# Complicating Whiteness: Identifications of Veteran White Teachers in Multicultural Settings

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The University of San Francisco

COMPLICATING WHITENESS:  
IDENTIFICATIONS OF VETERAN WHITE TEACHERS  
IN MULTICULTURAL SETTINGS

A Dissertation Presented  
to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by  
Anthony Miele  
San Francisco, California  
May 2013

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

Complicating Whiteness:  
Identifications of Veteran White Teachers in Multicultural Settings

A scrupulous search of whiteness literatures in relation to multicultural education reveals a preponderance of scholarship noting White privilege and race evasiveness. Given contrasting scholarship arguing White identity as complicated, multifarious, and bound to social and historical context, concurrent with a dearth of scholarship that examines such complexity, studies that explore and complicate White racial identity are of vital importance in advancing discourse around whiteness in education. Moreover, studies on veteran White teachers in multicultural settings explore professional identifications that have emerged along a continuum within authentic educational contexts rather than pre-service teachers in decontextualized settings.

Exploring identifications of veteran White teachers in multicultural settings involves careful attendance to experiences that shape identity. To this point life history methodology is ideal, as the social and psychological functions of stories make them an ideal match for research within education.

Respondent narrative accounts suggest individual consciousnesses that are both constructively critical and problematic. Data from this study revealed respondent non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy, including problematic race talk and pedagogical traits that hinder culturally sustaining pedagogy. Respondent non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy were commonly consonant with an acquiescence to an oppressively-tending educational structure, an adherence to highly scripted implementation of curricula, and a tendency to give voice to language that

justified one's position within the structure, thereby escaping culpability for student academic failure. Data from this study also revealed respondent constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy, including race-privilege cognizance, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and constructive reflection. In addition, teachers, in whom constructive criticalities seemed to manifest in appreciable degrees, underwent experiences in their early lives that seemed to facilitate a social justice-oriented awareness. Moreover, these teachers also performed their duties with considerable degrees of curricular autonomy.

In conclusion, data from this study support findings of extant scholarship arguing White teachers' race evasiveness may be attributed to more complex phenomena beyond simply protecting privilege. In addition, data from this study suggest educators continue to question White teacher racial knowledge all the while maintaining a view of White teachers as capable learners.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Anthony Miele  
Candidate

May 15, 2013  
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## Chapter I

### The Research Problem

As public school student populations in the United States grow more racially and culturally diverse the classroom teachers in charge of educating these youths remain predominantly White (Applebaum, 2003; Kailin, 1999; Sleeter, 2001). This disproportion of cultural representation has prompted a great number of multicultural education professionals and scholars to question the capacity such a plurality possesses in meeting a demographic imperative. As an intervention many scholars have called for White pre-service and in-service teachers to critique their racial consciousnesses as they prepare for careers as culturally responsive pedagogues in diverse settings (Bersh, 2009; Hytten & Adkins, 2001; McIntyre, 1997, 2002). Paramount in this effort is interrogating White teacher racial identity towards race cognizance.

By virtue of their whiteness, White people are equipped with an “invisible knapsack” (McIntosh, 1990) replete with a seemingly limitless repository of tools which can be employed to procure a stream of social privilege. Such unearned privilege is a key marker in the disparity between those who have and those who have much less. As a remedy to this inequity many scholars have challenged White people to localize themselves collectively into a racial category (Applebaum, 2003; Hytten, 2003; Mazzei, 2004; McIntyre, 1997). Consequently, White people, as part of a racialized group themselves, are better equipped to dismantle oppressive systems that White privilege maintains. Historically, White people in general have resisted racialization and have therefore escaped culpability in regards to racial oppression. This resistance, accompanied by a

convenient denial of the significance of whiteness, has secured and perpetuated privilege (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Bersh, 2009; Scheurich, 1993; Sleeter, 1993a).

### **Statement of the Problem**

A scrupulous search in the field of whiteness studies reveals a preponderance of literature that deals with White privilege and the eradication of racism. As Mayo (2004) stated, there is a “tendency in whiteness studies to remake White identity in order to undo racism” (p. 308). On a similar note, Warren (1999) asserted, “most, if not all, of the literature dealing with the constitution of White identity are concerned with antiracist social practice” (p. 188). This characterization has also been prevalent in whiteness studies as it relates to multicultural education, as numerous studies have focused on White pre-service teachers and the promotion of antiracist pedagogy (Bersh, 2009; Cooney & Akintunde, 1999; Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010; Haviland, 2008; Hill-Jackson, 2007; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 2001). Along these lines, Galman et al. (2010) argued for the “interrogation” of whiteness in teacher education. Similarly, Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, and Garrison Wade (2008) issued a call for the need to more thoroughly understand the impact White teachers have on students of color.

Given growing scholarship that argues White identity as complicated, multifarious, ever changing, and bound to social and historical context, concurrent with a dearth of scholarship that examines such complexity, studies that explore and complicate White racial identity are of vital importance in advancing discourse around whiteness (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009; Hughey, 2010; McDermott & Samson, 2005; Torkelson & Hartmann, 2010). With an overemphasis on the lack of knowledge of White pre-service teachers (Sleeter, 2001) and scant scholarship on White racial identity beyond

notions of privilege and race evasiveness, a study that explores identifications of veteran White teachers in multicultural settings seems well situated to address the aforementioned paucity in multicultural education literature. Furthermore, a study on veteran White teachers in multicultural settings who have remained committed to their professions explores professional identifications that have emerged along a continuum within authentic educational contexts rather than pre-service teachers in decontextualized settings who lack experience and have in many cases been encouraged by teacher educators to disrupt their racial consciousnesses in anticipation of service.

### **Background and Need**

Though scholarship on whiteness in the United States did not begin to flourish as a significant movement until the 1990s, works by Hall (1981) and Dyer (1988) laid important groundwork much earlier. Making an argument mainly within the context of media structures, Hall's depiction of an elusive "White eye" positioning everything else within its gaze very succinctly spoke to the normativity and invisibility of whiteness. Focusing on a theme of normativity as well, Dyer, through his analysis of whiteness in film, demonstrated how whiteness assumes dominance over blackness by depicting itself in terms of rationality in contrast to the irrationality of blackness.

In addition to these pioneering portrayals of whiteness, Roediger (2006) referenced its presence in academe to the 1990s in the seminal texts of Saxton and Morrison. Rodriguez (1999) made a link to critical legal theory and also cited the 1990s when scholars such as Frankenberg and McIntyre, to name only two, wrote on the topic in relation to race, racial identity, and education. Painter (2010) credited Roediger's 1991 book, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, and Ignatiev's 1995

book, *How the Irish Became White*, as the beginning of Critical White Studies. One could also argue that the study of whiteness began in the early decades of the twentieth century in the groundbreaking work of W. E. B. Du Bois.

Origins aside, the point most germane to this dissertation is the contribution whiteness studies has made to multicultural education in explicating how the neutrality of whiteness has been complicit in supporting institutional racism (Warren, 1999). Though this contribution has been invaluable, static depictions of race evasive White teachers who protect their privilege has dominated whiteness literatures in education. In response to such prevalent characterizations of whiteness some scholars have made calls to initiate new waves of whiteness studies in education. These waves move towards “creative identifications” (Jupp & Slattery, 2010a) that emphasize race visibility as well as notions of post-White teacher identities in multicultural education (Raible & Irizarry, 2007) that “bring [White identity] forward in response to the postmodern conditions of the twenty-first century” (p. 195).

This study represents a response to such calls to advance discourse on White identity, as the conditions of a so-called postmodern age demand situating whiteness beyond static notions prevalent in socio-educational literature. To this point, and as the title of this dissertation states, I have chosen to advance discourse through complicating White identity. Complicating whiteness through the stories of veteran White teachers in multicultural settings is my attempt to explore the spaces in between the extremes of racism and antiracism, to not fear to traverse the middle ground, and in so doing perhaps reveal textures of identity that resist unequivocal positions as antiracist but ultimately are not racist either.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to advance discourse on whiteness in education beyond prevalent notions of race evasiveness and privilege, and towards capacitating White teachers who work in racially and culturally diverse settings. In recognition that such a study involved subjective explorations of identity, life history methodology was an appropriate design to carry out such a task. Though traditionally life history involves a narrative story about one's life, in the context of education the focus is confined to key episodes and experiences that relate to the individual professionally (Creswell, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

In the interests of exploring identifications held by the teachers of this study a narrative dialogue was facilitated in order to address the following research questions.

- How do respondents' understandings of race emerge in their personal and professional life stories?
- How do the stories complicate existing understanding of White teachers' race-evasive identities as documented in critical consciousness-raising interventions?
- What does the representation of veteran White teachers' work mean for the training and development of pre-service teachers?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Locating an appropriate conceptual or theoretical framework for this study was difficult. Roberts (2010) defined a conceptual or theoretical framework as "a lens through which [the] research problem is viewed" (p. 129). In review, the research problem of this study highlighted the preponderant tendency of socio-educational scholarship to cast static views of whiteness primarily related to privilege and race evasiveness. Given this

problem the purpose of this study was to advance discourse around whiteness in education beyond such prevalent notions. To accomplish this objective I chose to complicate White identity through identifications of veteran White teachers that emerged through narrative discourse.

The identifications I sought emerged within respondent life history texts that arose through collaborative interviews. In this sense an argument can be made for identifications within life history texts to serve as the conceptual or theoretical framework for this study. I understand a conflict seems apparent because, as chapter three indicates, life history was employed as the methodology for this study. I argue, however, given that life history methodology has been highly theorized in regards to qualitative inquiry, its philosophical grounding makes it an appropriate framework for this study, particularly in regards to identifications.

### **Identifications and narrativized selves.**

The experiences and successes I have realized as an educator have prompted me, perhaps erroneously, to formulate an “archetypal image” (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 624) of an effective urban teacher. In recognition that the purpose of this study was to advance discourse around White racial teacher identity beyond static identifications prevalent in educational literature I was hopeful that I would uncover counter narratives in my data that would contradict static notions of White teacher identity and further complicate whiteness in education. In other words, through my research I had hoped to find “a way to be White while also being antiracist” (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 59). For me complicating whiteness in education included an examination of how prolonged experiences in multicultural settings impacted White teachers’ sense of self.

Most scholars agree that a White person cannot racialize her or his own body and consequently realize heightened sensibilities around race without traversing difficult terrain fraught with feelings characterized by denial, defensiveness, guilt, and anxiety, to name a few. To make oneself aware of privilege in order to understand how an invisible racial marker can perpetuate oppressive practice is a delicate process that not all find success with. Though my research did not explicitly intend to effect this change within my respondents, it did explore White racial identities in positions of authority in relation to people who have been historically marginalized based on race. To that end identifications within life history narratives served as a framework for complicating White teacher identity. According to Jupp & Slattery (2010a), identifications are interactive narrative processes through which identities emerge within social and historical contexts (p. 458). And as Hall (1996) argued, identities are never unified but ever in flux, contingent upon social and historical experiences, yet constructed through difference. Given that identities do not formulate independent of others but in relation to others, identities are bound (West, 1995). Furthermore, identity is superseded by identifications “in that they articulate narrative processes of identity creation” (Jupp & Slattery, 2010a, p. 458). Finally, as Hall (1996) argued,

Though they [identities] seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than of being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become, how we might have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.



Identities are therefore constituted within and without. . . . They arise from the narrativization of the 'self.' (p. 4)

As the literature review and discussion later elucidate, broaching the subject of race with White people is a delicate undertaking that invariably gives rise to charged emotions and feelings of discomfort. Given the difficulty of this process many White people resist discussions of race and devise ways to evade the topic entirely. Numerous scholars have argued that such evasive tactics employed by White people represent efforts to protect privilege and escape complicity in oppression. Other scholars have argued that such evasive tactics come as a result of invasive intervention and mask much more complex phenomena that cannot be explained as simply a protection of privilege. Regardless of which argument one agrees with it is imperative that White subjectivities be explored in order to address a demographic rift between an ever growing racially diverse student population and a predominant White teaching force. Such an exploration necessitates White people talking about race in secure and constructive ways. One way to do this is to not explicitly focus on race but address the topic within a larger context of one's life and profession. To this point narrative life histories not only serve as method but are an optimal framework for exploring personal and professional identifications around race.

As Zingsheim and Goltz (2011) stated,

We are never *only* raced subjects, but are preceded and interpellated by multiple discourses of identity. Hence, we ought not limit our discussions of whiteness (in articles or classrooms) to race alone, specifically as these practices work to perpetuate the elusive invisibility of whiteness. (p. 220)

**Post-White identities and new waves of whiteness studies.**

Another important concept that frames this study is the notion of post-White teacher identities (Raible & Irizarry, 2007). In a study based on interviews with two White women that documented their experiences with multiculturalism, racism, and cultural differences, Raible & Irizarry (2007) arrived at what they called, “transracialized selves, that is, ways of being White that transcend predictable performances of more typically racialized identities” (p. 177). In transforming their selves towards a ‘post-White’ identification the women in Raible and Irizarry’s study drew from experiences that resulted from having cultivated close relationships with people who were racially and culturally different from them (p. 178). With their research Raible and Irizarry strove to inform teacher education by updating racial identity theory with more complex understandings of whiteness (p. 179).

Raible and Irizarry’s work is particularly important to this study in that it stressed the importance for individuals representing different races and cultures to form “long-term caring relationships” within multicultural environments (p. 179). Narrative dialogue was of great importance in this undertaking as it facilitated for the respondents a greater knowledge of their selves. It is important to note that I do not consider my respondents’ prolonged experiences teaching in diverse settings as a substitute to what Raible and Irizarry referred to as long-term caring relationships with people who differ racially and culturally. It could very well be that for some of my respondents their teaching experience represented their only substantive contact with non-White people. Still, the notion of post-White teacher identities is an appropriate conceptualization for my study

because in order to arrive at what Raible and Irizarry call “transracialized selves,” a process of complication must be initiated.

Finally, scholars such as Twine and Gallagher (2008) and Jupp and Slattery (2010a) have articulated new waves of whiteness studies. A new wave of scholarship on whiteness resists essentialist notions of whiteness as monolithic, but understands whiteness as multifarious and bound by historical context. More importantly, these waves of whiteness scholarship move beyond emphasizing the race evasive tendencies of White subjects and towards emphasizing race cognizance that recognizes inherent privileges and the need for antiracist praxis.

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to White teachers with at least 10 years experience working in multicultural settings. In acknowledgment that the highest rate of attrition for new teachers occurs within their first five years (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006), a respondent base comprised of veteran teachers lent credence to the notion that these individuals have remained committed to their chosen profession. In addition, engaging veteran White teachers, rather than “under experienced and uninitiated respondents” (Jupp & Slattery, 2010a, p. 471), provided the opportunity to explore the whiteness of people who have sustained prolonged proximity to populations that, many scholars argue, bear the brunt of racial oppression.

### **Limitations**

This qualitative study relied upon narrative data and employed life history methodology. The term *life history* might imply that data collected represented respondents’ entire life histories. This is not the case. Data were collected through

individual interviews lasting approximately two hours each. One's life history is impossible to encapsulate within this limited amount of time. Still, the term *life history* is appropriate for this type of study, as the data include key information regarding respondents' professional lives as teachers. More information on life history methodology is provided in the third chapter. In addition, that the study is qualitative may be viewed as a limitation, as some scholars (Croll et al., 2006; Hartmann et al., 2009; Torkelson & Hartmann, 2010; Niemonen, 2007) have noted the lack of empirical data on whiteness and have called for more quantitative studies to address this void.

### **Significance of the Study**

In deference to seminal scholarship on whiteness there is a need to continue to advance the discourse around whiteness beyond its association and complicity with systems of oppression. With respect to the argument that White people generally resist discussions around race, the narrative dialogues of this study illuminated a "reticence" (Mazzei, 2004) many scholars have connected to intentional race neutrality and protection of privilege (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Bersh, 2009; Scheurich, 1993; Sleeter, 1993a). Though many White people exhibit this proclivity, a less simplistic explanation of this purported neutrality and invisibility seems in order, as reason might conclude such a generalization does not apply to all White people (McDermott & Samson, 2005). To this end, could there be a reason beyond self-denial and guilt that some White people exhibit a resistance to racial localization? Rose-Cohen (2007) warned against the oft held assumption that "membership of one culture precludes membership in all other cultures" (p. 38). Jupp and Slattery (2010b) suggested such resistance might be a result of activist

research. Others have questioned whether resistance is in fact an outright protection of privilege (Lensmire, 2010a; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011).

Lastly, this research was significant because it explored the individual traversing through the construct of race rather than using race to frame the individual. Furthermore, this study contributed to a necessary balance in the ongoing discussion around whiteness as it resisted the tendency Mayo (2004) noted to remake White identity solely for the purposes of combating racism.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Antiracism* – “The intentional and learned effort on the part of individuals to resist and actively counteract the discursive process of racialization and its resultant behaviors that privilege the lives, needs, and experiences of one race above all others” (Raible, 2005, p. 67).

*Colorblindness* – “The position that the race of a person is and should be irrelevant to the decision-making process” (Applebaum, 2006, p. 345). “A widespread cultural discourse of individual merit that does not allow Americans to think structurally about race as a relational structure” (Croll et al., 2006, p. 5).

*Critical Race Theory* “embraces a movement of left scholars, most of them scholars of color, situated in law schools, whose work challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii).

*Critical Whiteness Studies* – “The theoretical body of work that examines whiteness as part of a broader system of oppression” (Croll et al., 2006, p. 2).

*Identifications* – “Interactive narrative processes through which identities emerge within social and historical contexts” (Jupp & Slattery, 2010a, p. 458).

*Life History* – Where a life story “is the story we narrate about the events of our lives . . . the life history is collaboratively constructed by a life story teller and life story interviewer/researcher. The aim is to locate the life story as it operates in particular historical circumstances” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 62). Also, “life history research goes beyond the individual or the personal and places narrative accounts and interpretations within a broader context. Lives are lived with the influence of contexts” (Coles & Knowles, 2001, p. 20).

*Multicultural Education* – “Education that focuses on equity, culture, and power by requiring high academic expectations for all students; infusing multiple perspectives, cultures, people, and worldviews into the curriculum; and equipping students with an understanding of issues of power, privilege, oppression, and ideas about how they might work towards social justice” (Castagno, 2009, p. 48).

*Oppression* “can be defined as an asymmetric power relation in which one individual, group, or subject position dominates and subjugates another. It is normally understood in terms of one group's having a sense of being subjected to an unjust force or arbitrary power” (Rehn & O’Doherty, 2011).

*Privilege* – “Rights or immunities granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor; Advantages held by a dominant group in society” (Ferber, 2008).

*Purposive Sample* – In the context of this study a purposive sample is a respondent base selected on certain criteria (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), that is, veteran and White.

*Racialization* – “The assignment of racial meaning to real, perceived, or ascribed differences among individuals or groups, which produces hierarchies of power and privilege among races” (Burton et al., 2010, p. 445); “The processes based largely on fear of alterity through which individuals are inducted into codes of White superiority” (Raible & Irizarry, 2007, p. 179).

*Racism* – “The systematic implementation of a doctrine of racial supremacy that maintains the superiority of one race over another” (Nicole Shelton & Richeson, 2011); “Any attitude, action, or institutional arrangement that results in the subordination of another group based ostensibly upon group-linked physical characteristics” (Jones, 2002, p. 30).

*Whiteness Studies* – A critical examination of what it means to be White in the United States (Arminio, 2011).

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

Given the complex and multidisciplinary nature of whiteness, the literature around it is predictably just as complex and varied. One cannot undertake studies in sociology or education without realizing the salience of whiteness. Although this salience is often obscured to the White subject, as the following literatures elucidate, the power and influence that whiteness wields is hardly invisible. Invariably, the study of racism in the United States revolves around the concept of whiteness. While scholars argue that race is socially constructed they are quick to note that its effects are very real. Likewise, whiteness, though difficult to define, in effect permeates all aspects of our culture. The literature review that follows traces whiteness from its inception as a field of study to its maturation as sociology. Themes encompass the association whiteness has with privilege and systems of oppression, its pervasive presence in the field of education, its evolution as complex, fluid social phenomenon, and its critique.

#### Whiteness-Critical White Studies

A review of the literature around whiteness would be remiss to not include Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness*. In this seminal text Roediger (1991) traces the term *White* to pre-colonial America where it was used as a demarcating device by Europeans to distinguish themselves from indigenous and African peoples. Roediger then illuminates the conditions and attitudes of colonial America, antebellum north and south, and post Civil War that prompted both White-skinned native-born Americans and newly arrived immigrants to unite under the assumed superiority of a virtuous American White working class. By manipulating the very language of labor and distinguishing and disassociating



themselves from what they believed were inferior, lazy, and lustful newly freed Black slaves, White laborers consequently secured an enduring advantage in the burgeoning American workplace. Roediger also deftly portrays the fears and longings that nineteenth century White people projected onto Black people and how “whiteness was a way in which White workers responded to a fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline” (p. 13).

The history Roediger writes of in great part set the stage for twentieth century origins of critical legal theory, which explicated how the legal system in the United States was inherently biased towards White people (Rodriguez, 1999). It is from this scholarship that Critical White Studies emerged. These beginnings paralleled, and were fueled by, a rising interest around the study of people of color. Whiteness studies was not only about racism and privilege, however, but included how White people themselves viewed White culture as well as their own identities (Rodriguez, 1999). In addition, whiteness studies is not restricted to White scholars, as non-White people have made acute observations given their historically subordinate position in relation to White people (Roediger, 2006). Restrictions aside, critical White studies has focused exclusively on the United States and has generally neglected larger global contexts where systems of dominance are not always based on whiteness (Jupp, 2010).

### **White Privilege and White Racism**

Whether or not debate within whiteness studies revolves around origins or defining principles, almost all commentary includes terminology such as privilege, racism, race invisibility, and race evasiveness. In her now renowned article on White privilege, McIntosh (1990) declared that the privilege conferred upon White people is in great part

unearned and the accompanying denial of or oblivion to such privilege goes hand in hand with the notion of individual effort reaping individual gain (Scheurich, 1993). Integral to protecting privilege, White people view non-White people as racialized subjects while resisting racial localization for themselves. In being race evasive White people protect and ensure their privilege (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Bersh, 2009; Scheurich, 1993; Sleeter, 1993a).

### **Race Invisibility, Race Evasiveness, and Race Cognizance**

Analysis of the invisibility of whiteness occurred even earlier than the aforementioned citations, however, in more innovative fashion. In a now classic piece, Dyer (1988), showed how whiteness is represented through an in-depth analysis of three mainstream films. He prefaced this analysis by stating that Black is a color while White, although being all colors, is no color at all. “To be everything and nothing is the source of its [whiteness’] representational power” (p. 45). This invisible quality of whiteness makes it hard to locate and analyze as a category and once any interrogation begins it quickly dissolves into specificity, thereby masking whiteness in favor of another preferred representation. Conversely, the marked aspect of Black makes its analysis as a category quite easy.

Though Dyer’s piece is well acclaimed in revealing the unmarked power of whiteness, Hall (1981) expertly analyzed this power some seven years earlier. In a renowned essay Hall claimed that the way in which the British media portrays issues of race “reproduces the ideologies of racism” (p. 28). Hall argued that because the chief business of media is ideology, racism in media touches issues of ideology directly (p. 31). Moreover, he argued that change is not possible unless close attention is paid to media constructions of

race and racism. Crucial to this attention is distinguishing between *overt* and *inferential* racism. The latter is the more harmful of the two in that it is more prevalent and subtle, therefore often eluding conscious awareness and questioning (pp. 36-37).

Hall depicted the media as a structure in which racist practice persists even though individuals who are a part of the structure may not be active racists. This power to impel individuals from a variety of persuasions to formulate racist ideological discourse is of great significance. Hall cautioned that we do not yet know how to construct an antiracist ideology but that we had better learn soon.

As a solution to addressing the ways in which whiteness as racism is reproduced, some scholars call for a critical theory. Making such an argument, Owen (2007) stated “a critical theory of whiteness contributes an account of key socio-cultural mechanisms of the functioning and reproduction of racial oppression” (p. 203). Having functional properties, Owen maintained that whiteness reproduces White supremacy in seven ways. First, it formulates an understanding of self and world through a racialized perspective (p. 205). Second, it locates a position of structural advantage (p. 206). Next, respectively, whiteness is normalized and invisible to White people but not to non-White people (p. 206). Fifth, apart from skin color whiteness is an embodiment (p. 206). Sixth, “its borders are continuously being redefined” (p. 206). Finally, its origins and maintenance are characterized by violence (p. 206).

Owen argued that as structuring property whiteness remains if no attempts are made to disrupt it (p. 209). He called for a unified theory, which takes into account whiteness as a social identity, as property, and as cultural representation (p. 114). Rather than be abolished, whiteness needs to be “exposed, challenged, and re-formed” (p. 218). This

undertaking must include the “insight” of those that whiteness oppresses, as White people alone are not sufficiently equipped to carry out the task effectively (p. 219).

Also on the topic of theory and with compelling references to binaries such as positive-negative, good-bad, and blackness-whiteness, West (1993) argued for the necessity of a social theory to explicate the ways in which whiteness has exploited blackness. He warned that such demystification is not immune to “deadly traps” such as reductionism, where “one-factor analyses yield a one-dimensional functionalism” (p. 20). According to West, the new cultural politics of difference bring intellectual, existential, and political challenges for people of color as they strive to thrive in a racially polarized nation such as the United States. The cultivation of “critical sensibilities and personal accountability without inhibiting individual expressions, curiosities, and idiosyncrasies” (p. 22) will be vital in this effort.

Though convincing arguments have been made regarding the necessity of theory to confront and disrupt the exploiting power of whiteness there is no mistaking the dominant themes of privilege and race evasiveness. Despite the saliency of these defining characteristics of whiteness in the literature some scholars have found these conclusions to be overgeneralizations. Mahoney (1997), in referencing Frankenberg (1993), stated that the “lived experience of whiteness” is in a state of transformation (p. 331) and that the interrogation of whiteness needs to move beyond treating privilege as fixed (p. 330). Despite this assertion Mahoney contended that such privilege needs maintenance and that this maintenance involves not seeing the process or “mechanisms” that make privilege endure (p. 331). In relation, White people, by and large, attribute their successes to their own individual efforts and not to prejudice or inequity (p. 331). Moreover, Mahoney

argued that White people recognize whiteness only in relation to those non-White, as well as when their well-being is threatened (p. 331). For White people, race is synonymous with the other, not themselves. The invisibility of White dominance fosters an individualistic identity that precludes membership to a culture (p. 331).

Continuing the question of invisibility, Gallagher (1997), from his interviews of White and non-White students, hinted at a general confusion among White people regarding their race and how they fit into American race relations. The nature of such confusion might include being naïve, humane, defensive, and reactionary (p. 6). Gallagher also concluded that whiteness was no longer invisible and that White people are undergoing transformation and racialization.

Gallagher also noted a lack of ethnic identity among his respondents. Where before White people may have pointed to a specific ethnicity as an identity marker, the waning of any practice associated with that ethnicity subsequently erodes that identity. Consequently they now point to a racial identity, that being White (p. 8). Gallagher countered many scholars who argue that White people see racial identity and ethnic identity as distinct. He found his respondents claimed no distinction between racial identity and ethnic identity because ethnic identity has disappeared, replaced by race (p. 8). He also found that White people began to think of themselves as a racialized group once other minorities became subject to identity politics (p. 9).

Gallagher is not alone in arguing for the visibility of whiteness. Counting herself among those who for years saw whiteness as an unmarked category, Frankenberg (2001) at last called this perceived invisibility a mirage (p. 73). Though whiteness remains visible to people of color, Frankenberg was “struck by the extraordinary ease with which

(especially White) individuals can slide from awareness of whiteness to the lack thereof, from race-consciousness to unconsciousness and from antiracism to racism” (p. 77).

Critical to Frankenberg’s understanding of whiteness has been the “emphasis of race as process rather than thing,” (p. 72). Frankenberg also argued that prior to the start of the twenty-first century attention to whiteness to a large degree came in relation to people of color demanding equitable treatment. With the start of the twenty-first century White people have now become part of the critical scrutiny of whiteness (p. 82).

Noting her earlier research, which found many White people to be “color- and power-evasive” (p. 90), Frankenberg interpreted many papers at the 95<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA) held in 2000 to suggest that on one level White people are more conscious of their whiteness as well as the fact that they live in a racialized world. This consciousness, however, does not necessarily correlate with antiracism. Frankenberg noted a “power-evasive race cognizance” (p. 91), where *cognizance* refers to awareness of the civil rights fight and *power-evasiveness* refers to efforts to dismantle civil rights (p. 91). Still dealing with the racist roots of the United States, White people, though increasingly aware of their whiteness and the “White self as a racialized subject” (p. 92), are still affixed to entitlement, all the while aware of racial injustice (p. 92).

Speaking to process as well, Eichstedt (2001) argued that White people must acknowledge their whiteness, locate their racial category, and acknowledge privilege before becoming antiracist. Moreover, contrary to much scholarship which positions whiteness as “unmarked and unremarked upon” (p. 454), respondents in Eichstedt’s study spoke to owning their whiteness as a first step in combating racism (p. 454). As part of

this acknowledgement they claimed it was "impossible to extricate themselves from racism" (p. 459) and that they saw themselves as racialized and connected to the whole system as well as to the racialized *other* (pg. 461). Although the activists in Eichstedt's study admitted to privilege derived from their whiteness, identifications held with other categories such as class, gender, or sexual orientation may have subjected them to oppression. Though these identifications do not absolve the White individual of complicity to privilege, they can assist in understanding the complexity of such an identity and keep feelings of guilt from engendering paralysis (p. 462).

The activists in Eichstedt's study face a balancing act. They must deal with an identity with historical roots as one of oppressor, all the while cultivating a positive construction of self that works for social justice unencumbered by guilt and shame. "Deconstruction is the ultimate goal, but they hold onto whiteness not to give them a place from which to act, but as a social location of responsibility" (p. 466-467).

Continuing with themes of race cognizance Hartmann et al. (2009) and McDermott and Samson (2005) proposed that many more White people than previously thought actually possess a salient awareness of their racial positions as well as their advantages. Given the complexities of White identity these scholars have cited Frankenberg's assertion (2001) that such invisibility may very well be a "mirage." Furthermore, in regards to the meritocratic argument of individualism and hard work garnering social reward, Hartmann et al. (2009) found that a plurality of racial minorities agreed with the White position, thereby suggesting that such an ideal is prevalent among all racial groups.

In summary, though the aforementioned literatures do not directly pertain to education, their coverage is important in highlighting the enigmatic nature of White

identity. Insofar as this study, and White teachers, are concerned, exploring phenomena such as race evasiveness and race cognizance is critical in complicating White identity.

### **White Identity Development, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction**

As the literature has revealed a substantially higher degree of race cognizance among White people than was previously believed, an evolved and perhaps remade White identity might be a likely outcome of such awareness. A transformation of this kind would please many scholars, particularly those in education who believe that the work for social justice must involve remaking White identity. A key argument Yudice (1995) made is that it would behoove those of White and especially of non-White construction “to transform the ethnoracial order in which they collude in reproducing the centrality of whiteness” (p. 258). Of importance in this undertaking is understanding both the “privilege and liability” (p. 258) of an unmarked whiteness.

Yudice questioned which strategies White people would embrace towards disavowing privilege and called for rearticulating whiteness. He argued that simply declaring oneself non-White by virtue of a cultural difference as the price for admission into multiculturalism is not an option, particularly in a system in which identity politics do not allow White people, especially those of the working class, to claim such difference (p. 261). Given these constraints the White person claiming cultural difference will not likely disavow privilege nor be able to take part in a genuine antiracist construction that does not smack of wanna-be-ness. Given this conundrum Yudice believed that “the compulsion to disavow is inevitable as Whites seek to avoid being on the wrong side of the *us and them* divide that identity politics continues to enforce” (p. 263).



Proceeding with themes of rearticulating whiteness, Giroux (1997) recalled a movement begun by certain White people on the right [politicians] that mobilized a populist discourse as part of their resistance to an ever widening multicultural reality against which many White people felt threatened. As racial prejudice was considered "taboo," this new racism, veiled within political discourse, emerged, designed to frame whiteness as a "besieged" identity (p. 287). Giroux argued that although scholars inscribed whiteness as invisible in the 1980s, this does not hold true in the 1990s, especially among White youths who have become very astute to matters of race due in great part to the media's role in making issues of race more salient (p. 287).

Giroux explained that media depicted Black people as problems and White people as victimized yet intellectually superior. Concurrently, scholarship sought to locate whiteness as a racial category with inherent privilege and power. Consequently, the White man as a privileged subject was in jeopardy.

Centering on a theme of rationality and a critical pedagogy of whiteness, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) did not see whiteness as separate from hegemony. Whiteness has to do with power issues between White and non-White people but it is an identity that is always shifting. Given this context whiteness has become a key component of multicultural education for the twenty-first century (p. 4).

Locating the sociohistorical roots of whiteness, Kincheloe and Steinberg looked to the European Enlightenment of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of Western Europe. Drawing shape from its close affiliation with science, whiteness was equated with rationality and order as opposed to the chaos and violence, which characterized all things non-White. Such naturalized and universalized dynamics have afforded whiteness

an invisible power (p. 6). Manifestations of this power enabled nineteenth century Americans such as the Irish to be distinct from other ethnicities, thereby laying the groundwork for privilege. Such purity, in contrast to the colors around, assumed an air of superiority (p. 6).

Speaking of the crisis of White identity, Kincheloe and Steinberg argued that White racialization manifests in different ways, ranging from guilt to reactionary right-wing identity politics (p. 10). This identity crisis has prompted many White people to hearken to their ancestral ethnicities. But these efforts are insufficient. Even with racialization whiteness lacks meaning (p. 13). In reaction to this crisis in identity many White people have positioned themselves as victims and have called for a colorblind society in which everyone is treated equally (p. 14). In consideration of such an identity vacuum and crisis an alternative White antiracist identity is needed in contrast to tactics espoused by the right wing (p. 12). “A cardinal aspect of the entire conversation about whiteness is the fact that liberal and pluralist forms of multiculturalism and identity politics have not produced a compelling vision of a reconstructed White identity” (p. 12). Asserting that guilt and renunciation are not effective in the fight for social justice, Kincheloe and Steinberg called for a new critical pedagogy of whiteness that embraces pluralism (p. 12). This new pedagogy must understand the history of whiteness, privilege, power, and invisibility. It must decenter whiteness and foster the “unlearning of racism” (pp. 16-19). “It is possible to rethink White identity and reinvent whiteness in light of progressive democratic social goals and a critical understanding of social justice” (p. 20).

In a compelling take on identity reconstruction, Moon and Flores (2000) recalled a conference held at the University of California at Berkeley entitled, *The Making and*

*Unmaking of Whiteness*. Held in 1997, the chief goal of this conference was to talk about whiteness as strategy, that is, what it is used to do, rather than what it is as an identity. This conversation did elicit fear among some in that such talk brings with it the potential to breed White narcissism and neglect the aim of combating racism. Additionally, Moon and Flores noted that scholars of color have written about White people for decades, however, what is new about whiteness studies circa their above-referenced article is that White scholars are now beginning to study themselves.

In the article the authors highlighted two salient features of whiteness studies: anti-racist [reconfiguring whiteness] and abolitionist. They also made note of three features that seem to characterize whiteness studies, they being “an impulse to mark and come to understand whiteness, a commitment to anti-racist politics, and a desire to build emancipatory notions of whiteness” (p. 99). In light of these characteristics, however, Moon and Flores, like Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) above, cited much scholarship that has asserted that no “liberatory vision of whiteness has been articulated” (p. 99).

A key part of their article focused on a group that calls themselves New Abolitionists, also known as Race Traitors. This group believes that rearticulating whiteness will only glorify whiteness rather than improve race relations. As a result, White people [those acting White] will wage class warfare (pg. 100). The New Abolitionists argue that antiracism reinscribes race and that there is nothing positive about the White identity and that it should be done away with (p. 100).

Race Traitors distinguish between having European descent and being White. They do not call themselves White. Their problem is with the social construction of whiteness and its historical device of oppression. It is a state of mind (p. 102). As a counter to the race

traitor position Moon and Flores argued, "freezing whiteness ultimately recenters it" (p. 103). Moreover, they asserted that in making whiteness so monolithic race traitors assign significant agency to it regarding "historical change" (p. 106). Moon and Flores argued for an intersectional approach to whiteness given the complexities of oppression and the contention that social identity categories do not work in isolation (pp. 109-110).

As a logical antecedent to remaking White identity some assert deconstructing White identity as a first step. Bersh (2009) outlined a process of White identity deconstruction that required White people asking themselves what it means to be White. This process entails a critical look at prominent attributes that comprise White identity such as colorblindness and invisibility. Once White people become aware of their social privilege and that their colorblindness is merely a manifestation of their race evasiveness, the task of reconstructing White identity with the aim of building a more just society can commence.

In her work with White prospective teachers, McIntyre (2002) also relayed the need for White people to redefine their whiteness in order to uncover the more positive aspects of being White. Not only would such an acknowledgement aid White people in their service to society but it would also enable them to feel good about what they already possess.

In more subtle fashion that deviates from remaking White identity, Mayo (2004) offered an alternative proposal for White allies in the work for social justice. Portraying whiteness as a strategy for securing privilege rather than an identity, Mayo argued that the focus should not be on identity but on the work that needs to be done in combating

racism. Encouraging White people to focus on constructing a positive identity only serves to reify such an identity and consequently, the certainty of privilege.

Though not making an argument for total renouncement but calling for alternative ways for White people to combat racism, O'Brien (2001) pointed to the necessity of distinguishing between "nonracists" and "antiracists," where the former "minimize the significance of racism" and the latter "notice and address racism regularly" (p. 5). As part of a study O'Brien conducted she drew a respondent base from two key antiracist groups, Anti-Racist Action (ARA) and The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PI). Citing the diversity of her sample and the potential for "multidimensional" answers to questions of racism, O'Brien asserted, "That activists do not have to fit one basic profile to join in the struggle against White supremacy opens up possibilities for a stronger and broader-based movement" (p. 15). This point is important to my aforementioned assertions regarding complicating White identity and resisting staking out positions that leave little room for variability.

### **Whiteness in Education and White Teachers**

If inherent White racism is one of the main obstacles on the path to racial harmony any serious effort with the objective of building and maintaining the structures for a just society obviously understands the role education must play. Social justice workers with these aims must also understand that the educational apparatus poised to do such work may in fact be ill equipped to carry out the task. Adding complexity to this structural problem is a demographic imperative in which a majority White teaching force is educating a diverse student population. Echoing the themes expounded upon previously regarding White people coming to terms with their inherent privilege, the arguments that

follow focus on issues White teachers must face regarding their racial identities and how such inner dialogue, or lack thereof, plays out in their workings with a multiracial student body. While I attempt to weave issues pertaining to pre-service and in-service teachers together, and with an effort to be chronological, it is clear that the following review focuses mostly on pre-service teachers, which, as I have argued in the problem statement, reflects the preponderance of this topic in education literature.

### **Pre-service Teachers and Teacher Educators**

Sleeter (1993b) maintained that merely educating White teachers is not enough to deal with issues of racism in education. Arguing that schools “reproduce structures of inequality and oppression” (p. 157), she asserted that a teaching force primarily composed of White people will not reverse this racist trend. Drawing from a body of research that studied both White pre-service and in-service teachers, Sleeter claimed that psychological approaches which focus on racial and prejudicial attitudes that White people hold in their heads only serve to reinforce how teachers view students of color. Rather, a structural approach “focuses on distribution of power and wealth across groups and on how those of European ancestry attempt to retain supremacy while groups of color try to challenge it” (p. 158).

In a particular study that she and a colleague conducted of 30 teachers, 26 of which were White, they found most of these teachers’ views on race and social status mirrored tenants of ethnicity theory, where ethnic affiliation gives way to hard work in regards to social mobility. The White teachers used this argument to deny playing a role in White institutional complicity that subjugates people of color.

Among other noteworthy assertions Sleeter made were that White people do not encounter people of color much, nor understand their reality, nor really want to for fear such realities would be an affront to their privileged way of life (p. 168). Given the resistance White people show to challenging inherent racist notions, bringing diverse people into the teaching profession is necessary to deconstruct institutional racism, as they are better equipped to facilitate such an undertaking (pp. 168-169).

Speaking to the institutional nature of racism, Lawrence (1997) referenced a movement afoot in antiracist teacher education with the objective of making teacher candidates, who will teach in multicultural education, more cognizant of their race and its privilege. She questioned, however, whether or not this newly acquired knowledge about White racial identity and its effects on students would necessarily translate into practice in the classroom.

Additionally, Lawrence commented on a study of hers, which involved three teacher candidates who taught a practicum after having taken a multicultural education course. Taking cues from Helms's model of White racial identity development, the study examined the ways in which teacher identity development affected the candidates' teaching. Lawrence concluded that development of racial identity can take place over the course of a semester and that new awareness can translate into classroom practice, but that such teacher education should occur for more than just one semester and beyond coursework. Moreover, teacher candidates benefit from veteran teachers with advanced racial identity development (p. 115). Of particular interest, Lawrence presented the concept of whiteness as having layered meanings, those being of description, experience, and the ideology of whiteness. Description is equated with physical attributes; experience

entails privilege unearned; and ideology reflects the mechanisms White people rely upon to sustain invisible privilege (p. 108).

Reiterating themes of White identity evolution, McIntyre (1997) explored what it meant for White female student teachers to be White teachers. While this meaning-making very much involved coming to terms with privilege and making vocal what was before silent, McIntyre suggested that White educators make their whiteness public so that the multiple dimensions of such an identity can be understood within the context of education, and that teaching practice of an antiracist nature can be devised as a result. In a subsequent study of prospective teachers, McIntyre (2002) made a similar conclusion, that being the necessity for teachers to question their whiteness as a problem and move from simply talking about it to actual practice that promotes social justice.

Henze, Lucas, and Scott (1998) also spoke to the silence that is prevalent around discussions on whiteness in education. They cited a lack of trust as a major inhibition around such discussion. In order to speak to issues usually held private, such as privilege and power, a safe environment must be present to do so. Mutually agreed-upon guidelines can assist in fostering the trust necessary to have this type of dialogue. Furthermore, Henze et al. (1998) noted that the level of discomfort the White teachers in their study felt when broaching the topic of privilege and power may have very well originated from a naïve belief that the education system in the United States is meritocratic.

Speaking of power, Warren (1999) stated the need for White educators to disrupt the power center in the classroom. He argued that the pervasive tokenism that masquerades as multicultural education can be replaced if White educators are willing to critically



examine the power structures that are so often invisible to them. Such an examination could prevent non-White groups from being marginalized.

Where invisibility is concerned, Marx (2001), in her study involving White female pre-service teachers, found that her participants' whiteness framed their attitudes towards their students. She noted that unless White teachers make visible their invisible racist beliefs their practice could be detrimental to their students.

Also revealing the detrimental effect that racial identity silence has on curriculum and pedagogy, Mazzei (2004), in her study involving White teachers, argued for the importance of bringing the gaze inward and resisting the tendency many have in reflecting on their race only in regards to those who are non-White. Likewise, Picower (2004) noted this inclination for White people to recognize race only when confronted with others who differ racially. This tendency is consistent with aforementioned findings of race evasiveness and invisibility as well as the discomfort many White people feel when speaking to these issues.

Reflecting aforementioned themes of deconstructing White identity before remaking it, but still on the topic of inward gaze, Bersh (2009) emphasized the importance for prospective White teachers to critically examine their cultural identities in anticipation for teaching a plurality of non-White students. Such an examination makes possible an equitable educational experience for all. Hill-Jackson (2007), like Bersh, also stressed the need for White teachers to engage in this critical consciousness as pre-service teachers. She argued that facilitating a journey from an immature cultural consciousness to an attentive cultural consciousness is necessary in meeting the demands of multicultural education.

Shifting the focus from teacher to student, Douglas et al. (2008) interviewed Black students on their reflections regarding being educated by White teachers. Although this study did not explicitly interrogate White identity, but implied the necessity for cultural competency for White teachers, its notation is important here because of the study's suggestion that western epistemological underpinnings and their hegemonic characteristics likely account for the cultural disconnect between White teachers and their non-White students.

Marx (2008) also spoke to this cultural disconnect in her study involving Latino students and their White teachers. She, like other scholars cited thus far in this review, spoke to the limitations of whiteness in education, which, as these scholars have argued, is primarily due to inherent convictions of privilege that unless confronted, perpetuate cultural misunderstanding and racist practice.

As I have made clear, the effort to engage both prospective as well as in-service White teachers in the interrogation of their racial identities for the purposes of becoming mindful, antiracist educators is well documented in the literature. Moreover, the front lines of multicultural education involve teachers and students as inextricably linked in the fight for social justice and the dismantling of oppressive structures. However, as Galman et al. (2010) remind us, education scholars would be remiss if teacher education institutions were not included in the discourse. Complicating this discourse is the presence of White teacher educators training White student teachers. This reality highlights the folly in concluding that solely prospective White teachers need to examine their whiteness when their White educators face the same identity issues. Galman et al. (2010) concluded that although teacher educators should go about their work preparing

prospective teachers in tender fashion, their work on their own White racial knowledge should take place aggressively.

In summary, the aforementioned literatures on whiteness in education and teacher education are germane to this study. Although this study was not designed as an intervention to explicitly interrogate White teacher identity, respondent data in chapters four and five reflect many of the themes expounded upon above, particularly the ways in which respondent reflections on self-identity bear out in their pedagogies.

### **Pedagogy and Curriculum**

In recognition of the aforementioned necessity to question the identities of White teacher educators and their preservice subjects before they come into contact with students, an understanding of the hallmarks of curriculum and pedagogy that seek to dismantle systems of oppression supported by White privilege is requisite. As Applebaum (2003) warned, admission of White privilege is simply the beginning, however, too few White teachers, and consequently their White students, are able to make the link between such admissions and how privilege sustains systems of dominance. To bridge this gap, Applebaum argued it is necessary for White people to understand the systemic nature of privilege and develop a macro view of the issue that could illuminate what is often obscured by an individualistic perspective. “The starting point for such a pedagogy of the unknowable is to begin to listen to those whose experiences are an outcome of oppression” (p.17). Given the subtle ways White privilege eludes knowing, Applebaum stressed the need for continued vigilance.

In reference to such a structural understanding of racism, Roman (1993) questioned not oppressed peoples’ ability to speak but privileged White groups’ willingness to listen.

“How Whites can know the difference between occasions for responsive listening and listening as an excuse for silent collusion with the status quo of racial and neocolonial inequalities” (p. 79) is the question. Moving beyond relativism and essentialism in classroom pedagogy, Roman argued that upon recognition of the structural aspect of racism in which they are apart, White students and educators would be well advised to move beyond defensiveness towards a disinvestment in their privilege (p. 84).

Another admission that needs to be made in the construction of multicultural curriculum that is pedagogically critical is that race does matter. Curtis (1998) insisted that teachers and students are “racial and racialized beings” and that “the inclusion of our historical and social locations as they relate to power, oppression, and privilege has the potential to be a compelling component in the construction of curriculum” (p. 138).

As stated above, the importance of acknowledging the structural nature of racism as well as avoiding essentializing whiteness, particularly in education, have become common themes in the literature. Where such discourse takes place commentary on approaching whiteness as intersectional and not in isolation is likely an inextricable element.

Lewis (2004) argued that, on the whole, White subjectivities have been neglected in favor of discussing racial minorities (p. 624). Material and ideological elements of race must not be studied in isolation from each other but as inextricably linked (p. 625). As whiteness is not fixed, it must be examined with historical context in mind (p. 625). All, including White people, are racialized subjects, but through the historical tendency of racializing others White people have not developed a "strong racial consciousness" of their own (p. 626). Lewis maintained that it is difficult to discuss White people as a group

when they generally avoid such talk of racial identity or identifications with whiteness. What is needed is a conceptual framework (p. 626). She sees race as both symbolic and structural (p. 630) and believes that the avoidance of essentializing the White experience is an important challenge (p. 640).

Reflecting on her experience as a professor at a rural college in which the student body was predominantly White, Winans (2005) echoed a common theme, that in which race and racial identity only pertains to people of color (p. 254). Given such a context, Winans believes that an exploration into the ways in which whiteness works in settings lacking racial and cultural diversity can still be done effectively. She noted that most scholarship on whiteness essentializes whiteness thereby equating it with privilege. She believes this has created problems in the area of critical pedagogy and as a solution proposes local pedagogies (p. 256).

Winans argued that a predominantly White campus creates an artificial sense of safety for White students. In such a non-threatening environment White students are insulated from perceptions that they might be racist (p. 257). Winans' pedagogy interrogates White safety by focusing on the narratives students have developed to keep them safe, one being claiming innocence about race through colorblindness (p. 258). Though students need to understand the "implications of colorblindness critically," (p. 262) teachers must still listen to what students find difficult to express (p. 262). Exploring colorblindness is necessary to reveal how it serves to obscure conflicted feelings about race. Local pedagogies that address students' beliefs seriously can help them move past a "dualistic, innocent-versus-guilty framework" (p. 263). One local strategy that is helpful in deconstructing student narratives around race and racial identity is analyzing

autobiographical narratives of other people's lived experience of race (p. 263). When writing critically about race "White students decenter themselves by exploring their positions, thereby challenging the perception of their own neutrality and innocence" (p. 267).

As I attempt to transit from classroom pedagogy to pedagogy as a theoretical concept, encompassing the cross-disciplinary nature of education, the following citation touches on many of the previously mentioned themes, but in nuanced fashion. Specifically, Duster (2001) examined portrayals of race and whiteness as fluid against those in which race and racism are seen as solid (p. 113). Noting voices that describe race as ever changing as well as those who see its structural and enduring nature, Duster argued that both sides carry truth. Whiteness and its privilege is "deeply embedded" (p. 114). Even White people who are aware of privilege cannot so easily deny it and do away with it.

Making the case that race can be "both structural and embedded yet superficial, arbitrary, and whimsical" (p. 114), Duster portrayed race, or more specifically, whiteness, as analogous with water. Like water, whiteness can be both fluid and solid. Unlike water, however, whiteness can make the switch between both states in an instant as well as be simultaneously fluid and solid. Water needs time for this transition (p. 115). Neither state is "more real than the other" (p. 115). Empirically, though, race is socially constructed with more variation within rather than between racial groups. The effects of race, however, are real (p. 117).

In further regards to whiteness, Duster asserted, "we cannot study whiteness in any meaningful way unless or until one sees it as a relational phenomenon" (p. 131). Duster believes that the best research is that which heeds the ability of whiteness to morph yet

“remain structurally privileged” (p. 131). “There is a tendency to see only fluidity or at least to so emphasize fluidity that one lacks the capacity to see enduring structure” (p. 132).

Although there is widespread agreement regarding the necessity of critical pedagogy that addresses racism and oppression, Trainor (2002) and Niemonen (2007) offered words of caution regarding the potential hazards of such an undertaking. Trainor noted that the rhetoric of critical pedagogy usually carries with it an insider-outsider mentality. The question she posed was, “How do we bring those outsiders in without compromising the ethical integrity of the critical project?” (p. 637). Trainor went on to state, “by creating rhetorical frames that demonize whiteness and White students, we may do more harm than good, may inadvertently perpetuate, even create, the very values we seek to unravel in our teaching” (p. 647).

In summary, the aforementioned literatures are important to this study because they highlight the connection between White subjectivities and curriculum and pedagogy. Moreover, as chapter five demonstrates, I have found it important to present arguments that challenge linking whiteness wholly with privilege. As Winan’s (2005) argued above, essential views of whiteness, as well as unequivocally interpreting perceived race evasiveness as efforts to protect privilege, neglect complex phenomena that need to be illuminated if we are to gain deeper insights into whiteness in regards to pedagogy. In addition, the aforementioned literatures are relevant to this study in that they emphasize structural understandings of race, which are critical in regards to pedagogies of whiteness.

### **Complex Identities and Fluid Identifications**

As a concluding theme the following literatures transcend typical identifications in regards to White identity, therefore dispelling myths and expanding the conversation beyond that which is prevalent in the literature.

McDermott and Samson (2005) noted an encouraging move in the literature to loosen White identity from its usual association with privilege. Citing the complexity of White identity they stressed the need to consider the context of the White individual and how such location plays a role in defining the identity. Hughey (2010) in concurrence, stated, “it is now agreed that whiteness is a constantly morphing identity refracted by context” (p. 1291). Raible and Irizarry (2007) also argued for the importance to consider context where complex identities are negotiated. In addition, they maintained that if White identity were to be retheorized or transformed, such a transformation would require the involvement of non-White people. “We cannot simply will ourselves to be new in different ways without negotiating and gaining the validation of others who differ from us racially” (p. 179).

Continuing the theme of complexity, Jupp and Slattery (2010a), in their call for a second wave of White identity studies, emphatically underscored the need for “creative identifications” around whiteness to emphasize a process of becoming rather than identities characterized by stasis. Though Jupp and Slattery made reference to a second wave of White identity studies, two years earlier Twine and Gallagher (2008) heralded a third wave. This provisional third wave analyzes how whiteness is deployed and how White identity and privilege are maintained and destabilized. This wave sees whiteness not as static or essentialized but characterized by a multiplicity of identifications. It



rejects whiteness as being only associated with power and privilege (pp. 6-7). Third wave whiteness studies strive to make privilege visible and conscious while also acknowledging Du Bois' understanding that identifications of White people are not universal and monolithic (p. 9).

In their analysis Twine and Gallagher traced the waves of whiteness studies. In the first wave they credited W.E.B. Du Bois and his writing in *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* as having provided the theoretical foundation. White laborers opted for admission into the dominant race rather than join in solidarity with recently freed slaves. This identification ensured social capital. It is noteworthy to mention that Du Bois observed over 100 years ago the way in which the invisibility of whiteness sustained privilege (pp. 7-8).

In the second wave, critical race scholars, many of whom were Black, focused on making White supremacy and institutional racism visible. White social scientists of the twentieth century focused on the pathology of racist individuals and not on the structures that supported racism (p. 10). Twine and Gallagher also cited Morrison's work [*Playing in the Dark*] and her scholarship on the practices that make whiteness invisible as well as critical legal theory which posits the favor White people gain from the legal system and the view of whiteness as property (p. 11).

Finally, as part of their provisional third wave analysis, Twine and Gallagher also showed how third wave whiteness studies has displayed an interest in how White people have sought to “recuperate, reconstitute and restore White identities” (p. 13) through a variety of research methodologies including use of the internet, biographies, music, and interviews (p. 12). In mapping out new empirical ways to analyze whiteness Twine and

Gallagher expressed hope that these efforts would contribute to the dismantling of racism (p.19).

The aforementioned literatures are particularly relevant to this study because in complicating White identity one of my chief intentions was to highlight more progressive identifications that resist essentialist notions and re-vision White identity in more capacitating ways.

### **Whiteness Studies Critiqued**

Though most scholars in the field of whiteness studies contend it is a public sociology, Niemonen (2010) argued it does not fit the definition of a public sociology as proposed by Burawoy (2005). According to Burawoy, a public sociology discusses issues pertinent to its domain publically and in democratic fashion (Niemonen, 2010, p. 49). Niemonen criticized scholars who have made lucrative careers of highlighting the travails of the marginalized while failing to address the unfinished business of the civil rights movement. He argued that studying race and racism from a distant academic vantage point rather than a personal one limits efforts towards a public sociology and risks perpetuating "White interests" (p.50). By nature of whiteness studies' "ontological, epistemological, and soteriological foundations," it "panders" to the oppressed and "condemns" the privileged, thus devolving into a partisan sociology instead of a pop sociology (p. 49).

In addition to criticism as a sociology much work on whiteness has been based on essentialized and deficit notions, therefore ignoring the fluid nature of whiteness (Eichstedt, 2001; Jupp & Slattery, 2010b). Such notions risk reification and have made it difficult for White people to embrace antiracism (Eichstedt, 2001; Giroux, 1997).

Essentialized and deficit notions pertaining to whiteness carry particular gravity in the field of education as predominant research on White teachers has focused on deficit views of non-White people as well as race evasiveness (Jupp & Slattery, 2010b). Moreover, little focus has been directed on researcher positionality, For example, Jupp and Slattery (2010b) challenged an interventionist approach, which "assumes a monolithic false consciousness on the part of participants" (p.210). In regards to activist research they argued that what might be construed as race evasiveness on the part of the participant may actually be a resistance to researcher intervention (pp. 210-211). Additionally, they contended that scholarship on White teachers should entail more focus on contexts, as research has been highly de-contextualized. To this point McCarthy (2003), in reference to five articles on White identity and teacher education, made a compelling observation.

A particularly troubling aspect of these studies is the fact that virtually all of them construct a world of teacher education that is effectively sealed off from the rest of society. The world of these studies is a virtual laboratory of preservice teacher education seminars, school classrooms, and the clinical researcher perched on the observation deck. The living social context that feeds into the educational setting and with which these school inhabitants and their educators interact in their everyday lives is barely alluded to. It is as though the entire cast of research subjects and their researchers had shown up for a ritual or play only to go off stage when the various essays were finished. (p. 131)

Finally, Jupp & Slattery (2010b) maintained that scholarship on whiteness in education has not understood the White subject in a non-essentialized way (p. 211). "In

short, what is missing is a White subject who both challenges yet enacts, critiques yet complies. This more complicated White subject marks a starting place for pedagogical practice with White teachers” (p. 211).

The tendency in whiteness studies to look at White identity without taking into consideration the complex and ever changing social dynamic in which it is located was also explicated by Lensmire (2010a). He cited deficiencies in whiteness studies, particularly the lack of analysis of its intersections with issues of class, gender, and sexuality (p. 159). Lensmire’s conclusions were based on a study that involved 22 White people spanning three generations in rural Wisconsin. Speaking to the conflicted and ambivalent nature of White identity, Lensmire cautioned that viewing whiteness as only an embodiment of privilege undermines work for social justice (p. 169).

As educators and researchers, we must assume that White racial identities are multifarious messes of thought and feeling, and recognize that resistance to antiracist and social justice efforts is not always a straightforward defense of White privilege. We must remain attentive to the pedagogical possibilities of complexity and conflict. (p. 170)

Finally, in regards to education, Niemonen (2007) noted the tendency of antiracist education to vilify White people and reduce the argument to good White people and bad White people. He also cited a disconnect between the theory of antiracist education and its actual practice, as well an evangelical zeal common among many of its practitioners.

As a morally based educational reform movement, antiracist education is anti-sociological because it is rigid and highly judgmental. Its pejorative claims show a disregard for rules of logical inquiry and empirical means of proof. By embracing both

the postmodern epistemic that rejects the Western canon and the tenets of evangelical Protestantism, which emerged from the Western canon, antiracist educators take a position that is inherently contradictory. (p. 171)

The aforementioned arguments are particularly important in the context of my study because, as the title of this dissertation implies, my intention was in large part to critique prevalent tendencies in whiteness studies where education is concerned. Such a position resists static portrayals of identity, partisan inclinations, positivist notions of teacher effectiveness, and questions the tenets of antiracist pedagogy.

### **Whiteness rearticulated.**

As explicated earlier in this literature review many scholars argue for reforming White consciousness from that of problematic identity to one with objectives aligned with battling racism and oppression. Though there is widespread consensus on the need to refigure White identity, scholars have noted the delicate nature of such an undertaking and potential ramifications if not done with careful consideration. For example, in referencing Jeater (1992), Yudice (1995) argued that rearticulating whiteness should not involve feeling guilty or wanting to be Black. The dangers, however, of a reconfiguration in which everyone is neither “central” nor “marginal” is that “there will no longer be a moral basis on which to demand that ‘others’ be listened to” (p. 264). Still, Yudice asserted that multiculturalism and identity politics must move beyond blame and merely the disavowal of whiteness “to project a new democratic vision that makes sense to the White middle and working classes” (p. 273).

With similar words of caution Giroux (1997) argued for rearticulating whiteness but warned against casting it as "synonymous with domination" (p. 292). Furthermore,

Giroux contended that it has become difficult for White youth to simultaneously acknowledge their whiteness and be antiracist. He elucidated two forces that have emerged, which have contributed in making whiteness visible yet hindered White youth in being oppositional: identity politics and an increased visibility of Black people. The pressures of identity politics have left White youth with few options, that is, either renounce their whiteness or deal with the charge of racism (p. 294). The increased visibility of Black people has caused White youth to confront the forces of cultural difference (p. 295). Consequently, White youth face an esteem crisis and an ethnic void making difficult the articulation of an oppositional position from which to wage a battle for social justice.

Finally, on a related note, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) offered the following.

The reinvention of whiteness operates outside any notion of racial superiority or inferiority, as it seeks to traverse the terrain of transitional identity. While it confronts White tyranny directly, it avoids projecting guilt onto White students. In the process, it generates a sense of pride in the possibility that White people can help transform the reality of social inequality and reinvent themselves around the notions of justice, community, social creativity, and economic/political democracy. (p. 21)

**Lack of empiricism.**

Though the topics that have been covered in this review of the literature are varied there is an underlying theme that courses through all of them. Discussions around White identity usually carry an emotional charge. Whether in defense of White identity or in scrutiny the conversation persists and it seems clear that whiteness will continue to be on trial, especially where multicultural education is concerned. Though many of the

conclusions that implicate whiteness as complicit in supporting racism are based upon studies, some scholars have alluded to a lack of empirical grounding in such findings. Although these assertions are not included as prominent themes in this literature review they deserve mention here.

Hartmann et al. (2009) questioned the extent to which the invisibility of whiteness was generalized, therefore prompting speculation as to just how concealed whiteness is in the United States. They cautioned that the lack of measurement involved in studies on whiteness, of which the vast majority have been qualitative, renders issues of generalizability suspect. Likewise, Torkelson and Hartmann (2010) made mention of this tendency to favor theory over empiricism and, like other scholars (Croll et al., 2006; Hartmann et al., 2009; Niemonen, 2007), suggested a need for more empirical studies to address the inherent complexities of whiteness. Finally, Croll et al. (2006) and Niemonen (2007) cited the aforementioned lack of empiricism as a major reason why many conclusions on whiteness have not been embraced by disciplines outside of education. Considering the multidisciplinary nature of whiteness studies, such validation seems crucial if the field is to be taken seriously.

### **Concluding Themes**

Throughout this literature review themes centering on the invisibility of whiteness as well as the dangers of its reification are unarguably salient. In consideration that these points are convincingly made I will now focus on other themes that I believe deserve particular notation but are still bound to notions of race evasiveness and reification.

One such theme is that of meritocracy, which, in the context of whiteness literatures, is the practice of White people attributing advantages gained in life to individual effort as

opposed to advantages stemming principally from being White (Gallagher, 1997; Henze et al., 1998; Mahoney, 1997; McIntosh, 1990; Scheurich, 1993). In this regard the White subject evades discussions on race by conveniently holding to an American ideal that sings the praises of hard work. Interestingly and as noted earlier, Hartmann et al. (2009) found that most non-White people believe in a meritocratic ideal as well.

Meritocracy aside, if the White subject is ever willing to admit to skin color as the primary reason for advantage, the manner in which the subject is broached is of critical importance. Henze et al. (1998) called for a safe environment in which to broach the subject of privilege while other scholars have cast doubt on popular explanations for resisting the subject. Such scholarship (Dickar, 2008; Jupp & Slattery, 2010b; Lensmire, 2010a) has alluded to other reasons contrary to race evasiveness to explain such resistance.

The aforementioned argument regarding race evasiveness and characteristics that define White people speak to another theme in the literature, essentialism. Given the fluid nature of identity in general many scholars have warned against essentializing whiteness (Eichstedt, 2001; Jupp & Slattery, 2010b; Lensmire, 2010a; Lewis, 2004; Winans, 2005). This scholarship argues that equating whiteness only with privilege and deficit understandings of difference, as well as failing to consider where whiteness intersects with other social markers, compromises the advancement of discourse around whiteness and risks reifying it.

Efforts against essentialized notions of whiteness also include moving beyond blame (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Moon & Flores, 2000; Niemonen, 2007; Trainor, 2002; Yudice, 2005). With a subject as emotionally charged as racism this is a



difficult proposition, as there is a tendency to assign blame to its perpetrators.

Scholarship that speaks to moving beyond blame understands the responsibility that must be taken but also understands a fixation on condemnation and guilt perpetuates an *us versus them* mentality, compromises efforts to build antiracist coalitions, and runs contrary to democratic ideals.

While making convincing arguments against a condemnation of the White identity as referenced above, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998), as well as Moon and Flores (2000), have also noted that a compelling vision for the future of whiteness has yet to emerge. This assertion begs the question of whether the previously referenced focus on blame and guilt has played a role in forestalling efforts for whiteness to be redefined as an agent for social justice.

If such agency is ever realized by whiteness it cannot wage a fight for social justice alone. Though many would place the burden wholly atop the shoulders of White people this task requires the assistance of people who are not White (Owen, 2007; Raible & Irizarry, 2007; Yudice, 1995). The argument for disparate forces to remedy divisions through the assistance of one another speaks directly to relationality. Any approach that would analyze phenomenon such as whiteness must consider other social phenomenon with which whiteness intersects, as whiteness does not exist nor perform in isolation (Duster, 2001; Lensmire, 2010a; Lewis, 2004; Moon & Flores, 2000).

### **Conclusion of Literature Review**

In this literature review I have attempted to provide a comprehensive report on extant scholarship on whiteness. Though I have covered many literatures and have touched upon

many themes, the literature on whiteness is vast and is still evolving as newer understandings are realized.

Having, to the best of my ability, presented fair coverage on the breadth of whiteness literatures, I believe I have provided support for the statement of the problem made in the first chapter of this dissertation. Given prevalent notions in the literature that equate being White with race evasiveness and privilege, and how these problems impact education, it is imperative that new scholarship on whiteness in education resist partisan tendencies (Niemonen, 2010). Such tendencies do not claim moral high ground in the fight for social justice, but continue to embrace democratic discourse that leads to fruitful and inclusive dialogue.

With a demographic imperative in which a plurality of White teachers are faced with meeting the educational and social needs of a multiracial and multicultural student body, it was my intention at the onset of this study to contribute to such a dialogue by exploring White teacher subjectivities and hopefully gain for myself a deeper understanding of White identity in terms of social justice. In recognition that I sought to explore White teacher identifications it became clear to me that I needed to engage in face-to-face dialogue with teachers. In order to facilitate such an exchange a narrative research design was necessary. To that end I chose life history methodology to tell the stories of the respondents.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

The increasing racial diversity of students in the public schools of the United States, concurrent with a predominant White teacher force (Applebaum, 2003; Kailin, 1999; Sleeter, 2001), brings issues of representation front and center in the work for social justice. At the heart of this disproportion between students of color and White teachers lay questions of identity.

#### **Restatement of Purpose**

Complicating whiteness in a way that resists the construction of a monolithic White identity is critically important if a new wave of White identity studies is to gain traction and address issues of representation in education. In order to hold true to the stated purpose of this study, that is, to expand the discourse around whiteness in education beyond static representations prevalent in multicultural education literature, the methodology employed to elicit such discourse is equally critical.

#### **Research Design**

In recognition that this study explored identifications of veteran White teachers in multicultural settings, careful attendance to experiences that shape identity were necessary. Integral to this process are candid reflections on critical periods of one's personal and professional life. This inward gaze ideally leads to a telling of one's own story. As Atkinson (1998) stated, "when we tell a story from our own life we increase our working knowledge of ourselves" (p. 1). Similarly, Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach, and Tamar (1998) noted, "we know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by

the stories we tell” (p. 7). In consideration that the data of this qualitative study was generated by stories told by teachers, life history methodology was employed.

Although stories are used in a variety of contexts by a variety of practitioners their social and psychological functions make them an ideal match for research within the discipline of education. Goodson and Sikes (2001) commented on the growing use of life history methodology in the field of education, and in particular where teachers are concerned, its effectiveness in merging the personal with the professional. As they stated, “life history does not ask for such separation: indeed it demands holism” (p.10). Additionally, Riessman (1993) stated, “because the approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity” (p. 5).

In dealing with something as enigmatic and ever changing as identity it is imperative that the researcher gain as deep an understanding of respondent data as possible in order to mine such content for a reliable narrative. As Atkinson (1998) stated, “the life story narrative may be the most effective means for gaining an understanding of how the self evolves over time or at least in seeing the subjective perspective on that” (p. 11). Goodson and Sikes (2001) also spoke to the subjective in relation to its common avoidance by most other social scientific methods. “Conducted successfully, the life history forces a confrontation with other people’s subjective perceptions” (p.7).

In conducting this research, in which explorations of identities were concerned, it was imperative that I struck a careful balance between facilitating the explorations of the respondents all the while remaining at a distance that ensured the integrity of their voices. Life history methodology assured this distance insofar that the narrative was kept “in the words of the person telling the story” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 2).

When one tells a personal story the listener often connects to that story as well. To the extent that this study complicated White identity, respondent responses often functioned as lenses through which I came to more clearly understand my own story. As Atkinson stated (1998), “stories can affirm, validate, and support our own experiences in relation to those around” (p. 10). What is more, Cole and Knowles (2001) added, “life history inquiry is about gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans” (p. 11).

### **Cognition**

Bruner (1986) has been lauded for identifying two types of cognition (thought): *Paradigmatic* and *Narrative*. Paradigmatic thought concerns storied occurrences as belonging to categories and why they are part of a category (commonalities) rather than what makes them distinct from other instances within a category (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 10). Narrative cognition, on the other hand, focuses on the unique attributes of each action (p. 11). These concepts were germane to my study as they assisted me in framing my respondents’ stories as episodic as well as comprising unique cumulative instantiations.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

In relation to cognition, Polkinghorne (1995) referred to two types of narrative inquiry: *analysis of narratives* and *narrative analysis*. The former deals with analysis of collected stories towards themes where the latter focuses on events and elements eventually building towards a story (pp. 12-13). Realizing my study explored identity it would seem that both types of inquiry would have been important, however, analysis of narratives was employed because my intent was to expand the conversation around White

identity beyond the scope presently evident in educational literature. This objective was achieved through individual voices rather than arriving at an emplotted story.

### **Research Setting**

During the 2011-2012 school year all 10 respondents worked in the Leafstown (pseudonym) Unified School District of California. In this year 101 schools served approximately 38,000 students. Student demographic percentages by race or ethnicity were as follows: 39.8 % Hispanic, 31.5 % African American, 13% Asian American, 8% White, 1.7% Multiracial, 1% Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, 0.8% Filipino, and 0.4 % American Indian and Alaska Native (kidsdata.org, 2011). The 2011-2012 school year was the seventh consecutive year that the Leafstown Unified School District was named the most improved urban district in California as measured by Academic Performance Index.

### **Population**

In holding to the tradition of life history methodology the respondent base was small (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Riessman, 1993), as “depth over breadth” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 70) was sought. Furthermore, in recognition that generalization was not the objective of this study, rather, richness of data, a higher quantity population was not entirely appropriate (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). As Morse (1994) stated, an adequate [population] size is evident when, “sufficient data have been collected and saturation occurs and variation is both accounted for and understood” (p. 230).

Purposive sampling was used to ensure respondents met the proposed criteria, White teachers with 10 or more years experience in multicultural settings. I define a multicultural setting as one populated by a racially and culturally diverse student body

with demographics similar to those stated above in the Research Setting section. If White students comprised 8% of the total student population in the Leafstown Unified School District for the 2011-2012 school year, the percentage of White students taught by the teachers of this study was far less. In some cases teachers had no White students at all.

In further regard to population criteria, all of the teachers had taught for at least 10 years in a multicultural setting by the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year. This amount of uninterrupted time, as much as any other indication of service, implies a commitment to a chosen profession. Finally, no efforts were made to screen for respondents who self-identified as either White or antiracist.

### **Respondent information.**

Table 1

Respondent	Years of Service	2011-2012 Assignment
Sara	11	Grade 8, English Language Arts, Social Studies
Carol	38	Grade 3, Multiple Subjects in English
Jack	21	Grade 12, AP English
Jane	15	Grades 2-3, English Language Arts, Spanish Language Arts, Math
John	28	Grades K-5, Teacher on Special Assignment
Maggie	13	Grades 9-12, Resource Specialist

Vernon	20	Grades 4-5, Multiple Subjects in English
Pete	32	Grades K-5, Special Day Class of Non-Severely Handicapped Students
Henry	32	Grades 10-12, United States History, Driver Education
Nancy	27	Grade 8, Algebra

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### **Instrumentation**

Participant data were elicited through semi-structured interviews. The first few questions and dialogue prompts were designed to provide information regarding early-life experiences that were influential in the formulation of the respondents' identities. Subsequent questions and dialogue prompts focused on the respondents' professional lives as teachers. Although the questions and dialogue prompts were numerous and sequential, the respondents were given unlimited time and space to speak. As a result of the free-flowing nature of the dialogues many of the questions and dialogue prompts were addressed without being prompted. As the transcriptions reveal, I did not engage in conversations with the respondents, but facilitated in-depth narratives by simply asking the questions and following up with unscripted questions and dialogue prompts when I deemed necessary.

The following respondent questionnaire was intended to complicate existing understandings on whiteness in education. As a researcher I viewed the respondents as holders of knowledge and facilitated a dialogue in which they were the experts in their fields. As the questions and dialogue prompts exhibit, common language or terminology



related to multicultural course work and teacher pedagogy was avoided, as such language hints at intervention, which this study was not. This study was also not an overt attempt to make the respondents aware of their privilege. Although each respondent was asked to reflect upon being a White teacher in a diverse setting, as well as to reflect upon the academic performance of student racial groups, concepts such as privilege and racism were addressed indirectly. With respect to this point it is necessary to recognize the respondent narratives of this study as representative of lives within structures.

Developing a structural understanding of racism and how such societal structures replicate oppressive practices is important if we are to combat racism. Moreover, a structural understanding of racism does not relieve White individuals who derive privilege and advantage from such oppressive structures (Reason, Scales, & Roosa Millar, 2005). Understanding one's privileged position within an oppressive structure is, however, a safe starting point as the White individual moves from innocence to personal responsibility.

#### **Respondent questionnaire.**

What was growing up like for you?

What was going to school like for you?

Tell me about your college experience.

When did you start thinking about becoming a teacher?

Tell me how you got into teaching.

How did you arrive in a multicultural setting?

What was learning to teach diverse students like?

How would you describe life as a teacher?

What do you see as important to your teaching and why?

How does your school experience compare with that of your students?

Tell me about being a White teacher of diverse students.

Tell me about your students.

Tell me about your students' racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Tell me about your most successful students.

Which groups are most successful academically?

What factors make a student successful?

Tell me about students who don't do so well.

Which groups are not so successful?

What factors make a student fail?

How do you plan?

How do you reach your students?

Tell me about some lessons you developed that really work for you.

Why do those lessons work?

Tell me about some lessons that didn't work so well.

What happens when lessons don't work out?

What have you learned about how classrooms of diverse students work?

Do you ever feel it necessary to change your behavior to accommodate your students?

What about your school environment helps you accomplish your work?

What about your school environment gets in the way of your work?

In your opinion what makes a successful teacher of diverse students?

What advice would you have for a first year teacher?

Final question (debrief): How would you say your life history (background, education) ties into your professional life as a teacher?

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Given the features that distinguish life history methodology from most other qualitative methodologies, issues of validity and reliability are likewise unique. As Goodson and Sikes (2001) maintained, “since life history work is so often collaborative, with researcher and respondent seeking meanings and explanations together, respondent validation may well be built into the research design” (p. 36). Atkinson (1998) added, “reliability and validity are not necessarily the appropriate evaluative standards for a life story interview” (p. 59). To all intents and purposes, beyond a positivist paradigm, they are inadequate (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 123). These assertions do not, however, relieve the researcher of taking measures to ensure validity and reliability. For a methodology such as life history issues regarding validity and reliability very often come down to trust. I address this concept in the next section.

### **Fidelity**

Although validity and reliability are crucial components in both quantitative and qualitative studies, trustworthiness and authenticity have proven to be more appropriate in narrative research. Towards this point, criterion around the concept of fidelity (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p. 26) may prove to be a viable solution to the dilemma. Where truth deals with what actually happened in an event, fidelity addresses the actual impact a particular happening had on the teller. This revealing subjective experience seems more appropriate to narrative inquiry but of course hinges upon trust between the teller and receiver. Such trust has the potential to foster believability in the audience (p. 31).

In addition to the aforementioned measures undertaken in the interests of credibility and trustworthiness perhaps the most important measure undertaken was constructing

effective questions and dialogue prompts. Questions and dialogue prompts were designed to elicit the true voice of the respondent and not what the respondent thought was appropriate nor what he or she thought I wanted to hear. I was very careful to not predispose the respondent perspectives but rather let the dialogue flow. This was particularly important when broaching issues on the topic of race. With these interests in mind I was guided by what Atkinson (1998) called the “threefold complexity of every life story” by prompting each respondent to reflect upon, “Who am I and what happened to make me who I am?, How am I?, and Why am I?” (p. 75).

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through one-on-one interviews that took place during the winter and spring of 2012. Interview locations were chosen by the respondents with the condition that the locations provided a relaxed and quiet atmosphere free from work and distractions. Locations ranged from classrooms to respondent homes, as well as my home. The duration of each interview was approximately two hours. The interviews were recorded using a professional microphone and a digital voice recording computer program.

To ensure consistency of data collected all respondents were asked the same primary questions and dialogue prompts. With respect to internal consistency (Atkinson, 1998), that is, the absence of contradictions throughout the narrative, both the respondent and myself carefully monitored the course of the discussion and made efforts to clarify comments that seemed to contradict one another.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Transcription.**

Interview transcriptions were begun using voice recognition software. This process involved listening to each recording while viewing the transcriptions and making corrections where the software made errors. Though this process was tedious it allowed me to re-experience the audio portion of each interview, which assisted me in deriving deeper meaning, as vocal inflections cannot be captured by written words. And as Riessman (1993) noted, “forms of transcription that neglect features of speech miss important information” (p. 20). Once this stage was completed I listened to each interview again while reading the written transcript to ensure accuracy.

In regards to faithful transcriptions I did not include every single ah, uhm, hesitation, pause, and false start. I agree with Nespor and Barber (1995) in that the above features of speech are “artifacts of interview practices” (p. 56). As Nespor and Barber stated, “People do not speak on paper. Transcripts are written forms, and when we freeze interview speech into print, we construct those we have talked to as subordinate writers: We make them look ignorant” (p. 57). Moreover, Brooks and Warren (1970) argued that the researcher needs to provide an “impression of real life and not a word-for-word recording” (p. 611). Although my procedure did result in error-free verbatim transcripts I believe I did provide such impressions. Finally, in the interests of corroboration (Atkinson, 1998) each transcript was then sent to its respective respondent for review and approval.

**Analysis.**

In preparation for analysis individual transcripts were converted to PDF documents (for ease of annotation) and transferred to the Zotero interface system for organizational purposes.

At the onset of this critical phase of the research process I admit that the task before me—reading through hundreds of pages of interview data—seemed daunting. I consulted numerous texts for analysis procedures but ultimately concluded that there are no set formulae for life history analysis and writing (Cole & Knowles, 2001). I decided to trust myself as the instrument and simply read the data and come to know it as intimately as possible and let the important stories emerge. In regards to this process Plummer (1983) is on the mark.

In many ways this is the truly creative part of the work. It entails brooding and reflecting upon mounds of data for long periods of time until it “makes sense” and “feels right,” and key ideas and themes flow from it. It is also the hardest process to describe: the standard technique is to read and make notes, leave and ponder, reread without notes, make new notes, match notes up, ponder, reread, and so on. (p. 99)

Although I used voice recognition software for initial transcriptions I rejected the use of software programs for data analysis. As Cole and Knowles (2001) stated, “the stronger the commitment to the intersubjective nature of the researcher-participant relationship, the less likely it is that a researcher will invite a computer program into that relationship” (p. 99).

I began reading the data and found myself highlighting striking information, that is, information that I deemed relevant to the purpose of the study, as well as “critical

moments in the awakening of work identity” (Riessman, 1993, p. 13). I also made notations in the sidebars. During this process I held to the concepts of fidelity and trustworthiness and was mindful to not let personal bias influence what I chose to highlight. Being already well apprised of whiteness literatures assisted me in highlighting pertinent information that both reflected and challenged arguments made in the literature. Throughout this stage of analysis I monitored my feelings very closely and was careful to not intentionally seek material which could be used as counter narratives to support my own prior postulations. To safeguard against researcher bias I focused on the structure of the narratives and worked from the inside out, thereby privileging respondent experience (Riessman, 1993).

Highlighted material and annotations from each individual transcription were then converted into preliminary profile sketches of each respondent. The profile sketches were then crosschecked with the annotated transcriptions to ensure accurate representation of the respondents. Profile sketches were then revised and transformed into respondent portraits (Cole & Knowles, 2001), which served as mini-biographies. Each portrait was sent to its respective respondent for review, corroboration, and approval.

I then returned to the highlighted transcripts and the profile sketches to begin coding for striking information, particularly narrative patterns. This process was also characterized by fidelity. Striking information and narrative patterns were color-coded and organized by categories. Upon deeper analysis of the newly coded transcripts and profile sketches, I distilled the narrative data into two major categories, which are later enumerated in chapter five. Interpretations of data are provided in chapter five as well.

### ***Subjectivity and interpretation.***

Given the general distrust of subjectivity in mainstream social science (Riessman, 1993) it is necessary to defend its use here. The methodology employed in this study relied upon respondent narratives as data. Respondent narratives as representations of experience are in essence interpretive and require interpretation for meaning-making. As a postpositivist qualitative researcher my job was to subjectively interpret respondent narratives. In speaking to the limits of representation, Riessman (1993) makes an important point.

Meaning is ambiguous because it arises out of a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst, and reader. Although the goal may be to tell the whole truth, our narratives about others' narratives are our worldly creations. . . . Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly. (p. 15)

### **Human Subjects Protection**

Consent for the study began with the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco. Once this consent was granted I obtained consent from the Leaftown Unified School District and informed each respondent's principal of the nature and procedures of the study. Additional information regarding protection of human subjects is provided below in the Ethical Considerations section.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Issues pertaining to ethics are particularly striking in narrative research, as the researcher must essentially restory a story told. In a sense the researcher is inventing, or



perhaps better put, crafting a new story. Not only is the researcher reserving the right to interpret stories told, he or she is also, by virtue of holding the position as researcher and by obtaining consent, in a position of authority. Because I established a sense of trust with my respondents through my recruitment tactics as well as the fact that I was myself a working teacher fitting the same criteria, I did not encounter any difficulty regarding the aforementioned ethical issues. To the greatest extent possible I looked upon the data elicited as a shared discussion in which both teller and receiver assumed equal status.

Through a process of informed consent all respondents were notified of the purpose of the study and were given a written document prior to data collection detailing the entire procedure, as well as notification regarding their right to terminate participation in the study at any time. All references made to respondents in the study were made anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. Respondents were treated in the spirit of collegiality and measures were taken to prevent a competitive and tense environment. A leveling of the playing field, so to speak, was achieved through a process of reciprocity (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), where researcher and respondent interactions were geared towards shared knowledge and experience. Recorded data was considered the property of the respondents.

Any commentary regarding ethical practice in narrative research must address positionality (Sikes, 2010). In addition to the respondents being apprised of the purpose of this research they also fully understood where I stood as a researcher before accepting the offer to participate. More commentary on researcher positionality follows.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Multicultural education, purposefully and rightfully committed, is work for social justice. Though I believe my work as an education professional and budding scholar is committed to social justice I have a mild aversion to call myself antiracist. This is not an instinct based on race evasiveness but one grounded in the notion that identifying with one of two opposing poles hinders efforts towards what might ultimately manifest as antiracist praxis (Perry & Shotwell, 2009). In this study my intent was to examine whiteness in education through a critical lens while resisting reducing the argument of race in education to a dichotomy of two extremes. This position is reflected in the following quotation.

We hesitate to use the term “antiracism” because it implies a reactive politics that is not always true of successful practices for social justice. As such, “antiracism” elides the relational character of “racism” and “antiracism”: as opposing poles, “antiracism” is predicated on “racism,” perhaps precluding nonreactive action for social justice. . . . We will be arguing for an understanding of antiracism based on a nondual theory of social justice and social justice action. (Perry & Shotwell, 2009, p. 34)

### **Educational Background of the Researcher**

#### **Foreword.**

My first eight years as an elementary school teacher were spent in highly scripted environments in which curricular autonomy and academic freedom were virtually absent, as well as discouraged. Despite these restraints these years were still very fulfilling for me as a teacher. I worked at schools that were very racially and culturally diverse both in student populations and staff. I taught alongside Black, Latino, and Asian teachers. As a White male primary grade teacher I was in the racial minority of teachers. During this

time many people said to me that it was so great to see a male teacher in the primary grades because such representation is sorely missed in education. I wondered what these people were talking about because at the schools in which I taught there were several male primary grade teachers. During this time I also recall hearing about White female teachers as representing the majority in schools. Again, I wondered about this because where I taught White female teachers were not in the majority.

My ninth year as an elementary school teacher marked the beginning of a four-year stint at a new school where again, many of the supposed truths I heard about in public education were challenged. I look back upon this job as a dream assignment. The school was a small autonomous school that had successfully negotiated with the district for curricular autonomy. According to its creed, and in my opinion as well, the school was a model for diversity and equity, a place where culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012) could thrive. Teachers devised inquiry driven expeditions in two languages intended to engage students' actual life experiences. Students were viewed through asset-oriented educational philosophies. Staff went on neighborhood walks to reach out to the community and sought out students' homes for conferences. Twice a year the school would have an exposition of student work where the whole school community would gather to celebrate student discoveries. In fact, the school was nationally recognized for having closed the achievement gap more than any other Title 1 school in California for the 2010-2011 school year.

This new job also coincided with my entrance into the doctoral program that led to this dissertation. During this graduate experience I became immersed in literatures detailing the demographic imperative, failing schools, and particularly, White teachers

that looked upon their racially different students with deficit views, lowered expectations, and denial of their own inherent privileges, which adversely affected their teaching practice. Again, I found myself puzzled and even a little angry as I muttered to myself, “What? Not me! Not the White teachers at my school! How can this be? Who are these White teachers that are failing our children?” I admit that the experiences I have undergone as a teacher in the urban schools in which I have taught have impacted my view of urban and multicultural education in the United States. Although optimal, these experiences did not represent the reality nationwide. But I had a hunch that there were more mindful White teachers out there doing the work of social justice. It is from this standpoint that I was compelled to explore my own identity as a White person and multicultural educator and find out more about whiteness in education.

### **Flashback.**

1997 was an important year for me. Although I graduated from Penn State University many years before with a degree in film and video I found myself developing a passion for writing children’s literature. As I wrote more stories I realized the necessity to network and joined a couple of organizations for children’s literature. Through one of them I was invited to read a notable children’s story to inner city school children. I accepted the offer with the condition that I would read a story I had authored. The organization agreed so I ask my artist friend, who had created original illustrations for the story, to accompany me to the Leafdown public school I was told to report to. The experience that transpired was so fulfilling that it changed my life. I decided that I wanted to become a teacher. I applied to Dominican University of California in Marin County,

was accepted, and in the fall of 1998 began work towards obtaining a multiple subject teaching credential.

As part of the credentialing process I began an assignment as a pre-service teacher in the spring of 1999 in a racially diverse school in Richmond, California. This placement was designed for pre-service teachers to obtain experience in low socio-economic, multicultural settings. The experience was effectual. I felt such an affinity for this type of environment that I began to tell my advisors and fellow students that I preferred to teach “these kids” rather than the more affluent kids near my home. After graduating I applied for a job in the Leafy Town Unified School District of California, the very place where it all began with the children’s story, and accepted an offer. Looking back to that time I now wonder what deep-seated beliefs may have led to my attitudes then. Did I view inner-city children differently? Was I placing them into racial categories? Did I view myself as separate, yet wanting to work for their cause because I had more to offer these children than the affluent kids near my home? Was I viewing them as *others*?

My first six years—1999 to 2005—provided the experience of teaching very racially and culturally diverse primary grade students. It was a wonderful experience and I was constantly reminded how fortunate I was to be exposed to such diversity. I felt as if I was the one getting an education. During that time I remember having only one White student. Although these first six years were fulfilling I felt the desire for a change and took a leave of absence in order to teach English in Italy, as well as make a connection with my ancestry. At that time I also decided to get my master’s degree in education, a process that had already begun with obtaining my teaching credential. I began my master’s studies abroad while I taught for one year in Italy and then returned to California

to continue to work as a teacher in Leaftown and finish my work on my master's degree. As fulfilling as it was to have earned a master's degree I did not feel as though I had reached a destination. Rather, I felt as though I had just embarked upon another journey. That zest for learning and knowledge that consumed me when I first enrolled in college many years before was still there. I was still hungry. Writing my master's thesis had awakened a sleeping scholar within. My advisor sensed this and urged me to continue. At last, I applied for admission to the International and Multicultural Education doctoral program in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco.

I did not begin my doctoral studies with a particular research problem in mind. As stated above, I simply wanted to continue the scholarly journey that had begun with my master's studies. Although my first dissertation prospectus addressed critical thinking in primary grade classrooms, after taking a course in bilingualism I began to develop an interest in indigenous language phenomena. With a degree emphasis in second language acquisition and a growing interest in indigenous peoples this new focus seemed right.

Although this area of focus did not lead to a dissertation proposal it was fruitful. As part of studying language phenomena of indigenous peoples of North America I began to understand issues of colonization more thoroughly. Part and parcel to such understandings is the concept of whiteness. Nearly every piece of literature I read regarding indigenous peoples and colonization included references to the White man. With the help of faculty I realized I had stumbled upon a new topic—identity—and moreover, my identity, a so-called White man.

There I was, immersed in literatures that detailed the privileging of the western canon over all other epistemologies and intellectual traditions, traditions I wanted to celebrate

during my explorations of indigenous peoples. There I stood, a White teacher, immersed in literatures detailing the failures of western education and the growing demographic imperative that questioned the pedagogical prowess of a predominant and privileged White teaching force. I was angry and defensive. But a process unfolded in which I began to think deeply about my identity, my whiteness, and why I always proudly exclaimed that during my 12 years as a teacher the number of White students I taught could not even be counted on one hand. An interrogation had begun. And the time was ripe.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Methodology**

Employing life history as the methodology for this study was significant to my findings, both in complicating respondents' whiteness and in illuminating their personal and professional identifications. Without such a design it would have been difficult to understand how respondents' life experiences influenced how they viewed their students as well as the relationships they co-constructed with them.

It was not lost on me that two hours was scarcely enough time to get a life story. Even though I was acquainted with a few of the respondents before this research took place every bit of data was generated from the interviews. My challenge was to obtain a wealth of information within a limited amount of time, which required questions and dialogue prompts to be fashioned in such a way as to encapsulate complicated topics into cogent narratives for a dissertation. The trust and comfort level I established with the respondents was crucial.

In a sense I feel as though I have betrayed the respondents. Upon approaching them for this research I told them I wanted their reflections about being White teachers and that their stories would remain anonymous. The impression they may have gotten was that,

given the difficult work teachers do in a society in which our profession is under heightened scrutiny, our personal stories should be told. My participants also understood I had hoped to counter much educational literature that questioned White teachers' capacity to affirm the identities of students hailing from much different social and cultural backgrounds.

The first draft of the final chapter was written in a way that celebrated the teachers' service and contradicted static notions of White identity prevalent in educational literatures. I soon realized, however, that such a treatment did not pass muster with the aim of this research, which is laid out in the title—to complicate whiteness, not to celebrate it. Throughout much of the discussion in the final chapter I do not interpret some of the teachers' narratives in glowing terms. I would add, though, I could not have posited much of what I did in chapter five without interrogating my own consciousness. In many regards I embody the same detrimental traits I argue are present in the data. I hope I have not exploited the teachers who trusted me and formed relationships with me, if even for a couple of hours.

To critically analyze the narratives of individuals with whom I developed friendly relationships was a challenge. Still, it was the means I chose to question and complicate their identities and therefore my own. Such an undertaking is often uncomfortable and requires safe spaces and trustful interactions. To this point life history methodology does great service in advancing discourse around whiteness in education and towards antiracist praxis. Rather than be encumbered by the reflective work we must do as White teachers, let us be empowered and proud to courageously mine our latent and salient realms of consciousness to reflect our commitment to social justice, all the while resisting static



notions of identity. For this opportunity I owe tremendous gratitude to the teachers who shared their stories.

In the chapter that follows I present vignettes of the 10 teachers who chose to share personal and professional stories, and in their sharing have assisted me in knowing my story as a White person in the United States and as a White teacher in a diverse setting.

## Chapter IV

### Respondent Vignettes

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to advance discourse around White racial identity in education beyond static identifications prevalent in the literature. Listed again below are the research questions.

- How do respondents' understandings of race emerge in their personal and professional life stories?
- How do the stories complicate existing understandings of White teachers' race-evasive identities as documented in critical consciousness-raising interventions?
- What does the representation of veteran White teachers' work mean for the training and development of pre-service teachers?

Given the density of the interview transcripts the following vignettes (Seidman, 1998) encapsulate, through narrative quotations, pertinent information related to the research questions. This information is grouped within four individual sections: life before teaching, teaching, respondents' views of themselves, and respondents' views of people who are racially different from them. In the chapter that follows, where in-depth and specific analyses take place, more quotations appear, providing a more comprehensive understanding of respondent identifications. It should be noted that although I attempt to establish context in this chapter through the use of bracketed lead-ins, the following respondent vignettes, absent their entire transcripts and more particularly the prompts that elicited them, are in essence, presented out of context. In this regard we should appreciate Wortham's (2001) assertions around monologic dialogue and how one's overarching context influences language and terminology used in discourse. In regards to this

distinction the majority of respondent commentary relating to race is framed within the context of teaching.

With respect to the points made above, the following respondent narratives stand twice removed from context. This does not render respondents' statements irrelevant or absolve the respondents from any responsibility for having made the statements, but reminds the reader that the spoken word as a representation of experience is bound by context and lends itself to interpretation. Finally, each paragraph represents an individual respondent quotation and is meant to stand alone without topical relation to preceding and succeeding paragraphs.

### **Sara**

#### **Life before teaching.**

“I spent a lot time at school because I did not like being at home. And I had a really difficult time with my father. And so as a result education became a very important aspect of my life because it was my release, it was my escape.”

“My father was extremely prejudiced. . . . And so when I had this opportunity to see people that he had badmouthed and realized that he was wrong, I knew it in my gut but I was able to prove it with my own experiences.”

“I think when I was in the corporate world I had this kind of just gnawing kind of feeling that kept just happening that I wasn't doing what I really wanted to do or I wasn't being who I really could be. And I would spend my summer vacations giving my time to worthy causes whether it was working in an orphanage in Thailand teaching English or going down for Habitat for Humanity down in places like Guatemala to work and give of my time, and I started realizing I got so much more fulfillment as a person through those

experiences. I think I had started forming this thought . . . I could become a teacher. That's how I can give back full time. . . . I really wanted to work with inner-city kids.”

**Teaching.**

“I think that I really walked into it saying to myself, I'm working with young people and that it was about engaging them. That it was on me to engage them as opposed to be on them to learn from me. . . . But I think because the classroom . . . it's really a family. And it's about blending that family so that everyone is positioned to be the greatest success that they can be.”

“So it's my role . . . to really help them see that the skills, the opportunities that are gained in the classroom can be taken outside too. . . . But it's really about how you create this collective of students who feel comfortable to voice their opinion, to push back, to be able to know how to do that and succeed through that process.”

[On the learning environment] “I'm really about a safe classroom, respectful voices, and respectful ears. And to recognize the value in each of us is greater than the relationship between you and a book. That the greatest learning actually comes from each other.”

[On reaching students] “Number one is engaging lessons. They have to be lessons that are relevant, that have some connection to their own lives or I can help them see the connection. . . . You know, when I went to school it was a one-way process. Knowledge just got dumped and you hopefully were a sponge that absorbed it. That's not really what's happening in a classroom. It's about students being able to somehow touch the knowledge . . . ”

[On the power and influence teachers can have on students] “You can't abuse that power. . . . It's making sure that, you know, that the minds that are being molded in the process of a learning environment you're not imprinting your own schema. . . . My fingerprint doesn't belong on that person. And so I . . . you really think about it as a coaching environment. And it's almost helping a student to kind of unveil. I always talk about let's peel the onion. Let's find out what's under that.”

[On effective lessons] “In my lessons I'm very much about outlining like a recipe what's going to happen first, second, third, fourth. And I also interject questions to have students take over, in a sense, the teaching. And so I pick questions and I put a lot of time thinking about the type of question and how it should be worded so that students then take over for me.”

[On being a successful teacher of diverse students] “I think that . . . and it's tough because sometimes we're given a textbook and I do a lot of supplementing because I really want our students to, one, feel proud about their culture group, to be able to see individuals like them who are great writers, who are great poets, who are great musicians, who add to literacy. . . . Yes, I inherited a textbook. And you know what, there are some great things in it and there are some things I'm going to skip over. And how do I supplement that so that again I'm engaging my students and that they feel that it's relevant to their lives?”

**Self.**

[On being a White teacher of diverse students] “. . . Occasionally I'll have students come to me and talk to me about another teacher. And, you know, that they might say, you know, she or he is White. And then I'll say, well, I'm White too. No you're not, Ms.

Sara. Yes I am. . . . Why is it that you don't see me as a color? And someone said, you're a rainbow. You just have this ability to just accept everything and so you can't be any color except for a rainbow.”

“ . . . And I'm thinking back and especially in New York City . . . that one particular teacher, students felt that the individual was White because they acted in a way that they would hear from adults in their life where there was the negative kind of relationship. And that because they couldn't see that in me then I shouldn't be White. . . . 'Cause I think that there are times when it does occur where students don't necessarily see it as racial as it's, you know, kind of the adults versus the students.”

“You know, maybe part of it is that I don't see myself in a particular color either. I think that because at a very young age I was always, you know, not openly defensive with my father but, you know, inside myself I was definitely defending all of my friends and all the people that I knew who didn't fit my dad's White male image of, you know, what's acceptable and everything else is not that I probably downplayed maybe some of my own characteristics when you think about demographics.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

“I think in any classroom any of the students, their strengths, you know, outweigh someone else's. So there are strengths and weaknesses. But I think every student has this amazing gift that they give the class. Is anyone more successful? No. I think that . . . the interesting thing about dynamics with a class is that . . . they're so together so much of the time that, you know, success is really based on the group, not on an individual. . . . And that's why I think that our kids are so caring about each other is that their success isn't measured by themselves, it's measured in the eyes of others.”

[On whether particular racial groups are more successful than others] “Actually no. It's interesting, and you would think that students that maybe have more advantages but then there's that student who has proven me wrong. . . . Maybe there's some environmental aspects but I really think it's about the core. And if I can help students unlock that and realize what a beautiful light they have inside of themselves and that they can be proud then I think I'm being a better teacher than just sticking to the textbook.”

[On factors inhibiting student academic success] “I think that where students struggle the most is where they don't feel supported at home. . . . And I think another area that some of our students struggle—and maybe it makes the challenges of success greater—is being able to have the necessities of life. . . . And to have that worry kind of just, you know, hanging over them when they're in the classroom, I would think it would be more difficult to learn. . . . But I've also seen that very same student say, you know what, this is feeding me too. And I'm going to really take it and run.”

[On a diverse classroom environment] “I know I would be bored if it was a homogeneous . . . I wouldn't want it to be just based on this kind of similar belief system. The fact that we have such diverse thinking patterns and experiences that we bring to the table just adds so much more to the classroom experience that if I didn't have it I think I would be bored and I would lose passion.”

### **Summary.**

Education was a release and escape for Sara because of trials she endured with her father. His extreme prejudice prompted her to examine his beliefs and vow to never replicate them. Later, a corporate career life did not fulfill her and she spent vacations working for causes of the under-served and oppressed. Now, as a teacher Sara believes in

engaging students rather than pouring knowledge onto them. She sees the classroom as a family and strives to position each individual for success. She believes that sharing struggles she holds in common with her students conveys to them that they have someone with whom they can identify. Sara also believes in facilitating students to tap one another as resources for success and that the teacher must create a collective of students feeling comfortable about expressing their own opinions. Sara creates engaging lessons that are relevant to students' lives. She desires a diverse class and feels diverse philosophies and thinking patterns come as a result of a cultural mix. Sara does not see herself as a color and does not believe any one student racial group is more successful than another.

### **Carol**

#### **Life before teaching.**

“I was born in Leafstown in 1949 to a working-class family, probably socioeconomic not on the high scale, low scale. . . . Both parents worked. . . . Very hard-working people. School was very, very important. . . . Attendance at school was very, very important. My mother insisted we go to school unless we had a fever.”

“I think it was a good education. I remember my parents encouraging us to do homework, which we always did. . . . Encouraged us to go to the library. . . . We had lots of immigrants from Italy who came in. . . . And from the countries that were taken over by communism . . . And we stayed friends with them all through high school. . . . And then I noticed the change. I graduated and then a couple years after is when the drugs came into Leafstown. . . . All the schools in Leafstown were affected by that. . . . And it affected my family. . . . So a lot of people think that me being White, I don't understand what it's like to have the drug culture and I think I do after losing a cousin to drugs.”



“I started out at a Catholic college for one year but then I went to Cal State Hayward where I graduated in a degree in early childhood. . . . I paid my own way. . . . We all worked and went to school and we all knew we had to get some kind of a degree, especially the boys because the draft was in effect. So if you didn't go to college you were drafted. And that was the Vietnam War. . . . We lost quite a few from our school.”

### **Teaching.**

[On transitioning from being a Catholic school teacher to a public school teacher] “It was a shock because discipline . . . there was a consequence if a child didn't behave in Catholic school. You were given the same warnings our kids get but when you got to the cliff you didn't get to go back to the beginning and run to the cliff again.”

[On her first public school assignment] “At that time the school was pretty segregated. They had the Spanish track, Cantonese track, a Vietnamese track, and quote, 'others.' And I was in the 'others.' I had Cambodian students so I went and studied with the district for Cambodian culture. Helped write a program. Never got credit for it because it wasn't the ‘in’ group. . . . And I had a woman who was an excellent instructional assistant who spoke Cantonese and we ran a pretty good bilingual classroom.”

[On bilingual education] “I would love to run a bilingual program 'cause bilingual programs should be . . . kindergarten children should be in their first language and then be transitioned. By first grade they should be really seeing more . . . but some people here think that they should stay with their main language until they're fourth and fifth grade, which I don't think is right. We're not preparing them.”

“I wish we spent more time on, like, the FOSS science is wonderful. Where they can do hands-on and go through the process and the thinking. I think doing theater with them

. . . I find that very enjoyable, the way they can work on something.”

[On reaching students] “I share a lot, and I guess when we were trained in Open Court I was dinged a lot because I was told not to bring my personal life into my teaching, but that's just who I am. . . . My kids can tell you all about my family. . . . I think who I am is important to my kids. . . . I always say, you're going to have all kinds of different people that are going to teach you. . . . And if you can make it through twelve years with all these different people you're going to succeed in life, you know. And I tell that to the parents, you know. Stick with the kids. Don't ever tell them that they're not going to succeed or that they're not going to make it or, you know. I insist on parent conferences. In my 26 years I have never missed a parent conference.”

[On teaching History] “A couple years ago we had some people come in to tell me the third grade history curriculum and they handed me these books. . . . There's the Chinese, the Black, and the Spanish. That was it. That was the history of Leaftown. And I said I won't teach it. . . . I said, but you left out the Portuguese on 23rd Avenue. You left out the Italians in North Leaftown. You left out the Irish and the Germans in the (Anonymous neighborhood). You left out all those people who made Leaftown who they are. And they were like, oh you White . . . I said, no. You don't lump all those people and call them White. They're not. . . . I loved history and I really think that if you're going to do history . . . at least get everybody's story if you're going to do a good history of Leaftown.”

**Self.**

“I never think of myself as a White teacher with diverse children. I don't think I've ever used that term, that I am a White teacher. . . . I've taught with so many teachers at this school and it doesn't matter. If you have the desire to teach . . . I don't ever think of

them as what color and nationality they are. . . . Some teachers take me . . . they want to take me there to confront that a lot. . . . Just because of who you . . . the color of your skin doesn't make you a success.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

[On student diversity from private to public school] “Oh, we had quite a few different races when I taught in 1985. . . . There were a lot of Spanish-speaking kids, a lot of African American. Not as many Asian students in the school then but then the Asian population didn't come into Leafstown until after the Vietnam War. . . . I didn't see a big difference [in diversity]. . . . It was the consequences for discipline were different. . . . You can't tell a kid you're suspended. . . . You have to kind of do something almost physically harming. . . . I mean, it's to the point we can't even talk about it. Our school board won't talk about it. And if you do talk about it you're considered racist. . . . I think anybody who does this, I don't care what, they could be pink, yellow, blue, whatever. If a child gets to that point and they've not been helped, wow!”

[On values] “I don't consider myself conservative. I was raised by two parents. I have many friends in theater who are gay and they have children. Or lesbians and have children. I have friends who have raised children and divorced and now are single parents. But they have taken their responsibilities . . . And I think that's lacking. . . . I watched on the news and to see this man stand there and say he was 19 years old and very proud of the fact he had six kids by six different women and we were teaching those children. That's a crime. . . . And you can't talk about it . . . You just live it. . . . And you ask me why I'm here. It's like I signed on . . . I guess. And it's not a Catholic word and it's not a religious word, but faithfulness. I was taught that as a young child and I am faithful

to my friends. I'm faithful to the school.”

“When I get my class list at the beginning of the school year, if I see seven different groups of people in it I go, whoa, that's the kind of class I want. I don't want 22 Vietnamese and two White and two Black. That's boring! The kids aren't going to benefit from it. . . . I think by the third grade we should see all our classes mixed. And if you want to pull them out for a language thing or pull them out for an English . . . that'd be great.”

[On whether some groups are more successful than others] “No. We give an award at the end of the year, like the Presidents Award. . . . Somebody told me about four years ago one little boy was supposed to get it because he got it the year before and he's really smart because he's from this culture. . . . And he was about the laziest child I ever met. Never helped anybody. And his parents were very upset he didn't get the top award. Because I explained to the kids at the beginning of the year the top award goes to a well-rounded student. A student who, you know, not just academics. So, I can see some groups of people suffering through a lot.”

“I find it frustrating to think of our fifth-grade girls. The expectation sometimes is . . . they're just not going to go much farther than high school or something. . . . And you can see it in the streets of Leaftown. . . . We hit the news of the United States. The young prostitutes of Leaftown are the youngest in the nation. . . . I called (Anonymous member of congress)'s office on that. I called the mayor's office on that. I worked with LCO when it first started, which is the community organizing, and I [said] . . . that should be your first priority is to get those young girls off the street. . . . And they're little, they're young . . . and they're people of color. . . . So if you want to know why a White teacher is

teaching here, I want . . . I just think it's appalling that this is allowed to happen. If there were White girls on the corner it wouldn't be happening. You'd have people doing something.”

### **Summary.**

As a child school was very important to Carol and her family. While attending Catholic school Carol had contact with fellow immigrant students. Now, as a teacher she desires a racially and culturally mixed class and believes classes should be mixed so that students can benefit from diversity of experiences. Carol is also critical of discipline and consequence policies in urban schools and feels there is a silence around the issue. She is very aware of the history of her community and the peoples and races that have been left out of that history and consequently refuses to teach history that leaves out such details. Carol believes success in school is a three-way thing involving the student, the parent, and the teacher. She reaches students by bringing her own personal life into class. She does not think of herself as a White teacher and does not think of students in terms of race or ethnicity either. She believes the color of one's skin does not ensure success. Carol does not believe any one student racial group is more successful than another.

### **Jack**

#### **Life before teaching.**

“I grew up in a primarily White small town. My parents were very liberal. They were far to the left wing so I always knew to appreciate different cultures and to value them. And I was exposed to a lot as a kid going to, you know, I spent a lot of time in New York City as a kid and I liked different cultures. Plus I was a real jock and without trying to stereotype I identified very heavily with the African American culture because I was

really into sports and most sports I like are heavily laden with African Americans so it was all part of that.”

[On being one of the only White kids in his high school] “I loved it. It was a complete transformation from elementary school . . . which was primarily a White school, which was fine, a great experience. [But] I loved the diversity [of high school]. I was really into sports there so I was, you know, I fit in well with the culture. Most of my friends were African American and I also got a very good education and I just felt really comfortable there. . . . I could just feel I could be more myself. I related to the people very well. I felt like, I don't know, there was less judgment going on versus the private setting where I felt like there was a certain elitism, which I hated.”

### **Teaching.**

[On his first teaching assignment at (Anonymous) High] “It was never dull. Very tough place to be a teacher. . . . And everyday was a challenge. I knew at that point if I could be a teacher at (Anonymous) High I could probably pretty much teach anywhere. I mean, one year for example, we had 50 arson fires and one of the buildings was burned down. And it always had this kind of out-of-control feeling which had a level of excitement to it but also a level of, I don't want to say fear, but uncertainty.”

“ . . . At one point I just said, you know, I need something that's a little safer, a little calmer, and I left in 2003, I believe. And then I found my way into (Anonymous school) about a year or so later.”

[On high-interest lessons] “It has to be culturally relevant, for sure. However, right now in my P classes we're reading *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which they really love.

And that's an all-White play written by a White playwright but the issues and the themes are universal. . . . They [students] connect with it.”

[On successful lessons] “Lessons where we can read something that strikes a nerve with them or they’re engaged in some way. That's really hard because the curriculum dictates otherwise. So if they're hooked into something they're reading they like to discuss it, they like to write about it. . . . This week they're writing a letter to one of the main characters who has suffered spousal abuse. . . . They're writing a letter to Stella who has been hit by her husband and advising her whether or not she should leave her husband. And the kids are all pretty into doing this assignment.”

“I know that the textbook we have pretty much sucks. . . . Most of the stories are culturally insensitive. I still love them but I mean how many of these kids are going to be really into reading Willa Cather or Hemingway or Jack London? I wish it were different because they should read this stuff. But when you have a struggling student who, for he or she, just needs to read something, which is a step up, it's not . . . it doesn't mesh.”

“I think great literature transcends race and culture and it should. . . . If it's a good story and it's well written, as a White person I don't say I'm only going to read White authors. So that's a problem in our society because, you know, they're shortchanging themselves, these kids that dismiss it. That would make my life a lot easier plus it would enrich their lives as well.”

**Self.**

[On being a White teacher in a diverse setting] “You know it's funny. It never really comes up. And I don't think they look at me as, you know, the White teacher. There are a lot of White teachers at (Anonymous school) but it never really comes up, you know.

And I don't think they judge me because I'm White one way or another. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

[On which racial groups are the most successful] “That's a tough one. I've never thought about that. You know, I pride myself on really being able to relate to all the cultures and I know I do, without trying to brag or anything, but I know I do. If you look at my room at lunchtime for instance, kids that come in and hang out, I usually have 30, 40 kids in there. It's primarily African American, you know. I don't know why that is.”

[On what he attributes the scenario described above to] “You know a lot of it is being a male. I don't think it's a racial thing as much as being a male. A lot of these kids see me as a strong male and so I might be one of the few strong males that they feel comfortable with during the course of their day. And that could be a factor. I don't know if it's a factor that I'm White or what. I really don't know.”

[On a racially diverse classroom and campus] “If I look at my typical class there's three groups of kids. There's the Asian kids, there are the Latino kids, the African American kids. They for the most part mesh on their own and it's not because . . . I'm not seating them a certain way or anything like that, it's just that most of these kids have gone to school together for a long time so they're comfortable with each other. I don't see a real segregation, a self-segregation, at least in the classroom, you know, but you do see it on campus. I saw it at (Anonymous school). I saw it at (Anonymous school). I see at (Anonymous school). There is self-segregation. . . . But even so if I really think about it there's some self-segregation but I see a lot of non-self-segregation. I see a lot of mixing.”



[Comparing his school-age years to his students] “I was a lot more, for the most part, intellectually curious, you know. That's one of the disappointments I have, is, even with the AP kids, who are sharp kids; I felt like I had a lot more cultural awareness, political awareness, a lot less apathy, a lot more just higher-level thinking.”

“A lot of it comes from their backgrounds. I grew up in a culture where reading was paramount to what my parents required of me. I read very early. I was exposed to a lot. I was always pretty much a part of political discussions that my parents would have. And I feel like in a lot of ways because the way our culture is, our economy, everything else, I just feel like a lot of the parents today do not do what my parents did with me and the kids are getting shortchanged by that, you know. So I feel like I have to supplement a lot more basic things that I didn't need to be supplemented when I was their age.”

“I think a lot of them, they come from backgrounds where their parents, you know, they have other focus, you know. Both parents are working. A lot of them are newly arrived immigrants, you know. Their priorities are different than what it was when I grew up. I grew up in a sixties household where, you know, my mom was around a lot more. She didn't work. She was at home. There was more of that nuclear family which you don't see as much of today. Kids have to be a lot more self-sufficient which takes away some of the other things from their lives.”

### **Summary.**

Jack grew up in a primarily White town with liberal parents who helped him appreciate different cultures. Reading and political discussions were very much a part of his upbringing. As a youth Jack was very much into sports and identified with African American culture in great part because the sports he loved were heavily laden with

African American athletes. As a teacher Jack plans lessons with high interest material in mind and believes lessons must be culturally relevant. He believes teachers must be flexible and adaptable and must also appreciate the hardships many students face at home. Jack feels that his intellectual curiosity, cultural and political awareness, lack of apathy, and proclivity for critical thought aided him when he was younger, and that these traits are lacking in young people today. Jack does not feel his students look at him as a White teacher. He prides himself on being able to relate to all cultures and believes that his African American students connect with him because he is one of the only strong males in their lives. Jack sees his own love of learning as important to his profession and believes his students benefit from this attitude.

## **Jane**

### **Life before teaching.**

“I enjoyed going to school when I was a kid. . . . I loved foreign languages and I loved reading in any language and I enjoyed science. . . . My parents were children of immigrants. . . . There was always openness to learn other cultures.”

“My mom was very into the civil rights movement because she was Greek and dark-skinned and so she really identified with an African American call within their own community and a greater call to other communities to support civil rights. So I grew up with that and my parents made sure that we lived in a culturally mixed neighborhood when I was kid.”

“My mom told us about instances where she had been discriminated against and we witnessed it one time when we were on vacation because we went to an Indian reservation and we went to a store, like a gift store, and they insulted my mom and my

sister because they're both really dark. . . . So that made a big impression on me as a kid that somebody would insult my mom because they thought she was an Indian and my sister and then for my dad to be super angry and sort of defend.”

“And I guess it made me think about what that would feel like for kids, you know, to see their parents insulted and be insulted themselves and then just be frozen, not be able to react because it's so shocking. . . . So, you know, I think that that helps me to understand.”

“When I was in college I was a music major . . . Studying music was wonderful. I studied quite a lot of languages. I studied Italian. I studied Portuguese. I kept my German up. . . . And I liked historical perspectives . . . I took a lot classes on the classics and also on imperialism.”

### **Teaching.**

“I like teaching because it's interesting to learn with other kids. I didn't feel that I was such a successful student. I mean, I was successful in some areas but I struggled in other areas, so I feel I can identify with the kids who are struggling. And I also know what it's like to live in another country and have to adapt to learning a new language. So I think I bring that perspective to English and Spanish learners.”

“I think it's important to meet the kids where they are and bring them forward in whatever area whether it's social or academic. And also to let them understand that everybody struggles sometimes. . . . So I think that's important to my teaching, that you celebrate accomplishments and that you work from where kids are and keep building on their skills and having them help each other.”

[On reaching students] “I try and find something the kids are interested in, so I try and talk to them or try different kinds of books on them to see what is their interest and then I try and steer myself towards those interests . . . But I also try and stretch the kids and have them try something that maybe they’re not that interested in so that they can understand that reading can be an adventure to try something new. Same with writing, that they can try a genre that they’re not that comfortable with and sort of grow with it.”

[On a diverse classroom dynamic] “I think with a diverse class, different kids observe different ways to collaborate in their homes and their churches and their cultural setting, when they're with other people of their culture. So I think in a diverse class part of the job to make it all function well is that the kids have to have a language of collaboration and there have to be some rules of engagement about, you know, how to ask for help, how to give help, and how to talk to each other when they're collaborating on something. . . . And then I think in a diverse classroom when kids have had almost no interaction with another culture they need to feel comfortable being different and they need to feel that they can trust another culture. And that's hard.”

[On successfully teaching diverse students] “If you don't have the life experience to actually identify with the kids—and you can't because you can't have experienced every situation—I think you have to rely on the kids to tell you things and I think you have to admit that you made a mistake or made a cultural faux pas, lets say. You have to be upfront with that and just apologize.”

“And to try and do a little undercover work to find out what the parents and kids, what their sort of home situation, academic support situation is like. I think it's important to share your own experiences and don't make up experiences of a culture that you're not

familiar with.”

**Self.**

“I think I have to be careful to not judge kids and to try and give my best self so that if they’ve had negative experiences . . . they have, like . . . a positive experience with me or an experience where they maybe see a White person in a kind of a less . . . separated from themselves. I try to make them feel like I have some shared experiences with them. And I do have shared experiences. . . . I know what it’s like to not understand cultural things or events or situations because I went through that myself over and over again. I’m a parent also so I do understand some fears for kids. And my kids are Latino, they’re not White, so I try and hear what my kids’ preconceived notions of people are.”

“ . . . They [her students] don’t necessarily put you in a racial or linguistic group if you’re, for example, I speak Spanish but I’m not Latina. . . . Lots of them are biracial, bicultural, so that I think they feel like there is some kind of link and they want to discover if that is a real thing we have in common or if we don’t. And sometimes they’ll ask me or they’ll tell me that I don’t seem White to them. And that’s kind of interesting too and I usually ask them what that’s about. It usually comes down to that I speak more than one language, that my mom looks very different than I do, and that my kids are Latino. So they kind of feel that I could be anything, really.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

“I don’t think of them in terms of race very much. I think of them in terms of academic and social needs more than anything else. . . . Like I classify them in terms of reading group or students who speak Spanish or who speak English or who speak neither

as their home language and how they're doing. So I guess I classify kids linguistically and academically more than anything else.”

[Defining race] “Well, I mean, the simple definition is skin color although it's not that simple in this elementary school or even in Leaf town because so many kids are multiethnic and multiracial, so skin tone is not always a good indicator of race. And I would think maybe culturally you could identify kids who grow up in an African American culture or in a, like, a very Latino culture although that's an ethnicity and not a race. Or a very Asian culture. Some of the students do, some less so. So, I always feel like . . . lots of kids live in this sort of multicultural world already and when they come to [this] school it's just heightened because they're now in two languages.”

### **Summary.**

Jane enjoyed school as a youth. Her parents were civil rights minded and helped her gain an appreciation for other cultures. As a teacher Jane remains very open-minded and reflective and is aware of a proclivity to project preconceived ideas onto students. She welcomes new perspectives gained through learning about student cultures not previously known or understood by her. She organizes lessons so that they are accessible to all students and encourages lots of talking, collaboration, cooperative activities, and risk-taking. She defines student success as the ability to recognize talent in others and work with others to improve skills. Jane believes that rules of engagement and a language and structure of collaboration need to be present for a diverse class to function well. Many of her lessons impart to children that they can make change and as adults can empower others to effect change. As a White person Jane strives to reveal shared experiences and bridge separateness. She has realized that her students do not necessarily place their

teachers in specific racial groups and classifies her students linguistically and academically more than anything else.

## **John**

### **Life before teaching.**

“I grew up in (Anonymous), California. . . . I went to (Anonymous School), Saint (Anonymous), I went to (Anonymous) Middle School, and (Anonymous) High School. Graduated in 1978, ‘79 from high school, give or take a few years. And then I went to San Francisco State University and my major was in Chinese.”

“I continued with my degree in Chinese and at this time . . . the Viennese refugees were coming in so I decided to study Vietnamese congruently with Chinese. And so I studied Vietnamese to help the Vietnamese refugees who were living in Leafstown.”

“I worked primarily with the Vietnamese refugees. While studying Vietnamese I also studied their culture and history. . . . I attended the Buddhist temple every Friday in San Francisco. So from there I just learned all about the Vietnamese culture of the kids . . . even though I didn't grow up in the Vietnamese culture I knew a lot about it so I knew what to expect.”

“The principal [at his present school] heard me speak Vietnamese and asked if I wanted to volunteer. . . . So from there, working at (Anonymous school), I decided to be an instructional assistant. I volunteered and then the principal offered me a job as a part-time instructional assistant three hours a day so I could go to school. I got my credential, came back and worked as a full-time teacher at that school, a Vietnamese bilingual teacher ever since.”

[College] “It was a very straightforward . . . it was very theoretical, wasn't too practical because basically everything that we were taught at the school of education didn't seem to work well within the classrooms. I took it for what it was worth. Basically you had to go through these hoops to get over here. It was just a course and I didn't think much of it. I did it. It was fun but I moved on.”

**Teaching.**

[On reaching students] “I first had to think on their level. How would they view this? I'd try to go into it that way. Just telling them what was going on is not going to work. . . . Think at their level and try to make it interesting to them. And you always got to tie what's happening in the lesson to their own personal life. By tying it to their situation, it made it more relevant.”

“You have to be empathetic with the students. You have to show sympathy and a genuine desire to be a part of their lives. If I were to go in and not care about what was happening in their community or not care about what was happening in Vietnam or whatever they become very distant. Like if something bad happened in the area where we were teaching and we were talking, I was always abreast of what was happening in the area so I knew.”

[On teaching African American students] “Whoever teaches African American students must be 100% aware of their culture, their plight, their situation, everything. If you go into a classroom and you don't understand anything about them you're in trouble. And so you also have to understand their language and their language patterns and their way of dealing with people.”



**Self.**

[On being a White teacher] “It's most noticeable during Martin Luther King Festival days where the kids go up there and they're talking about when Martin Luther King . . . They say White people didn't allow us to do this, White people didn't allow us to do that. I'm back in the classroom saying to myself, this is embarrassing. But other than that when I was in the classroom . . . the students themselves weren't that . . . It was the parents of the students that were leery about having a White teacher. It was not the students. The students received their input from how the parents reacted.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

[On comparing his school experience to his students' experiences] “Well, when I was in school it was just primarily, it was mono-ethnic. Basically Caucasian kids. And even if there were African American kids in school—back then they were called Blacks—even if there were Blacks, in my mind I never saw them as being Black, believe it or not. It's like the shows in the sixties where, you see, there was Mission Impossible, those shows. There were African Americans within the show but they were just like any other . . . They didn't have the characteristics of what some people consider . . . now you consider the African Americans with the dreadlocks, ‘cause that's what I usually see on the streets in Leaftown, the dreadlocks, the White T-shirts, the baggy pants, and their mannerisms.”

[On student academic performance at his school] “Well, we're having trouble with our Hispanic group because they're not making the grade. So last year I would work one-on-one with the students, 15 of the students that really pulled our school down. . . . From what I could see with those kids because I work with all of them, one-on-one with all of them, and they're nice kids, they're not behavior problems, they just don't have that spark

to study. That spark is missing.”

[On the success of Asian American students at his school] “They're saving our school. . . . There's a desire to learn. . . . If you just walk into a classroom, look around, and be a fly on the wall, and you'll see the Asian students . . . I'm not being racist. I'm just using observations. Asian students just generally tend to be a little more focused, a little more desirous.”

[On school community climate] “Whenever I have to go to an in-service out in schools in East Leaftown or West Leaftown it's an eye-opening experience. It's dangerous. . . . The moment you step outside the building and you look around I feel very unsafe. . . . Outside on the street just right at the corner you had these gang bangers just looking around. I could tell what they were doing. They had the dreadlocks. They had the grills. They had the saggy pants. They're looking at us, they don't do anything to us but they got that look.”

[On White privilege] “Oh yeah, White privilege. It's there, but people try and go beyond that. It's like, for example, teaching. There is no one blocking African Americans to become teachers. 90% is White and the rest is Asian or whatever. . . . I'm in the Army band, for example. We're trying to get anyone to join the band. If you look at our band, it's basically White people. Our commander is Black. But still there's no one out there stopping or prohibiting any ethnic group to join the band.”

### **Summary.**

John's early school experience was mostly mono-ethnic. He majored in Chinese in college and also studied Vietnamese in preparation for the influx of Vietnamese people to California. As a teacher, John believes successful students are characterized by having a

spark and a desire. He believes successful lessons are ones he knows inside and out and are indicated by student interest, focus, participation, activity, and questioning. John reaches students by thinking on their level and by connecting lessons to what is happening in their personal lives. He believes a teacher must be empathetic, sympathetic, and show a genuine desire to be part of students' lives. John believes African American students at his school are experiencing an injustice because they are being "sprinkled" among predominantly Asian American and Latino classrooms. He also feels that the bilingual education policies in his district privilege astute parents and marginalize African American students and other races by segregating classes based on language and race. John is somewhat uncomfortable about his whiteness during celebrations such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. He claims he is aware of White privilege but argues that nothing is stopping Black people from entering the teaching profession. He feels that the sixties were a more nostalgic era when African American people seemed to do better and had a stronger sense of family.

## **Maggie**

### **Life before teaching.**

“I grew up in the seventies in rural Maine. . . . I loved school. . . . We had like two elementary schools so everybody from a big part of this town would go to school in the same place.”

“When I went to high school I didn't really have . . . any college guidance. So I just kind of wound up going to an art school right out of high school in Boston. . . . And I stayed there for a little while but it didn't really click for me. . . . So I wound up going to the University of Redlands in Southern California. And I studied photography. I studied

women's studies and English and kind of a very broad liberal arts kind of humanities major but the thing I was most into was photography.”

[On women’s studies and social theories] “When I was getting into high school . . . I kind of got into feminism . . . but I felt very conflicted because I felt like a lot of the feminism, especially the time since this was, like, the early nineties, was very middle class and very White and very, like, now very much lobbying for the Democratic party and stuff like that. It was very White where I grew up but we were very poor and very blue collar and I was, like, this sort of middle-classy feminism didn't really click for me. So then I discovered people like bell hooks and Angela Davis and, you know, much more radical Marxist thinkers.”

[On working with children abroad] “It was a Waldorf school adapted for special needs kids. . . . So the one I was at was in Aberdeen, Scotland. . . . It was founded after World War II by Jews escaping from Auschwitz. . . . I lived there for a year and I worked with very profoundly autistic kids and some kids who you would call here emotionally disturbed but there they called them maladjusted.”

[On preparing for life as a teacher] “So I left Scotland. I went back to Maine and I basically just saved up some money so I could move to San Francisco. And I moved out here and I didn't have a teaching credential at that time so I basically worked as a one-to-one aide or instructional assistant or an aide to the handicapped basically in these nonpublic schools that worked with severely emotionally disturbed kids. . . . And then I eventually went to State and got my credential. And that was a time when there was such a teacher shortage that I applied for a job as a paraprofessional and they were, like, they

gave me a teaching job immediately. So I started teaching in San Francisco in the spring semester of 1999.”

**Teaching.**

[On her current students] “Unfortunately, Leaftown, it conforms to the basic kind of stereotype of largely African American males are on my caseload. . . . I actually did the statistics one time . . . and they're pretty overwhelmingly African American male. Mostly learning disability but then there are also kids who were diagnosed with emotional disturbance.”

[On special education in an urban setting] “There was kind of a learning curve, I guess, probably culturally but I had worked with such challenging kids in Scotland and then in those schools where I was an aide before I was a teacher and those were more racially diverse. . . . I think I had been in my program just long enough to know how to stay away from certain loaded terms.”

[More on the cultural learning curve] “. . . Trying to figure out what kids would be interested in, like music and movies and books. . . . And I'd modify my own curriculum but . . . it gave me the opportunity and the challenge to try to figure out basically which you would probably call now like culturally relevant curriculum. So, you know, the history books . . . they're better now than they were when I was a kid but . . . the history is still pretty whitewashed, still pretty western-centric.”

[On culturally relevant curriculum] “I remember finding a collection of small . . . short stories . . . and they all took place in different made-up villages in Africa. One of them was about a big company man who was going to come and put a dam on the river and get jobs for everybody. And then the villagers were very torn. And the thing that was

interesting was that everybody was African. It was like an African business owner, a capitalist. And then the people in the village, they had a big fight. Of course I loved it because they had a protest and they drove the guy out of town and all that. . . . We always did stuff around, you know, Cesar Chavez. I tried to, like, do the social studies and English curriculum, link the history to stuff that would be happening then. I always did a lot of really great lessons on South Africa and we would watch *Serafina* with the older kids 'cause that's a pretty intense movie. . . . We also did the Holocaust. We did *Anne Frank*. . . . I would try to do just a diverse type of history.”

[On successful lessons] “I think almost every one of them a kid was central. . . . To me the idea that kids have to relate to what they read in order to appreciate it I agree with but on the other hand I don't agree with because I think you have to be able to take in stuff you don't immediately relate to that's not derived from your own experience. But there are connections. Like I think that teaching about the Holocaust . . . teaching it through the experience of a kid, of, you know, one person's life story I think is just an effective way to learn, especially for young people to learn. . . . But I think that having kids who are . . . there's a little bit of struggle, there's someone they can relate to, but then having it connected to a broader context is always good.”

[On successful teaching] “I think having a good sense of humor always helps. But I think being very flexible in your expectations, like, and this is a very Special Ed. thing, and it is probably true for lots of teachers, but it's a real Special Ed. thing to see where the kid is at, you know, the Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development. I think you also kind of have to have thick skin 'cause just awful stuff just happens in Leaftown and anywhere. But like, you know, I've had several kids who have been killed over the years

just being in Leaftown this long. . . . What's more common is that kids will come in having had something traumatic happen to them in their family or in their neighborhood. I don't know if you call it post traumatic stress but there's all this, like, heavy duty stuff that kids are walking around with. . . . But I think being flexible and knowing that success looks very different for different kids. I think teachers who have a really, like, to quote unquote, high expectations for everybody, that can actually backfire. It's better to have high expectations which look very different for different groups of kids and for different kids.”

**Self.**

[On being a White teacher of diverse students] “. . . Couple times kids will, if they feel like I'm picking on them, they'll call me racist. That's the sort of thing, it's hard to come back from that, you know, so it really, it's a sharp blow. But so what I've learned how to do when kids do that is I try to figure out what are they actually saying. Like, if they really think that there's an injustice and we really have to talk it out then I take the time to talk that out. Like, why do you think . . . why is this happening? Let's review the situation.”

“But I definitely do think that as a White teacher in a school of almost entirely non-White kids that it's important to avoid, like I said, certain loaded language. Like, I go crazy when I hear teachers saying things like, oh, these kids are just lazy. Oh, their attitudes. I mean, I haven't heard this since the Trayvon Martin case but the number of complaints you hear about hoodies at a high school, is like seriously, come on. . . . I've heard conversations about, ugh, single parents. Ugh, you know, stuff like that.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

[On whether some racial groups are more successful than others] “. . . There is definitely segregation in a giant school like (Anonymous) High. We have all these different programs, you know. . . . We've got a really high achieving science program, which kind of unfortunately fits the stereotype of very few non-Asian kids in it. And, you know, very very few African American kids and few Latino kids. And I think that part of that is a self fulfilling prophecy of, you know, you have a couple of kids who seem promising and then the kids who wind up getting recruited or follow through on, I mean, they're not selected. All the programs are open to everybody but just the way it kind of shakes out. And then on the opposite end of the spectrum where we are in Special Ed., the other stereotype of the African American males are highly overrepresented in our program. In my opinion it's an over-diagnosis, which isn't to say that on an individual basis these kids don't have specific needs but, you know, some pretty major patterns definitely emerge.”

[On why African American students in Special Education get over-diagnosed] “I think it's probably what people say is that the different behaviors that are exhibited. You know, girls don't act out the same way boys do. . . . I was shocked at the kids that I worked with this year as seniors who had never been diagnosed in Special Ed. but they just sort of, they're nice and they're quiet and they never really make a fuss and they're just nowhere close to graduating. You know, they're just woefully behind. . . . And they really need help but they don't stand out. So I think that the kids who get diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, you know, are just in rougher situations and act out more. Kids who talk back



to the teacher and, you know, stuff like that, they get targeted, they get referred for Special Ed. at a higher rate I think.”

[On how her background ties into her professional life as a teacher] “I think that there are definitely, you know, some gaps between being White in, you know, in a majority non-White school. But I think that the fact that I did grow up pretty working class to, like, lower working . . . and I'm not saying that it was anything like growing up in Leaftown. I mean, it's just a completely different ballgame. That, I think, is one of the things that I can really empathize with the kids who, you know, don't look like their clothes are super new or feel self-conscious about that kind of stuff. . . . So I think . . . which doesn't mean people of different class backgrounds can't be good teachers, but I think for me that, you know, that did help me kind of click with some of my students. That was beyond or not beyond or maybe separate from race but that was just, you know, knowing . . . not having everything handed to you. . . . And I think just basically having a basic sense of social justice, you know. I really think that schools are like one of the battlegrounds in our country politically. . . . So that's one of the areas I think that I am glad now that I've wound up in a school, in a profession that has a union, in a profession that is political and reform-minded although not always in the best way.”

### **Summary.**

Maggie grew up with parents who embraced an antiracist, radical 1960s philosophy. Growing up blue collar in a White neighborhood, Maggie did not identify with feminism that was dominated by the middle class and consequently became interested in history, women's studies, and socialist political theory. Before becoming a Special Education teacher Maggie worked in Scotland with children with special needs. She believes in

devising culturally relevant curricula that involve lessons of liberation from economic and social oppression. She believes in linking lesson history to current events in students' lives. Maggie reaches her students by getting to know them and their families and takes a problem solving approach rather than a punitive one when dealing with issues. She believes successful teachers are flexible, have a good sense of humor, set reasonable expectations, and meet kids where they are academically. Maggie is troubled by stereotypes about urban African American males and believes many students in Special Education are over-diagnosed. She feels schools are one of the political battlegrounds of our country and is glad to be part of a profession that is political and reform-minded.

### **Vernon**

#### **Life before teaching.**

“I was born in New York City . . . My mom was a New Yorker but our family was very European and she went back and forth between Europe and New York in her early years. And my father was Jewish and living in Europe and going through the war so they both were kind of like war kids. . . . They moved out west for the golden California lifestyle, but we ended up in a little low class suburb outside L.A.”

“When I was a kid my dad was really into track and field. . . . So, we were in like a lower-class neighborhood. We went to an even poorer neighborhood where we went running, which was a totally African American neighborhood. Actually, some Latino. I spent every Saturday with a diverse group of kids running in track meets.”

“Within my egalitarian civil rights sensibility is this total superiority complex that my parents gave me. That to be literate, to be poetic, and to be a thinker put you on a higher

level. That's a better place to be. That's where people need to get, to a place where they think. And there are a lot of people out there who don't think.”

[On choosing a career] “I dropped out of high school when I was 15 because I was bored. I was getting straight As and I killed on my SATs but I just hated the social scene. . . . So I left as soon as I could and I started reading like a lot at that age. My parents were very literate, like I said, and always arguing and talking. But then I started to really read for myself at that point and getting to philosophy and literature and religion and stuff like that. . . . I was interested in everything and I still am actually. . . . I finally realized, boy, there's only one way you can get paid to learn about everything. And that's to teach about everything to the kids who need to know it.”

### **Teaching.**

[On reaching students] “All my kids in my class are individuals and so I try to create a parallel soul development over here and model my soul's development over here. And each of us as individuals develops our souls. . . . I stand on the shoulders my forebears. There are things that they gave me that it is my sacred obligation to bring to this world.”

“So giving them real-life experiences as actors in their real world and giving them thinking experiences and learning experiences where they go to their families and they talk and they learn more about themselves and find their sources of pride and their sources of weakness that they need to build. And we write all these poems about it and use all these sentence frames. I give them all kinds of language to develop empathy for other people and empathy for themselves and their own struggles that they're going to have to go to, and steel themselves through the struggles before them because there's so much that they have to overcome. . . . I'm not going to teach them about their

backgrounds. They're going to bring their backgrounds into my classroom and they're going to speak it and they're going to share it and it's going to be representative.”

“I'm trying to help them build a bridge to their future actions as activists, as thinkers, as curious people, as creative people. . . . And so when kids just are obedient and just do what they're supposed to do, that's what I call an unsuccessful lesson. Because they're not owning it and thinking about it deeply. And the sad fact is that's always there, that's always present, is that part of them is doing what I'm telling them to do simply because they have an obedient function happening inside them that their parents instilled in them. . . . I actually don't want the kind of respect that shuts them up and makes them obey. I want the kind of respect where they're respected more as peers, their thoughts. I'm not above them. I'm with them trying to poke them and suck out of them juice. The juice of thinking, of creativity, of wondering.”

[On discipline] “I have a sentence on my wall which is, *I will not let you disrupt the learning environment for any reason whatsoever*. It took me a lot of years as a teacher to get to the point where such a simple sentence could be uttered. It seems so obvious. And yet every day in classrooms across this country it is run roughshod over, utterly. Because some kids who like to talk, and that often tends to be the kids who don't read as much, because that's their other mode of expression, they don't realize that when they talk they're shutting up 30 other people. . . . They're preventing 30 other people from thinking.”

“And if the principals do not support discipline in such a way that there is not someone talking all the time in my class then that's an obstacle. . . . I walked in and observed a partner teacher of mine my first year at the school and the principal saw a

child roll up a paper, walk around the class and hit every kid in the class on the head with the piece of paper, and then turn to the teacher and say, 'you have not set up solution structures for this child to succeed.' To me this is an outrage. To me the child should leave the room immediately. That's not unfair to him at all, in my opinion, at all. There are certain things you have to do to be in a school. And I'm not imposing my culture on you to say you can be quiet. This is a culture of human beings. You don't interrupt another human. You certainly don't touch them without their permission, you know."

"So that's what schools have done with behavior. In the name of being considerate of the pain that kids bring to school they have excused behaviors that are atrocious and outrageous and allow the child to wallow in their particular kind of pain. And what it does is ease their transition from being a victim to being a victimizer. This is what I see."

**Self.**

[On being a White teacher of diverse students] "It feels weird sometimes. I worry about whether I'm heard because I spend a lot of time trying to explain my life to the kids or give examples from my life that I think they can relate to, and examples from things I've seen. But there's some chance that there's kids in the class who are not relating to me, who are like, yeah, but that's not my life. Yeah, but that doesn't relate to me. Because people have conceptions about other people. I've had students tell me unbelievable things about me because I'm White. . . . I've had parents say things, like, they wanted their kid to have a Black teacher. . . . Well, you know what, I can't be that. I can only be me. So, I don't have a problem with it but I worry that some people might not hear me."

"Or when I'm doing like this huge living museum about, oh, you can be a person who changes the world, you know. Well, no matter what background I came from, and the

truth is in many respects economically I had a lot less than most of my students had. But in terms of literacy development and love, you know, or affection, I'm not sure, you know. My kids have had all kinds of different experiences that have painful relations to the racial history of our country and different ethnic groups' experience. It's a very wide range of experience. And I'm within that wide range of experience with a family that went through incredible suffering during the Holocaust. And sometimes it is a weird thing. I feel like the fact that I'm Jewish and my family suffered through the Holocaust, in the eyes of my kids, and some other people in society, it gives me some kind of standing because my people have suffered, see. So I can talk with people who have suffered.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

[On whether some racial groups are more successful than others] “On the bottom of the class and in the bottom of many schools I've been at is often a small group of African Americans whose families were so blown up that the kids are not on the same page as the school. They're not clear. . . . Any kid from any ethnicity could be in there but there's probably, disproportionately, overrepresentation by the African Americans . . . And I'm not sure what's happening at the very bottom of African American society but it's different than what's happening in other parts of African American society. There are many kinds of African Americans but I've had students who really thought that all African Americans were standing on street corners, that that's like what African American culture consisted of. Really had such an incredibly limited view of themselves because of their being African Americans.”

“The most important things in literacy development happen the first four years of life, I think. So, to not talk about it and pretend it doesn't matter is just outrageous. And

honestly to me that is the key in what creates the lowest of the low, the kids I'm really worried about. Because lacking a love of other worlds how will you care for other people, how will you outgrow where you're at and get to a better place? I've talked to the kids about traveling, about seeing the world, about expanding horizons. The most troublesome kids, they don't want to go anywhere. They think it's right there in Leaftown where they are. . . . And they don't want to go anywhere else because they're in love with the power of powerlessness. If no one expects anything of you then it's endless cops and robbers.”

[On how his background ties into his professional life as a teacher] “This job touches so many aspects of my being I feel like the luckiest guy in the world. . . . When I read to my children at night, I'm done. I feel like a man. And that's the way I feel about work. I raise children. That's what I do. I'm a natural person. I like sunshine. I'm not an artificial person. I like basic, natural, essential, real things. And I finish a day at work and I've done an essential real thing. I couldn't be a farmer. I wasn't raised properly. I'm way too weak. I couldn't be a doctor. I would love to. That would be powerful, meaningful work. But I haven't got the stomach for it. Being a teacher, that's real work. There's only so much real work out there and I'm in the real work with real humans in real time touching lives and doing what I can. And so are they. And I just encourage. I try to give them the courage to be themselves and be proud and happy and have fun and do good, strong things with their lives.”

**Summary.**

Vernon claims he was raised on the myth of freedom and opportunity. His parents were very aware of class and race in society and were steeped in the civil rights movement. Having survived the Holocaust, they raised Vernon with a strong sense of

responsibility to make the world a better place. Now, as a teacher Vernon believes in empowering students to own the process of learning and allows ample time for students to think independently and to exchange ideas collaboratively. He encourages students to listen reflectively and makes an effort to reduce his voice so that students have time and space to express themselves. Vernon challenges students to tackle tasks they find difficult and that are just beyond their zone of proximal development. He does not want conditioned obedience from his students but instead strives to cultivate an environment characterized by students respecting themselves and one another. He employs strategies that foster building relationships among his students as well those that affirm the identities of his students. Finally, in regards to race, Vernon's whiteness prompts personal reflection about the degree to which his students are able to relate to him.

### **Pete**

#### **Life before teaching.**

"I grew up in a primarily Yankee sort of setting. . . . My father was a working-class guy from Ohio and my mother was lace curtain Irish from a mill town in Massachusetts. . . . My mother felt really alienated in the town 'cause it was mostly Yankee and there was a lot of prejudice toward Irish Catholics."

"I was in Special Ed. as a . . . I didn't do well in school, elementary school. I had some learning disabilities. So I hated school. . . . I had one brother and two sisters and they had done well in school and it was like this whole thing of . . . why can't you . . . ? What's a matter with you?"

"I remember really early on I was like maybe 10, 11 years old, maybe. I was in a doctor's office and I was looking at a Life Magazine and there was this picture of this



lynching, this Black kid over on like a barbecue. I just couldn't believe it. . . . I was just outraged, you know, outraged. I guess outraged and shamed. I was shamed because I was stupid. I was seen as stupid and I wasn't getting it, you know. I was shamed because I couldn't seem to fit in to the way people did stuff.”

“But I tried, you know. . . . I wanted to please. But by junior high school I was like, fuck it. I was tired of trying to please and started acting out a lot. . . . What I found in high school was . . . I read Malcolm X . . . Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*, was one of the first books I was ever able to sustain reading. . . . At that point I was involved with the Black Panthers. The National Community to Combat Fascism was the White branch of the Black Panthers in Cambridge. And we were selling the Black Panther paper in downtown Sherborn.”

[On college] “Well, it's very sporadic. ‘Cause when I graduated from high school I didn't really want to go to college. And at 17 I was working in Boston public schools as a volunteer and I was working in a daycare center in Roxbury so my entire experience was in the Black community. And I really didn't want to be White. Really didn't want to have anything to do with what my White counterparts were doing which was mostly going to school. . . . So, then I ended up going to Boston State College, which was a teachers' college. ‘Cause the guy that was my mentor was a teacher in Roxbury named (Anonymous). . . . And so that was sort of, like, the school of choice for teachers who wanted to be Boston public school teachers, and that's what I thought I wanted to be.”

[On why he wanted to become a teacher] “When I was 16, 17, I first got my license. A bunch of us drove down to South Carolina and went to this Dominican priory . . . And I met this White guy there who was teaching in an all Black school. . . . It wasn't just as a

White teacher at an all Black school that he was different. But he was aligned with the more liberal politics, or more radical politics. 'Cause the Dominican priory there . . . it was like this island of different sort of thought. And this guy, you could tell he was wore down from fighting the good fight but I admired the fuck out of him. . . . I wanted to stay and become a teacher in South Carolina because the kids loved me and I loved those kids like the first day.”

### **Teaching.**

[On effective teaching] “Understanding each kid but being able to talk about kids with different people. . . . If I'm having difficulty with a kid and I see somebody who really likes that kid or gets along with that kid I go to that person and say, so, you really love this kid. Tell me why you love this kid. Or, I really need some help with this kid. Please tell me. We as teachers can get caught up in this thing of, well, I don't like this kid and there's a good reason for it. . . . And not looking at ourselves or looking at the kid fully . . . . Somebody somewhere likes this kid and so why do they like that kid? Somebody sees this kid's strengths.”

“First thing is that it's about compassion and limit setting. It's the balance of the two and being able to go back and forth . . . . With each kid it's a different set of limits and how much compassion they need. And then the other part is this is a reflective process, you know. You've got to be a reflective teacher, person, to be a good teacher. If you're not bringing your reflective process to it then you're fucked. Or the kids are fucked, really. . . . You have an issue with your manhood and some kid tests your manhood and is trying to work through his own boyhood or something, you know, and you take it as a threat to you and so you squash that kid, you know. That's a serious problem, you know.”

**Self.**

[On how much he reflects about being a White teacher] “Not as much as I used to. Now it's more like a language . . . I guess it's a cultural thing too. I understood Black culture better than I understand Latino culture. I didn't understand the totality of Black culture but I was much more familiar with it than I am with Latino culture. So there's a lot more for me to learn about Latino culture and so there's a lot more . . . sort of humility. I'm humbled every day. I think the way it manifests itself now is learning the language. I'm just totally humble with the language every day. I feel we are so lucky being teachers. We get to have this insight into these different cultures, to families. To be trusted like we are, oh my god. When I'm with parents, especially parents of Special Ed. kids, it's like, this is their treasure and their treasure is seen as less than or wounded in some sort of way. I have a Special Ed. kid, a child of my own in Special Ed., and to . . . what's that word I'm looking for? I'm entrusted. Sometimes I get chills down my spine that I could possibly be entrusted. I feel so . . . like I'm carrying nitroglycerin or something.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

“As White people in America we just owe so much of who we are and our existence to Black people and people of color. . . . So, I think as educators we have to always be reflecting, especially as White educators. . . . And I think there needs to be more information out there especially for young teachers, you know. 'Cause young teachers come at it with a lot of passion and a lot of them get alienated, disillusioned early on 'cause they come in with a sort of sense of, I'm doing something for these people and then they don't come into it with their eyes wide open as far as what they're getting out of it or

what the potential of what they can get out of it. It's like they've got this education and this sort of privileged position, then when people aren't thankful for what they got to deliver then they get disillusioned. I've seen a lot of White people in that kind of state of being.”

“You can tell kids feel left out or lost. And just recognizing them, seeing them, calling them by their name day after day after day after day even if they don't respond to you. . . . Kids are sort of the epitome of our lack of attention in this culture. It's like, I did this unlearning racism workshop years ago and they talked about being targeted. Different people are targeted in different ways. Like gay people are targeted. Black people are targeted. And there was a woman in the group who was gay, Black, Jewish. She was the most targeted of all. But what we have in common is that we were all targeted as children. And so it depends on what you do with that experience as a child. If you're just determined—and so many people are determined to overcome that pain and that humiliation and that shame of being a child and never have to relive that again—then, you know, you just are always fighting to be on top, always fighting to be in control. . . . So children know about humiliation and shame. They're in the midst of it and so it's so important to recognize them and see them as fully as you can.”

**Summary.**

Pete grew up in a Yankee setting in a family that espoused working-class values. He had learning disabilities and did not like school. As a child he was outraged by an image he saw of a Black person being lynched. This experience created a sense of shame and a feeling of not wanting to be White. Pete did not identify with other White people and bought into the notion that there was not much good about White people. In high school

he became interested in Black causes and later volunteered to work for the Black community. As a teacher Pete feels very fortunate to have insight into other cultures and is very mindful of the trust placed upon him. He believes in helping students advocate for themselves and feels that teachers must be reflective and contribute to the cause of the marginalized. Pete believes in being compassionate, reflective, and in setting limits. The power imbalance between White people and Black people is a great concern of his. For a long time Pete did not believe White people were equipped to work with Black people and consequently looked to Black people for assurance.

## **Henry**

### **Life before teaching.**

“I grew up . . . came of age in the sixties, which was a pretty exciting time to be a teenager. I loved school. . . . When I got to fourth grade, it was 1962, and I was growing up in an all White working class section of Boston called Mattapan and the NAACP was trying to integrate the Boston schools. And one of my earliest political memories is of mobs of White kids and parents throwing stones at this really sweet Black girl who was sent, who was recruited, whose parents were recruited by the NAACP to integrate our school. And it really traumatized me.”

“I went home and I told my mother about it and she said that that's just what the Nazis did to our people in Europe. And I knew from then on especially that I was different from the gentile kids because they shared a racism and a certain amount of anti-Semitism toward me. And I think from that point on I became a supporter, whether consciously or unconsciously, of people of color in this country because I can identify with what they were going through based on the historical experience of the Jews in Europe.”

“ . . . I got really involved in radical politics and so I started to neglect my studies when I got to college. This was late sixties, early seventies, and I was going through a period of rebellion. I began to look at the world beyond my neighborhood, beyond the city, and I started to really develop a perspective on history and social change. And that's one of the reasons that I became a teacher because I thought I could make a difference for kids who needed a good education.”

**Teaching.**

“I teach a very rich ethnic-studies-type American History and it's actually very Afro-centric. . . . The demographics have changed but I want my Asian and Latino students to understand American history through the lens of racism, and that the things that African Americans went through Latinos and Asians have gone through, maybe not to a great extent, although if you studied the history of Chinese in the West Coast there were a lot of lynchings. Chinatowns were burned. And kids need to see, you know, the ugly side of this country's history. And I feel by focusing on that I'm able to, you know, reach the students. They know I'm not prettifying American history. I'm actually exposing the underbelly so they have a better understanding of the history of the country.”

[On a diverse classroom] “Beginning first semester basically I had students sit where they wanted to sit and they tended to group females more together and I noticed that the African American kids, the Asian kids, Latinos kids were starting to group. And I told them that for the second half of U.S. History we're going to be talking about civil rights and the fight for integration and we're going to model it in the class. So I changed the kids around . . . and not have the same ethnic group sitting . . . And so, yeah, I think

teaching social studies sometimes, there are things you can do in the classroom that will connect to the curriculum.”

[On supporting students who do not want to go to college] “Everything is college oriented, A through G, and we don't say honestly to the students and to ourselves, there are a lot of bright kids who aren't interested in college. . . . They're bright but they, maybe for family reasons, they want to start earning some money. We need to have some apprenticeship tracks where students can say, you know, I like to work on a car, I know someone in my family is a plumber, you know, someone works in the building trades and puts in heating and ventilation systems, someone fixes elevators. All the skilled jobs that pay sometimes more than what a teacher makes we don't educate our kids and talk about non-college opportunities. Now we don't discourage them from going to college but we need to educate them as to what jobs are out there.”

[On student self esteem] “You know, whether it's the way they [boys] talk to girls, you know, the use of language that in my opinion reflects low self-esteem. And that's part of it too. If kids have low self-esteem it affects their achievement. They really believe some of the stereotypes, the racist past of America, that they can't do this. But I tell a story that I was always good in math 'til I got to calculus. And I had trouble with calculus and eventually I gave up and I developed low self-esteem around calculus. I lacked my confidence and I think a lot of students, they could do better but they're lacking in confidence and I think it does have a racial-ethnic component. Because when they look around, they look at a calculus class at (Anonymous) High, they see mainly Asian students and that's not a class of Black kids, it's all Asian. Kids internalize stuff like this. They might be able to achieve in that class but they don't want a risk of failure. And they

feel that, you know, they're going to be in the spotlight all the time because they're the only Black kid in calculus. That's a tremendous . . . you know, that's heavy.”

**Self.**

[On being a White teacher of diverse students] “Well, I'm very comfortable with my students and I think they really see that I identify with them and their issues. And so I don't feel . . . I don't think of myself as a White teacher. I had an interesting example when I taught at (Anonymous) Middle School in the eighties. I noticed that the students were calling me the name of a Black male teacher, Mr. Smith. I said, ‘Wait a minute. I'm Mr. Henry. He's Mr. Smith.’ They're there calling me Mr. Smith. They like Mr. Smith. They like me. So by calling me Mr. Smith they're basically complimenting me and saying, I don't see you foremost as a White teacher. I see you foremost as a male teacher who I like. That was an eye-opener to me. At least in middle school often the students look at your gender before your race and your skin color.”

**Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

[On which student groups are successful] “Oh, there are successful students in all groups, but the kids who disproportionately are doing better are the girls over the boys, and the Chinese and Vietnamese kids who come to high school, come to (Anonymous) High, I think, with a college mentality, with the idea that they're going to do better than their parents if they apply themselves. I think they've been successful in school at the elementary and middle school level and that carries over to high school. There are some kids who really like school. They like the routine, they like to learn, they're not distracted by the street life, school is not as boring. Some kids, I think, they just come into school with, I just got to get through this day. It's more like a sentence they're on rather than an



opportunity. And then again I think that a lot of it starts at the home and it also has a lot to do with what language they speak at home, what race, ethnicity they are. There are certain subliminal expectations that impact these kids that can hold them back in a school.”

“One of the complaints I have with the school and the district is that we have no African American male counselors in Leaftown Public Schools. And that's a crime. That's a shame that we don't have kids who have counselors and even teachers who look like them. The percentage of Black teachers and Latino teachers is very small in this district compared to the percentage of Black and Latino students. And I think one of things we have to address is that we need more teachers of color, particularly Latino and Black teachers in the classrooms who don't necessarily, aren't necessarily going to be better teachers but I think that it's good for the students to see more teachers of color in the schools. Right now if you go to (Anonymous) High, when the kids are looking for workers at (Anonymous) High they're seeing the secretaries, the IAs, and the custodians predominantly Black or Latino. Then they go into the classrooms and they see predominantly White teachers. I think by the time the kid gets to high school they're noticing this. And so they're not seeing people, professionals who look them and I think that has a negative impact on what their expectations are post high school. And I think we need to deal with that.”

**Summary.**

Henry grew up in a White working class environment and came of age in the sixties. As a young boy he was traumatized after witnessing an attack on a Black girl. A feeling of racism and prejudice prompted him to identify with the struggles of people of color.

During college Henry became involved in radical politics and began to develop a perspective on history and social change, which made him want to become a teacher and work for social justice. As a teacher Henry teaches a very Afro-centric history curriculum because he believes his students should see American history through the lens of racism. He strives for an interactive class and plans lessons to heighten student engagement. Henry feels vocational education is important for some students so they see school as a means to an end and not punishment. He laments about the lack of African American male counselors in high school and the lack of people of color in teaching positions. He is concerned about the effect this has on students, particularly the impact on their expectations after high school. Henry does not think of himself as a White teacher and believes that students feel he can identify with them and their issues.

## **Nancy**

### **Life before teaching.**

“I grew up with a sister and two parents and in I would call it kind of a rural part of Oklahoma City. . . . I went to just a local . . . it was three buildings and each building represented a couple of grades. They didn't have kindergarten, so I started immediately in the first grade. It was just a typical family. We did stuff together. We played lots of games together. I played with the kids in the neighborhood. . . . I'll always remember in the seventh grade we had all girl classes and all boy classes, so we were split gender wise. . . . And then in eighth grade we became mixed again. . . . I went to a high school that my class was the first class to start in the seventh grade and then graduate. So I ended up going to school with five other people from first grade on. And we graduated together.”

“I loved college. In college I was in the marching band so of course I went to all the football games. Went to a lot of sporting events. I didn't start out in education. I started out as a P.E. major and then about halfway through I changed to social work, so I actually graduated with a degree in social work, not a degree in education.”

[On choosing social work] “I worked for the Park Department in Oklahoma City for two summers. . . . And I happened to work in an area where there were lots of kids and they just came and hung out because there was nobody at home. So that kind of influenced the social work. Just somebody needed to care about them. Somebody needed to care what happened to them. And that's kind of what drove me to the social work.”

“Then I went back to education. Mainly because I was a single parent and I was working as a juvenile officer and I was on call 24-7. So it really wasn't very advantageous to a single parent so I gravitated back to the education. I started out in math and P.E. but I dropped the P.E. and just went with the math.”

### **Teaching.**

[On her first teaching assignment] “The eighth grade teacher had been a Navy instructor and she lasted four days and quit. So he [the principal] came to me and asked me if I would move up to the eighth grade. I said, sure, that's what I wanted anyway. So it was a very interesting year because the students felt like they had run a teacher off so they were going to run me off. And no. I told them they weren't. I'll never forget, one young man the last day of school said, well, we didn't run you off, did we? And I said, no. . . . Because I was the adult and I was going to stay there.”

[On getting through that first year] “I relied on my social work skills. Getting to know the kids, treating them as individuals. I tried to remember that every day was a new day

and if you drove me nuts yesterday I'm not going to let you do it today. So it was just those kinds of things that kept me going. Plus, I had something I wanted to teach them.”

“I have to tell my story. I was teaching in . . . my first teaching experience, the first school that I had taught several years. And I was teaching eighth grade and had a gentleman in my class that was 6' 5". Very big, big guy. And some of the other teachers were afraid of him and they wouldn't cross him. And I said, he's just a kid. And he stayed for tutorials almost every day. He was a joy but some of the other teachers were still afraid of him. . . . I guess that brought home that if you get to know every student on an individual basis you don't . . . don't tell me about the kids who come into my classroom. Let me figure out what goes on with them, what makes them tick.”

[On the adjustment from teaching in a homogenous environment to a diverse environment] “There wasn't. Because I'm going to teach them. I mean, I'm going to teach what needs to be taught and I always tell them, you don't have to like me but you're going to do what I want you to do and you're going to learn or you're going to suffer the consequences.”

[On reasons why she chose her current school] “They're strong on discipline. They hold kids responsible. Basically, as long as I cover the curriculum nobody's going to tell me how to teach my classroom.”

[On teaching] “I always say you never know when you're going to touch a student by what you say positively or negatively so don't expect your accolades, if there are any, to come immediately. What you do may touch a student 10 years down the road.”

[On reaching students] “Anyway I can. . . . Sometimes it's through humor, sometimes it's through being really tough on them. I always try to let them know, I'm not your friend

but I am your friend if that . . . I mean there's this fine line. And knowing that you care what happens to them, that you're open to them coming about anything.”

[On successful students] “The successful student in my class is constantly asking questions. They take care of their business, meaning that they do their homework every night and they do it to the best of their ability. They take good notes. With all of that they're asking questions all the time if they need assistance. They can call if they need assistance. So it's the student who really is on top of their game are the most successful. The ones who refuse to ask questions, who put anything down on paper to say that they did their homework, those are the least successful.”

[On a successful teaching] “To me the bottom line is how you approach it. Is it a profession or is it a job? And if it's a profession then you're going to care about a lot of things. Where if it's a job you just want to get through the day. Give me a paycheck and I'm out of here. So, to me that's the big difference, is how do you view what you do?”

### **Self.**

[On being a White teacher of diverse students] “It means nothing to me. 'Cause they're my students and I'm their teacher.”

[On whether her students see her as a White teacher or not] “I don't know. I would have to just ask some of them 'cause I don't know if they see me . . . I do know that there has been a division this year between the African Americans and the Hispanics, so trying to bring those two groups back together in the eighth grade . . .”

### **Individuals who differ racially and culturally.**

“At lunch you'll have one table that's all Hispanic and then the other tables will be African Americans and mixed with the . . . even the Orientals go with the Hispanics.

We've worked through it. And I say 'we have' by when I would put them in groups I was very deliberate on how I mixed up the groups.”

“I just made sure that the cliquy kids were not in the same groups and that each group as much as possible was racially mixed. Or if I'm going to get onto student A I want to make sure that I do the same thing for student B. So it's being very conscious on who I call out and why I call them out.”

[On why racially mixed classroom collaboration is important] “Cause we have to learn to get along with all kinds of people and I don't just teach algebra. I educate students.”

### **Summary.**

Nancy grew up in a rural part of Oklahoma City and enjoyed school as a youth. She graduated from college with a degree in social work and later transitioned into education. As a teacher Nancy treats students as individuals and treats each day as a new one. She believes holding onto grudges of yesterday interferes with learning and how students perceive their teacher. Nancy believes she may never know when she might touch a student by what she says positively or negatively and does not expect accolades to come immediately, as the effect on the student may be years away. Nancy reaches her students through humor and by being tough. She believes successful students are the ones asking questions. Nancy makes students develop their own rules in class, as they are then theirs to possess. She believes it takes three things for a student to succeed, those being the student, the parent, and the teacher. To Nancy, being a White teacher means nothing to her because it has nothing to do with her job. She also does not believe any one student racial group is more successful than another. She is deliberate about mixing racial groups

in class and believes the racial mix is important because students must learn to get along with different groups.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

I begin this discussion by reflecting on the ironies and trappings that confront a White educator conducting research about White teachers. In this study I faced the challenge of analyzing talk that is associated with my own race. Aside from this dilemma I found myself having to engage in a process I am suspect of, that is, interpreting White race talk. To address this dilemma it became necessary to heed advice offered by others who shared my skepticism. This advice suggested careful attendance to complexity and contradiction within White race talk as well as a willingness to consider that perceived race evasiveness of White individuals may not so simply be attributed to protection of privilege.

In this discussion I first present core findings I deem to be most striking in relation to the research questions. I then link these findings with respondent narrative accounts, which I interpret and situate according to the literature. Finally, I conclude with ancillary findings, implications for action, and suggestions for further research.

I preface this discussion by characterizing the public (kindergarten through grade twelve) educational system in the United States as institutionally oppressive. I argue that all of my respondents are, to varying degrees, aware of this oppressive structure, however, the manner in which they operate as instruments within it is variable.

### **Summary of the Study**

In review, given the preponderance of educational literatures on whiteness that focus mostly on race evasiveness and privilege, the purpose of this study was to advance discourse on whiteness in education beyond such prevalent notions, and towards capacitating White teachers who work in racially and culturally diverse settings. This



objective was achieved by employing life history methodology. Below, again, are the research questions.

- How do respondents' understandings of race emerge in their personal and professional life stories?
- How do the stories complicate existing understanding of White teachers' race-evasive identities as documented in critical consciousness-raising interventions?
- What does the representation of veteran White teachers' work mean for the training and development of pre-service teachers?

In what follows I present the core findings under two major categories: respondent narrative accounts that evince non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy, and respondent narrative accounts that evince constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy. I define non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy as respondent reflections that are problematic and instantiate beliefs or tendencies that are consonant with predominant characteristics of White identity as theorized in whiteness literatures. Such characteristics are documented in chapter two. I define constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy as respondent reflections that run counter to characteristics commonly associated with White identity and represent constructive views regarding race. The major categories, as well as subcategories they subsume, are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1

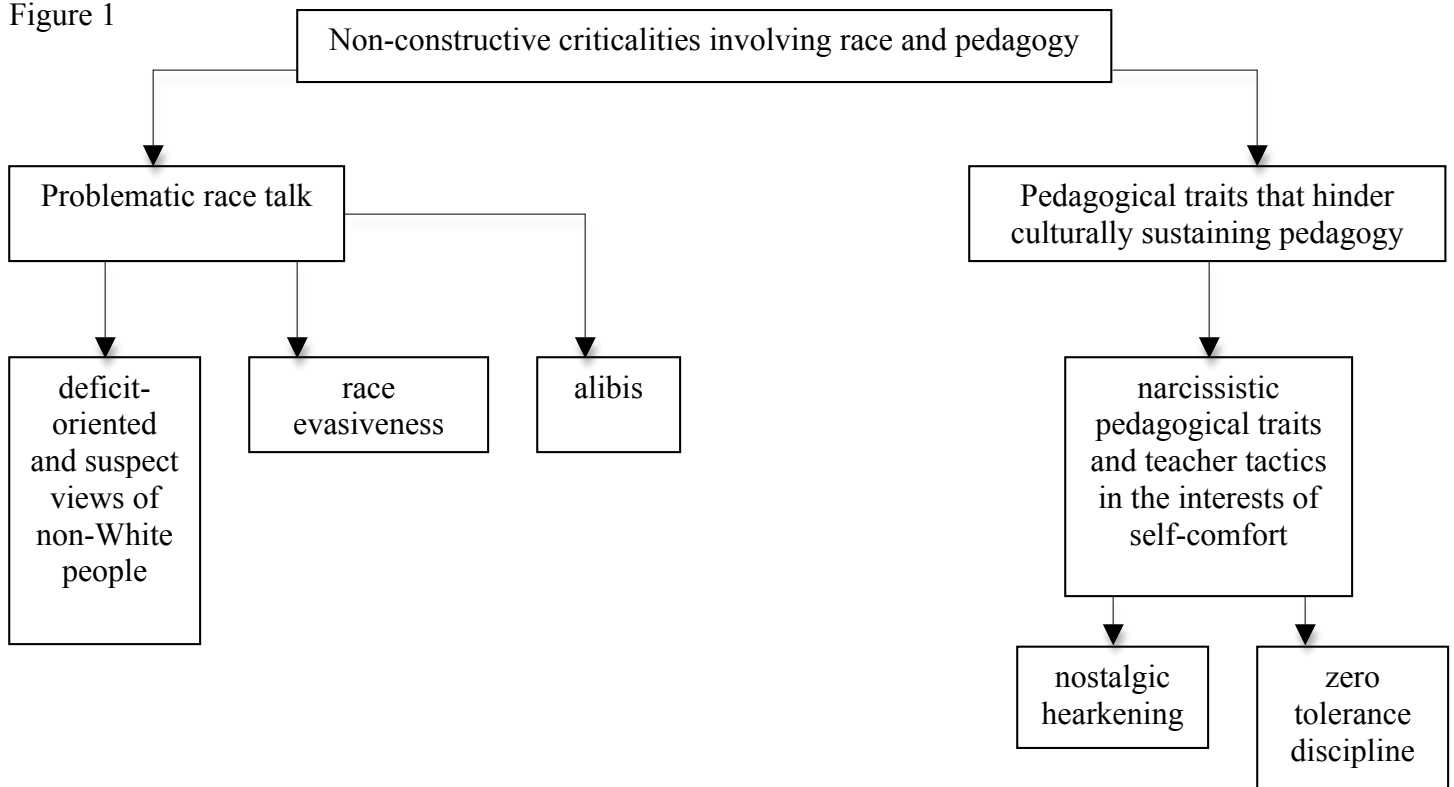
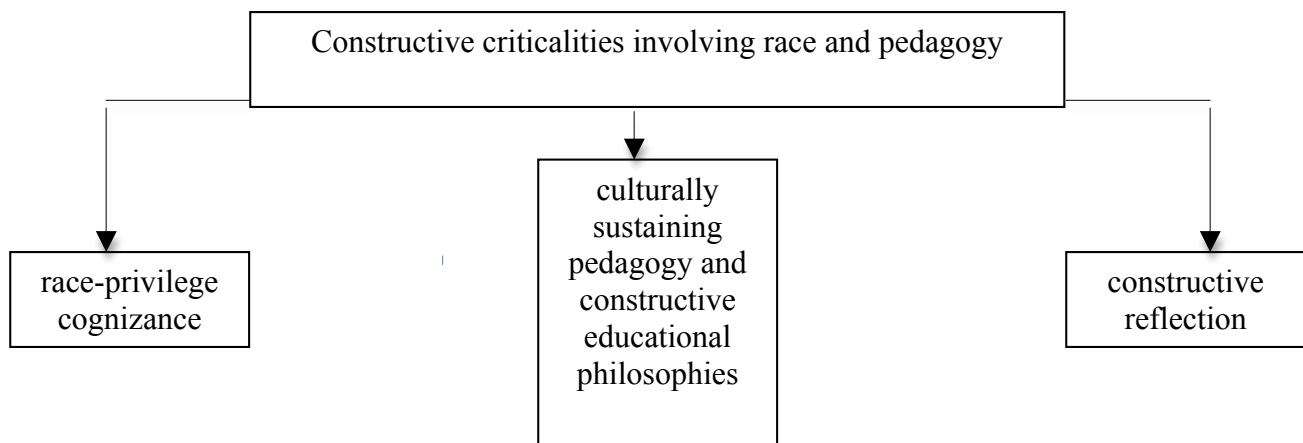


Figure 2



Data from this study suggest respondent non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy subsume ■ problematic race talk and ■ pedagogical traits that hinder culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). Problematic race talk includes (a) deficit-oriented and suspect views of non-White people, (b) race evasiveness, and (c) alibis. I define alibis as explanations provided by respondents that attribute inadequate student academic engagement and achievement to factors beyond teacher control. In continuation with subcategories, pedagogical traits that hinder culturally sustaining pedagogy subsume narcissistic pedagogical traits and teacher tactics in the interests of self-comfort, which include what I term nostalgic hearkening as well as zero tolerance discipline. I define nostalgic hearkening as respondent commentary that reflects a desire for a current academic environment to be more like an environment from a time in the respondent's past when things were better. In sum, a confluence seems apparent. Respondent non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy are commonly consonant with an acquiescence to an overarching, oppressively-tending educational structure (complicity), an adherence to a highly scripted implementation of curricula, and a tendency to give voice to language that justifies one's assumed position within the structure, thereby escaping culpability for student academic failure.

Data from this study also suggest respondent constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy subsume (a) race-privilege cognizance, (b) culturally sustaining pedagogy and constructive educational philosophies, and (c) constructive reflection. A confluence seems apparent here as well. Respondent constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy are commonly consonant with (a) a virtual absence of problematic race talk and (b) evidence of student-centered, culturally sustaining pedagogical tendencies.

In addition, data from this study suggest that teachers, in whom constructive criticalities seemed to manifest in appreciable degrees, underwent experiences in their formative years that seemed to facilitate a social justice-oriented awareness. Some of them endured traumatic experiences as youths that they were able to affectively process towards heightened awareness around issues of racism and oppression. Most striking perhaps is that teachers to whom constructive criticalities and culturally sustaining pedagogical traits are most often associated perform their duties with considerable degrees of curricular autonomy. I argue that this finding is of particular significance and I comment more thoroughly upon it in the conclusion.

Upon reading the following narrative accounts and interpretations it is apparent that many of the subcategories are interrelated, but presented separately for specific analyses.

### **Non-Constructive Criticalities involving Race and Pedagogy**

#### **Problematic race talk.**

As the review of the literature intimated in chapter two, educational literature is replete with incidence of problematic race talk among White teachers. As argued, such race talk indicates problematic beliefs around race, which adversely impact pedagogy. The following findings around problematic race talk reflect these arguments. While discussing problematic race talk I address complexities inherent within race talk as well as possible misinterpretations. In consideration that a growing amount of scholarship has argued that complexities inherent within race talk have been largely overlooked in research on White teacher identity (Dickar, 2008; Jupp & Slattery, 2010b; Lensmire, 2010a; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011), this aspect of the discussion is my attempt to adhere to the chief purpose of this study, that is, to complicate Whiteness in education.

***Deficit-oriented and suspect views of non-White people.***

While in the presence of teachers who engaged in race evasive talk it became clear to me that they, on certain levels, truly believed what they were saying. Feagin (2001) called this talk “sincere fictions.” This type of talk, in which individuals are not aware they are complicit in oppression, speaks to the insidious nature of structural racism. Scholars have argued that such deficit perspectives lead to lowered expectations of students (Henfield & Washington, 2012; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

*Race to blame.*

Respondent deficit-oriented and suspect views of non-White people spanned a range from blatant to subtle. What seemed salient for some was a tendency to blame race for problems. For example, John revealed a very defined view of African American students as having poor behavior, a lack of focus, and out-of-control hormones. As a solution he proposed separating African American students from other students and then the African American males from the females.

“And just have them [Black male students] work together and let them know that eventually we're going to have to work with other races. And then mainstream those kids into classrooms with other mixed races and mixed sexes. . . . My point is not to let them get distracted. ‘Cause right now when the African Americans get distracted, they get distracted by seeing the Chinese, the Asian kids do so well.”

Henry revealed similar perceptions of student performance and outcome.

“I find that sometimes the Black and Latino students are trying to coast too much and they don't want to compete with the Asian students who are more into doing their homework. . . . I think when a kid becomes a high school student they begin to be socially aware and . . . they're looking around and seeing who is doing their homework. So a kid might say, well, see, Chinese kids do their homework, Black kids don't do homework. . . . And there's no really strong movement to say to the Black students school is something you should be excelling in too. I have a lot of bright African American and Latino students that are just not trying hard enough.”

John and Henry's view that Asian (particularly Chinese) students are a model minority is obvious. In making this judgment Henry seems to mask his view within the words, "a kid might say," thereby distancing himself from the comments. Also, when he stated there was no movement to engage Black students in school he removes himself from culpability. Henry did go on to say that he believed African American student underperformance was also a matter of confidence, as well African American students buying into stereotypes cast about them from a racist America. Here, Henry is mindful of a greater racist dynamic but his commentary also suggests that his efforts alone are insufficient in addressing the problems he noted.

A tendency to blame race for problems was also evident in comments made by Vernon, which were offered as a result of asking him if he believed any racial groups were more successful than others. To this question he responded,

"I'm not sure what's happening at the very bottom of African American society but it's different than what's happening in other parts of African American society. There are many kinds of African Americans but I've had students who really thought that all African Americans were standing on street corners, that that's like what African American culture consisted of. Really had such an incredibly limited view of themselves because of their being African Americans."

Although Vernon did not evade the question I cannot help but wonder if this "limited view" that he believes many African American people have of themselves is a view that he holds of them as well. Like Henry, Vernon channeled his deficit views through the interpreted perspective of others, those being African American people viewing themselves in limited ways. And like both John and Henry, Vernon compared troubled students to a higher standard, which in this case, interestingly, were less beleaguered African American people.

In similar fashion, Henry expressed deficit-oriented views of students who differ from him racially by use of role models.

“So I have role models, fortunately, in most of my classes, you know, have a couple of strong African American male students. I can't tell you how important that is to counter some of the low self-esteem that other students of the same gender and race may bring to class. It's powerful when my top student can be a Latino male or African American male. Those kids are precious.”

By positioning strong African American and Latino students as empowering examples for others to aspire to, the implication here is deficit views of those with low self-esteem.

Again, on the question of whether some student racial groups were more successful than others, John, predictably gave favor to the Asian American students at his school. When I asked him to elaborate he replied,

“There's a desire to learn. If you just walk into a classroom, look around, and be a fly on the wall, and you'll see the Asian students . . . I'm not being racist. I'm just using observations. Asian students just generally tend to be a little more focused, a little more desirous.”

John stated that the Asian American students at his school were “saving” the school (as determined by federal Adequate Yearly Progress measures) and that the Latino students were “pulling” the school down. When I asked him what he thought accounted for Latino academic performance at his school he replied, “They just don't have that spark to study. That spark is missing.”

Scholars often regard commentary on Asian American student academic success as model minority stereotyping. Though the Asian American students at John's site are in great part responsible for a high academic performance index ranking, and make it easy for any teacher aware of this reality to vocalize Asian student academic performance, such commentary may mask underlying convictions. Some scholars have interpreted these convictions as the White subject admiringly pointing out redeeming qualities in

racially different people, not based in gracious, complimentary inclinations, but as insinuations that Asian Americans have embraced and risen to White standards of success (Asher, 2007). As scholars on race argue, the White subject usually reflects upon self-racialization only in reference to others who differ from them racially (Eichstedt, 2001; Gallagher, 1997; Mahoney, 1997; Mazzei, 2004; Picower, 2004). In the case of model minority stereotyping, intriguingly, this is a curious manifestation of self-racialization, however, in terms of White success, not racial localization.

Sara's commentary below follows similar lines as the preceding commentaries.

Though she did not overtly refer to race as problematic she still made a comparison.

“I want you [her students] to be confident in forming sentences so that when you speak that [*sic*] others see who you really are as opposed to forming a judgment about who you are.”

Here, Sara's comments suggest she shares this judgment herself. And like the preceding race blaming commentary, she obscures this judgment by inserting “others” who may form judgments, thereby removing herself as the primary source of judgment.

Pollock (2004) found that teachers in her study had difficulty analyzing between disadvantaged groups (p. 130). This seemed to be evident among the respondents of my study as well. Comparisons between groups were made but no teacher believed one group was more successful than another. Perhaps the question is not fair, but a contradiction is apparent. It is also possible that such a statement—no one group is more successful than another—represents, as Pollock (2004) found, an effort to not seem racist (p. 148), as the notion does hint at racial superiority and inferiority. To this point, Kailin (1999) argued that most White people offer socially accepted responses (p. 725).



Pollock (2004) also found that race-group comparisons and achievement patterns seemed common sense (p. 153). It is important to note, however, Pollock found that teachers of color also described racial achievement patterns. This point alone underscores the need to attend to race talk among teachers very carefully, especially considering such talk is not only done by White teachers.

In review, John and Henry lamented that African American and Latino students generally fail to aspire to the academic levels of Asian American students. Vernon and Henry made within-group distinctions of races other than White. Sara implored her students to be immune from the judgment of “others.” On a word level these comments appear to be comparisons between and within racial groups. On another level, I suggest that such commentary indicates a desire projected by the teachers for students to embrace and embody academic and personal traits the teachers themselves value. Here, the teachers disguise this desire by using high performing Asian American students, better-off African American persons, role models, and the judgments of unidentified others as stand-ins that embody ideals held dear by the teachers. In effect, a standard by which others are compared. This commentary seems to indicate a type of ventriloquy, that is, employing various stand-in devices through which teacher attitudes are expressed without the words noticeably coming from the teachers themselves. This seems to be a tactic of non-accountability. As I have yet to see this type of characterization (ventriloquy) in the literature, this is an example of the complexity I referred to in the introduction of this chapter, and one that deserves closer analysis.

*Whitewishing.*

Below, John compared his early school experiences with those of his students.

“When I was in school it was just primarily, it was mono-ethnic. Basically Caucasian kids. And even if there were African American kids in school—back then they were called Blacks—even if there were Blacks, in my mind I never saw them as being Black, believe it or not. It's like the shows in the sixties where, you see, there was *Mission Impossible*, those shows. There were African Americans within the show but they didn't have the characteristics of what some people consider . . . now you consider the African Americans with the dreadlocks, ‘cause that’s what I usually see on the streets in Leaftown. The dreadlocks, the White T-shirts, the baggy pants, and their mannerisms.”

John immediately responded to my question, which was not intended to directly focus on race, by using binary (Black-White) language. In this account he seems to whitewash Black people by making a link to the way American television sanitized and normalized Black people in the sixties. He then contrasts this normalized and sanitized Black persona with a modern but suspect urban African American stereotype he sees on the street, in which he conflates race with other categories of identity.

Below, Carol’s comments also seemed to follow a Black-White line when we were speaking about preparing young females for prosperous lives. She began to lament about low expectations of young urban girls, although she did not attribute these expectations to anyone in particular. Her commentary eventually led to her feelings about prostitution.

“They're young, young, and they're people of color. People of color [emphasis added]. So if you want to know why a White teacher is teaching here, I want . . . I just think it's appalling that this is allowed to happen. If there were White girls on the corner it wouldn't be happening. You'd have people doing something.”

Again, like John’s comments previously, races other than White are compared to a White image, which is normal and pristine (Dyer, 1988). Additionally, Carol’s comments suggest White people can rescue their own (even though there are White prostitutes), so the same should be expected of people of color. Moreover, there seems to be an implication that people of color will not or cannot rescue their own. Carol briefly inserted herself when she said, “So if you want to know why a White teacher is teaching here,”

but failed to elaborate. She seems to exhibit a type of White savior mentality but recedes into blame and outrage.

Whether respondents who held deficit-oriented and suspect views of non-White people blamed race for problems, compared troubled students to dream students, pulled off an act of ventriloquy, or wished a White vision upon others, one thing is common; assuming a sort of omniscience, these teachers proffered solutions without actually inserting themselves into the problems. Stockton (1995), as cited in Barnett (2000), argued that White observers speak from an omniscient and removed position. On a related point, Kailin (1999) noted that most White teachers operate from an “impaired consciousness about racism” and consequently default to a “blame the victim” mentality (p. 724).

***Race evasiveness.***

Though the term *race evasive* generally refers to the White individual evading self-racialization, I broaden this definition to include evasiveness towards matters of race in general. I asked all of the respondents to reflect upon being a White teacher in a diverse setting. Below is Henry’s response.

“I’m very comfortable with my students and I think they really see that I identify with them and their issues. I don’t think of myself as a White teacher. I had an interesting example when I taught at Anonymous Middle School in the eighties. I noticed that the students were calling me the name of a Black male teacher, Mr. Smith. I said, ‘Wait a minute. I’m Mr. Henry. He’s Mr. Smith.’ They’re there calling me Mr. Smith. They like Mr. Smith. They like me. So by calling me Mr. Smith they’re basically complimenting me and saying, I don’t see you foremost as a White teacher. I see you foremost as a male teacher who I like. That was an eye-opener to me. At least in middle school often the students look at your gender before your race and your skin color.”

That Henry does not think of himself as a White teacher is consonant with Whiteness literatures arguing the race evasiveness of White people. Moreover, Henry relayed an

experience involving non-White students to address the question rather than look inward at his own racial identity (Yudice, 1995). This tendency is also consonant with findings in Whiteness literatures, that is, White self-identity is usually only pondered when the topic is broached or when thinking of oneself in contrast to others who differ racially (Eichstedt, 2001; Gallagher, 1997; Mahoney, 1997; Mazzei, 2004; Picower, 2004).

When I asked Sara to reflect upon being a White teacher her answer was more complex. She seemed to vacillate between self-identifying as a White person and stating that she did not think of herself as a particular color. Sara's admission to being a White person emerged when she told a story about some of her students who had had trouble with another teacher (Yudice, 1995). They told Sara that the teacher was White. To this Sara replied, "I'm White too." Compellingly, in response, the students argued that Sara was not White. This, perhaps, was because Sara's behavior did not match behavior that some of her students equated with being White. Sara believed that to her students she was out of the norm, therefore they assigned no color to her at all. More of Sara's sentiments in not identifying with being White are expressed below.

"You know, maybe part of it is that I don't see myself in a particular color either. I think that because at a very young age I was always . . . not openly defensive with my father but, you know, inside myself I was definitely defending all of my friends and all the people that I knew who didn't fit my dad's White male image of, you know, what's acceptable and everything else is not that I probably downplayed maybe some of my own characteristics when you think about demographics."

Sara's narrative above, like Henry's, seems to be a complex form of race evasiveness. Though these student perspectives on race are the interpretations of only two respondents they call into question the relevance students place on race and suggest a need to illuminate the various forces that underlie student perceptions of race, which literatures on Whiteness in education have yet to sufficiently do. What one might take from this,

however, is that underlying reasons for perceived race evasiveness seem to be highly complex and might not merely indicate a protection of privilege (Dickar, 2008; Jupp & Slattery, 2010b; Lensmire, 2010a; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011).

When I asked Carol to reflect upon being a White teacher she replied,

“A White teacher. I never think of myself as a White teacher with diverse children. I don't think I've ever used that term, that I am a White teacher.”

In the previous section on deficit-oriented and suspect views of non-White people, Carol briefly referred to herself as a White teacher when commenting about local prostitutes.

Here above, there is no reference. Like Sara, Carol vacillated between self-identifying as a White person and evading self-racialization, but for different reasons. On the topic of prostitution, which engendered considerable outrage, Carol positioned herself as a White person. In this case, separated by a socio-spatial boundary, Carol's abhorrence of the “people of color” on the street, though seeming to come from a place of concern, in effect, distinguished her from them (Dwyer & Jones, 2000). In this context being White was useful in projecting a moral identity. Above, in a professional context, Carol found no need for being White. In fact, she went on to imply that if one has the desire to teach, it does not matter what color one is, as the color of one's skin does not ensure success.

As narrative accounts have indicated, at times some respondents admitted that they were White and at other times these same respondents stated they did not see themselves as White. Though this inconsistency could have been due to different questions, Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, and Bradford (1999) argued that such a vacillation is due to the normativity of Whiteness and the absence of need to define oneself. “They [White people] have a choice of attending to or ignoring their Whiteness” (p. 31). Given Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) assertion that Whiteness is strategic rhetoric such a

vacillation between acceptance and denial should not be so perplexing. To preclude confusion, however, I would argue that researchers asking White people whether they see themselves as White or not might instead ask them about their beliefs, presuppositions, and attitudes as representatives of the dominant culture. Applebaum (2006) makes a very powerful point in reframing how the subject of racist complicity might be broached by asking the White subject to consider how she or he “might be complicit in maintaining . . . systemic oppression” (p. 353) rather than directly asking the individual to consider if she or he is racist. This approach may serve to allay reactionary and defensive responses that are commonly misinterpreted. Applebaum underscores this point in arguing that it would be more constructive to focus on the ways in which White people sustain systems of oppression rather than on their culpability (p. 362).

Moreover, as Croll et al. (2006) argued,

Whiteness is both an identity for some, and an absence of identity for others; that it captures awareness and understanding of social inequities of some, and the absence of such understandings; that it is at once ubiquitous and privileged, localized and universal—are the essence of the phenomenon of Whiteness. Whiteness, in short, is a set of both-and statements rather than a series of either-or questions. Its complexity is what matters. (p. 19)

For the respondents thus far noted race evasive tendencies and reflections on being White suggest complex factors underlying race talk. Conversely, the following respondent narrative accounts lack complexity and more simply indicate race evasiveness.

In response to whether he reflected at all about being a White teacher John replied,

“It's most noticeable during Martin Luther King Festival days where the kids go up there and they're talking about when Martin Luther King . . . They say White people didn't allow us to do this, White people didn't allow us to do that. I'm back in the classroom saying to myself, this is embarrassing. But other than that, when I was in the classroom . . . it was the parents of the students that were leery about having a White teacher. It was not the students. The students received their input from how the parents reacted.”

Though John did not downplay seeing himself as a White person like others did, his reflection about being White seemed to reveal discomfort and guilt. Also, like other respondents, John reflected upon his being White through others' perceptions about him.

Though John offered some food for thought, Nancy, in response to being asked whether being a White teacher in a diverse setting meant anything to her replied,

“It means nothing to me. 'Cause they're my students and I'm their teacher.”

Here, Nancy offered no reflection whatsoever. Hoping for more detail I asked her if she thought her students saw her as a White teacher. To this she replied,

“I don't know. I would have to just ask some of them 'cause I don't know if they see me . . . I do know that there has been a division this year between the African Americans and the Hispanics, so trying to bring those two groups back together in the eighth grade . . . “

Here again Nancy was race evasive, and like Carol, deflected self-reflection by shifting the focus to problematic dynamics of races other than White (Yudice, 1995), therefore removing herself from the dynamic.

Finally, when asked if he thought any student groups were more academically successful than others, Jack replied,

“You mean racially? That's a tough one. I've never thought about that. You know, I pride myself on really being able to relate to all the cultures and I know I do, without trying to brag or anything, but I know I do. If you look at my room at lunchtime for instance, kids that come in and hang out, I usually have 30, 40 kids in there. It's primarily African American, you know. I don't know why that is.”

Unlike most of the other respondents, who immediately answered *no* to this question, Jack seemed to have been caught off guard. In response he shifted the focus to how he relates to other cultures, thereby inserting himself favorably into the issue. Jack's comments do suggest an apprehension to discuss sensitive matters.

*Alibis.*

Language that I have termed *alibis* is akin to what McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) have conceptualized as *equity traps*, that is, “patterns of thinking and behavior that trap the possibilities for creating equitable schools for children of color” (p. 603). For example, a teacher may fall victim to a trap by attributing poor academic performance to factors related to race, poverty, and language, to name a few. As a consequence, expectations are often lowered and student academic success is compromised. One equity trap in particular that McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) identified and that is evident in the respondent narrative accounts that follow is “racial erasure,” (p. 613). By citing issues such as poverty to explain poor academic performance, in essence, teachers escape culpability and find ways of avoiding terms associated with race.

Pollock (2004) found that when teachers make excuses for their students due to background there is a danger that some students will buy into this and lower standards for themselves and play on teachers' sympathies. Nonetheless, teachers often cite the beleaguered nature of many students' out-of-school lives as the primary reason behind academic disengagement and behavioral problems. In other words, such negative forces at work in students' home lives make it very difficult for teachers to have any effect on troubled students.



As is evident in narrative accounts already presented as well as those to come in later sections, many respondents revealed a tendency to imply that what was present in their lives as children is something that is needed but absent in the lives of their students. During my conversation with Jack he expressed disappointment that some of his students were not as “intellectually curious” and as culturally aware as he was when he was a youth. When I asked what might account for what he termed his students’ apathy he replied,

“I think a lot of them, they come from backgrounds where their parents, you know, they have other focus, you know. Both parents are working, a lot of them are newly arrived immigrants, you know. Their priorities are different than what it was when I grew up.”

Similarly, Carol hearkened to a time since passed in her lament about how needy her students are. She also blamed the parents.

“And 30 students in a classroom is really a lot of students for . . . it's different when kids did not . . . were seen and not heard when I was in school. In other words when you were told to sit down you didn't move. But now children are much more active. . . . And they don't necessarily sit down. You have to say sit down about 10 times because they themselves are not being raised when some one says no. Because many of their parents have no limits either.

When I asked Vernon to reflect upon his students his comments also focused on what was missing in students’ home lives.

“I always sort of find the rule of thirds. The top third is just flying. . . . And then the middle third . . . they’re willing participants but they’re not necessarily that self-motivated . . . And then there's the bottom third who . . . and it's not necessarily a third, but often there's a lot of kids in there who literacy development experiences are really so alien to them that I'm sort of playing catch-up with them. And I really worry about them because it's not in their habit to read and think. It's not in what's being modeled for them, apparently, a lot of the time in their life.”

Sara also referred to problems at home that impact school success.

“I think that where students struggle the most is where they don't feel supported at home. And, you know, we provide so much support here that it becomes very

blatant when they go home and they don't have that support. . . . So that's one area that I haven't come up with a really good solution other than making it clear that there's always a phone.”

Sara’s comments seem somewhat contradictory. She seems to suggest that the support her students receive in school is adequate but that she has not succeeded in finding a solution for the lack of support at home.

What is striking is that many respondent alibis were offered without me even asking about barriers to student success and emerged within general reflections about students.

Below, Henry reflected,

“I find at Leaftown High, some kids, as soon as they leave the school, school stops. There's no concept of continuing the education at home. I think sometimes because they may live in a noisy apartment, there maybe addiction issues going on in their life and they're just on survival mode when you get home. There are real issues going on that impact the achievement of the students that a school can't always deal with effectively. I'm not trying to make excuses for kids who are chronically truant or are late to school but somehow the society needs to recognize the problem and come up with some solutions.”

Though Henry is aware that his comments may sound like excuses he positioned himself safely as an instrument of the school that, as he said, cannot always deal effectively with student home life problems. He also removes himself from accountability by challenging an unidentified “society” to come up with solutions.

During a reflection about her high school days Carol brought up the subject of drugs in Leaftown.

“I graduated and then a couple years after is when the drugs came into Leaftown. All the schools in Leaftown were affected by that. . . . And it affected my family. Lost a couple cousins through drugs. So a lot of people think that me being White, I don't understand what it's like to have the drug culture and I think I do after losing a cousin, young, to drugs.”

Though Carol’s comments here are not a direct alibi for poor student performance they do reflect her general sentiments regarding what is beneath many of the problems in

her community. Her admission of being White is consonant with her comments about prostitution in the previous section. Above, again, she displays a race cognizance of a greater collective social identity within which is implied a redeeming virtue, that is, a White person aware of and touched by a sinister force that she is powerless to react to. This was in contrast to her evasion from self-identifying as White in the context of a profession in which racially different students were involved. Additionally, during our conversation when Carol was lamenting about such forces, whether they were drugs, crime, deadbeat fathers, or single parent homes, she responded,

“And you can't talk about it and you can't . . . You just live it. We just live it. And you ask me why I'm here. It's like I signed on . . . I guess. And it's not a Catholic word and it's not a religious word, but faithfulness. I was taught that as a young child. And I am faithful to my friends. I'm faithful to the school.”

Carol's claim that such subjects cannot be spoken about reflects a common fear many White people have when they broach sensitive issues around race and poverty. For fear of sounding racist they often retreat and claim powerlessness (Pollock, 2004). Additionally, in Carol's narrative account above she again inserted, “you ask me why I'm here.” Here again Carol dons a savior identity to justify her position as a teacher as if to be part of the solution but contradictorily backs away because there is nothing she can do. Though I comment more later about a recurrent theme of White virtue, which is certainly problematic, my comments such as those here are offered to illustrate the complexities I have referred to earlier.

Vernon also often lamented about forces in students' out-of-school lives that seemed too insurmountable to overcome. It should be noted here that Vernon spoke very candidly about his own complex psyche, which gives clarity to many of his comments. For example, he said,

“Within my egalitarian civil rights sensibility is this total superiority complex that my parents gave me. That to be literate, to be poetic, and to be a thinker put you on a higher level. That's a better place to be.”

With this perspective Vernon often created a standard against which he judged his students. But to account for beleaguered students' lack of success he offered answers such as the following.

“It's because their families are so soaked in violence and jail and lack of literacy that my ability to get inside their head and make them believe in themselves as something other than that, necessarily, I do what I can.”

Vernon often talked about how his ancestors overcame great hardship and that he tells his students that their ancestors overcame obstacles as well. He often used this bootstrap narrative to empower his students. In other words, if his ancestors prevailed and now he, then so can his students. Carol did so similarly in her defense of the many White ethnic groups who overcame adversity and contributed to the history of Leafstown. Arguments such as these, however, fail to elaborate upon the advantages such White ethnics were able to employ in making such contributions. Croll et al. (2006) succinctly articulated meritocratic tendencies of White people in that while White people are aware of the disadvantaged and marginalized states of many non-White people, they themselves are unaware of the structural advantages conferred upon them that have made their successes, which they erroneously attribute to individual effort, possible (p. 5). By clinging to this concept of race and extolling the virtues of those ethnicities that have also suffered, the implication is that Black Americans have no excuse for their failings to prevail over adversity (Alba, 2007). Additionally, where White teachers often resort to a meritocratic argument rather than consider advantages based upon structural inequity (Hartmann et al., 2009; Mahoney, 1997; Reason et al., 2005), Lowenstein (2009) argued that this type

of response “may be a natural part of their consciousness work and racial identity development” (p. 179). I believe that what Lowenstein is arguing here is that White individual responses that hinge on meritocratic ideals are not necessarily based on taken-for-granted privileges. That meritocratic ideals are so pervasive in the United States—so much to the point that many non-White people hold to them as well (Hartmann et al., 2009)—it is natural for many people to endorse them. Furthermore, where the White subject is concerned, while undergoing a process that hopefully leads to broader awareness of privilege, erroneous beliefs about achievement likely emerge before being eliminated.

Fervent teacher beliefs around success were not only meritocratic in nature but very personalized as well. Vernon held to passionate beliefs about early life literacy experiences. He relayed stories about how he was read to as a child and that he continues this tradition with his own children. Below, he reflects on this point.

“What is the role of the family in literacy development? We as teachers were not able to do much about that, or so we say, so the result has been we were not able to talk about it. And it's kind of like the elephant in the room because to me it is the greatest developer. The most important things in literacy development happen the first four years of life, I think. So, to not talk about it and pretend it doesn't matter is just outrageous. And honestly to me that is the key in what creates the lowest of the low, the kids I'm really worried about.”

In addition to referring to the violence some students are subject to, which presents a barrier to school success, Vernon also attributed school disengagement to a lack of literacy at home. What struck me is how bewildered Vernon would become when speaking of such issues as though he could not believe that so many people just did not understand what was so clear to him. As critically conscious of race that Vernon appeared to be these blind spots were surprising. He seemed to assume that what was

available to him as far as empowerment and resource should be readily available in and for his problematic students.

This conundrum underscores one of the complexities in need of theorizing around White identity. Below, Jupp (2013) sheds light on what he calls “White double consciousness.”

Teachers, in their discussions on difference, appeared as negotiators of hegemonic structures such as academic study and standards who found the absence of “traditional” family and household features as factors that worked against their negotiating role . . . Teachers, even though they variously discussed students’ and their families’ structural oppression, their professional identification seemingly required the negotiation of identifications between hegemonic center and margins. This negotiation, as life and teacher stories on difference indicated, emerged as conditioned by common sense dilemmas (Delpit, 1986, 1988) about power structures *and* deficits. (p. 62)

In short, I believe what is being argued here is that White teachers, hailing from middle class backgrounds and working within an institution designed to be an equalizing force in society, are so much a product of a hegemonic structure that they often mistakenly assume that troubled students should have no problem getting support outside of school as they did. Strangely, however, these same teachers frequently note the lack of support that is available for students outside of school. None of what I am arguing here is meant to release teachers from responsibility. I am simply arguing that as marginalized peoples are defined by an oppressive structure, this very structure shapes the views of the privileged as well and in highly complex and paradoxical ways. It is these complexities

that have been neglected in research on White identity.

John's comments about Black students being sexually out there and Carol's comments on the sexual promiscuity of the people of color she would see on the streets of Leafstown seem to reflect a judgment they have for these people, as well as an adherence to dominant narratives that have been upheld over time regarding the sexuality of non-White people (E. Fuentes, personal communication, 2013), rather than an appreciation of larger systemic issues that impact poverty (Katz, 1989 as cited in Jupp, 2013). Even beyond issues of sexual promiscuity, noncritical respondent elicitation around student deficits articulate simple student deprivation rather than complex understandings of structural reasons for student deprivation to explain performance patterns in school. "Logically, someone who understands differences as social and historical structures should *not* also describe differences as personal deficits" (Jupp, 2013, p. 56).

**Pedagogical traits that hinder culturally sustaining pedagogy.**

Throughout this dissertation I use the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (Paris, 2012) often. Though this type of pedagogy is akin to what, in educational literature, might also be called culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy, I most often use culturally sustaining pedagogy, as I believe it constructively advances the notion of socially-just teaching practice. As Paris (2012) stated,

The term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. (p. 95)

The following section focuses on teacher traits that I believe compromise culturally sustaining pedagogy.

***Narcissistic pedagogical traits and teacher tactics in the interests of self-comfort.***

As I was analyzing respondent narratives that seemed to suggest efforts to ensure self-comfort I discovered recent literatures that illuminated narcissistic pedagogy. “The core of narcissistic pedagogy is that the teacher experiences a student not as a center of independent activity but as a part of the teacher’s self” (Hess, 2003, p. 127). I argue that some of my respondents demonstrated these tendencies in their teaching. Though this interpretation is somewhat beyond the scope of this dissertation, the presence of narcissistic pedagogy in educational literatures (Hess, 2003; Pajak, 2011; Pajak, 2012) is emblematic of the need to more deeply understand teachers beyond racial characteristics and more carefully consider issues of context, as well as the overall impact that the teaching profession has on teachers (Pajak, 2012). This angle is not intended to absolve White teachers from culpability or forgive them for embodying traits that would compromise their pedagogies and exacerbate the demographic rift between them and their students. Rather, my exploration of narcissistic pedagogy is intended to shed light on the human aspect of teaching and frame seemingly damaging pedagogical traits within greater societal ills, which affect many regardless of their profession. Along these lines Pajak (2011) asks a very important question. “Could the education reform movement of the last several decades be related somehow to America’s narcissistic culture?” (p. 2021).

Further scholarship on narcissistic teaching tendencies was done by Pajak (2012), who cited educational sociologist Willard Waller and his work regarding the teaching profession in the 1930s. Pajak highlighted Waller’s assertion that expectations of teachers



then, which reflected rigid authoritarian sentiments, reinforced narcissistic behaviors that became very much a part of teacher identity (p. 1182). This is highly significant scholarship because contemporary society tends to calibrate its views and expectations of the teaching profession according to contemporary beliefs, thereby ignoring historical context. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century views on public education cast a rather sterile, dehumanized image of the teacher as the holder of knowledge imparting what is argued as truth onto students. This philosophy discouraged the image of a teacher engaging students on a more human, personal level. “These forces generated an institutional formalism in schools, which placed the interests of adults before those of children, thereby stifling spontaneity, creativity, and vitality in the classroom” (Pajak, 2012, p. 1183). Given today’s public schools, which are by and large subject to the whims of removed policymakers issuing top-down edicts and one-size-fits-all approaches to student achievement, little has changed.

Pajak (2011) cited Pinar (2004) stating that “teachers’ very identities are shaped by the expectations, preconceptions, and fantasies held by students, parents, administrators, politicians, corporate CEOs, and policy makers, as well as by their own internalized life histories” (p. 2022). This point is of tremendous significance in regards to the importance of appreciating relationality because it makes obvious the need for teachers to liberate themselves from the image others have for them and strongly consider the relational dynamic in which they are situated with their students. This of course necessitates deep self-analysis, which includes interrogating Whiteness, however, not being encumbered by such interrogation.

Pajak (2011) listed several narcissistic behaviors: “expectations of perfection in children, particularly with regard to intellect; a grandiose sense of superiority and entitlement; relentless fault-finding; projection of personal fantasies onto children; an absence of empathy for children and their needs; a preoccupation with control; conditional approval; and a well-intentioned view of their own self-centered motives and insensitive actions as being beneficial for children” (p. 2025).

In referencing narcissism I am only attempting to link these aforementioned behaviors with pedagogical tendencies that respondent narrative accounts seem to indicate. I am not exploring why certain teachers developed such traits, as this type of psychoanalysis is beyond the scope of this dissertation as well as my expertise.

When I asked Sara if she saw any particular group as being more academically successful than another she replied,

“Actually no. It's interesting, and you would think that students that maybe have more advantages but then there's that student who has proven me wrong. Scrappy student who says, guess what, I'm a little Ms. Sara.”

Sara answers this question in a way that, as this section will reveal, characterizes much of her talk, which involves singing her own praises. In fact, Sara frequently referred to education as the golden ticket and she stressed to her students that they would succeed so long as they value respect, safe voices, and education, like the way she did. Not only might this attitude reflect a deficit view of her students but it hints of narcissism as well.

In the previous section Vernon admitted to a superiority complex, which manifested frequently throughout his narrative. He spoke very passionately about what his students needed to succeed in life.

“This idea that kids can only be expected to know exactly what happened in their house is implying no book ever entered that house. 'Cause with books you let the

world in. And you expand your world. And it's the kids who have not expanded their world who I fear are doomed to replicate the dysfunctionality of the past. And I try to give them some tools to move away up out of that.”

It is commendable that Vernon provides tools to empower his students in order to set aright what he calls dysfunctionality, but again, this is based upon his almost utopian view of an ideal education. This hints at a dual consciousness that at face value appears to be empowering, and might actually be so, but could be a subtle perpetuation of the master narrative, which suggests an intriguing irony. In an effort to forestall a perpetuating reality of dysfunction and struggle, a teacher can perpetuate a savior mentality that in effect may do nothing to alleviate the suffering of the marginalized students the teacher so cares for.

The savior mentality I referred to above was evident in several narrative accounts and is often characterized by an assertive philosophy that places the teacher as the possessor of knowledge who can empower and serve their students so long as the students heed their counsel. Teachers with this type of attitude often placed more importance upon themselves than their students. Below, Vernon’s comments reflect this point.

“I stand on the shoulders my forebears. There are things that they gave me that it is my sacred obligation to bring to this world. I provide them with experiences where they have to go interview their family members and go learn about their background and write extensively about what is good to do in this world.”

Vernon’s commentary sounds very empowering but it implies that he has learned an important lesson from history and that with this knowledge he will show his students how to carry on in the same way. Here, Vernon does seem to place his students at the heart of the curriculum but he frequently assumes they will understand what he understood.

Below, Sara’s comments reflect a similar sentiment as Vernon’s comments above, that is, students carrying on with the same values as their teacher.

“I had teachers who believed in me, who saw beyond what I saw for myself, and gave me the nourishment. And yes, I was open to it. And then I couldn't deny myself. And I've always been a continuous learner. That's what I want for my kids. I want them to see that that's the golden ticket. And so those experiences have allowed me to achieve some really lofty heights and to say, you know what, I don't need this. And I could actually go back and get another education to then become a teacher. Like, that's a beautiful thing. That you could actually at a mid point in your life decide I'm going to change channels. And to be able to do that, what a message to the kids. You can do this too. But you have to embrace education.”

Sara was fortunate she had teachers who believed in her but what she fails to appreciate is that, as a White person, she had privileges her students do not have. Again, she seems to assume that her students need what she herself possesses. In other commentary Sara spoke about the importance of not imprinting her own schema onto her students. However, in subtle fashion here, she seems to very powerfully impose her own fingerprint upon her students in that her experience is the instrument of her students' greatest lesson.

Along with a savior mentality some narrative accounts revealed fantastical future scenarios for students. Though having high expectations for students is commendable it seems that such visions are more for the teacher than for the students. Vernon's comments below reflect this.

“I worked with them all year long and did everything I could and I tell them, ‘when you're in this class you're going to be a poet, a writer, an author, a thinker, a mathematician, a scientist, a historian, an artist, a musician, a singer. You're going to be all of these things. You must and you will. After you leave this class I don't know what you'll do. That's up to you.’ And all of them could pick up a pen and become poets. I gave them skills. I gave them experience. I gave them practice. I showed them the products and the fruits of such labors. But guess what? Then they're themselves and they'll do whatever they want with their lives. And I can't influence them no more.”

Above, Vernon's bold visions as well as his superiority complex are present. He assured that he provided his students with the necessary practice and that if they did not take

advantage of it they had only themselves to blame. He makes it sound simple as if greater societal constraints that hinder marginalized people are nonexistent.

Below, Sara exhibited fantastical visions as well.

“They care about each other. They stand up for each other. They love their families. They believe that they will go to college. They believe that they will have these great careers. And they're looking forward to a future where they see themselves in a more, I think, mature and adult level.”

The accounts referenced above, in which teachers seem to vicariously live certain lives through their students, could be manifestations of narcissism. As stated earlier, Hess (2003), Pajak (2011), and Waller (1976), as cited in Pajak (2012), have written of the presence of narcissistic behavior in our culture. Hess included educators to display such behavior. Pajak wrote of educators through citing Waller's research around what teaching does to teachers. As an institution grounded in western epistemic ideals that tends towards formalism Waller (1976) warned of the potential to give rise to narcissistic tendencies in teachers. I argue that teachers today, even though they no longer totally reflect the female teachers Waller referred to decades ago, still follow a line within an institution that tends to be formal as well as oppressive. I do not excuse White race talk and give it an alibi in that teachers are narcissistic and victims of structure. This does not absolve the White subject for a seeming failure to enact antiracist pedagogy. It does seem, however, a worthy direction to continue to explore. I address this point later in my conclusions.

While some teachers may display narcissistic traits, they may also display characteristics that contradict such traits. Vernon may seem narcissistic at times but when he says he does not want conditioned respect, this is healthy. Moreover, there is often a thin line that separates harmful narcissism from healthy narcissism, as all teachers cannot

be faulted in expressing approval when their students echo or affirm something they deeply cherish. What is crucial, however, is that the teacher facilitate within students an ability to be critical of what they are learning and even what the teacher is professing.

In my commentary on narcissistic pedagogy I am not suggesting that damaging pedagogy in White teachers is due less to their being White than to narcissistic behaviors. Scholars (Giddens, 1991; Greenfeld, 1992; Pajak, 2011; Pinar, 2004) have alluded to greater societal compulsions defined by winning at all costs and placing the needs of adults before children. Given that the public educational institution is inextricably linked to society teachers' existences are therefore structured existences and heavily influenced by an overarching context characterized by the aforementioned obsessions as well as oppressive tendencies of which racial oppression is but only one. The White teacher must not only reform her or his own consciousness but must dually act as an agent of institutional reform. Considering the White teacher is a product of an oppressive institution this is a daunting task.

Insofar that narcissism is a trait so deeply engrained in the psyche of the human that harbors such behavior, alleviating its detrimental effects on any individual in a position of authority, such as a teacher, requires psychoanalytic work. Pajak (2012) argued for such work towards diminishing the view of teachers as experts.

*Nostalgic hearkening.*

Not only did some of the respondents place themselves at the heart of curriculum by passionately imparting their visions and values onto their students but some, in frustration that students were not performing at desired levels, hearkened to a time in their pasts when, in their estimation, things were better. Below, Jack looked back to his upbringing.

“I just feel like a lot of the parents today do not do what my parents did with me and the kids are getting shortchanged by that, you know.”

In similar fashion, Carol recalled her childhood.

“I remember my parents encouraging us to do homework, which we always did. Always a lot of projects to do which my dad always helped us on and Mom helped us when we were doing research. Encouraged us to go to the library. Our library was very important to us.”

Both Jack and Carol seem to wish that their students experienced what they had experienced as youths, and that such experiences are necessary to stave off academic underachievement. This seems to imply a superiority of culture and that such a culture of values and literacy is missing today. In expressing this view these teachers seem to be acting as though parents these days just do not get it and somehow fail to consider that as youths they enjoyed privileges their students do not have access to.

Below, Carol continued.

“I don't have the correct word for it 'cause if I say it people will say, oh you're so conservative, but I'm not conservative. I was raised by two parents. I have many friends in theater who are gay and they have children. Or lesbians and have children. I have friends who have raised children and divorced and now are single parents. But they have taken their responsibilities . . . Their children are really important and it was great agony to go through divorce . . . But they made a commitment. And I think that's lacking.

Here, Carol hearkens to a golden age when, according to her, parents adhered to certain moral principles and fulfilled commitments. She appears to display a virtuous want for others but with no sensitivity or explanation as to why such values are “lacking,” nor an appreciation that what one culture values another may not. In effect, Carol is imposing her value system, which was nurtured by a type of privilege, upon others with completely different life stories.

When John was elaborating on his feelings of discomfort when White racism was

brought up during school celebrations for Martin Luther King Jr., he also looked back to a time when, according to him, things were better.

“It’s like okay, here we go, let’s point me out again, but I don’t say anything. And it happened back in the sixties. I hate to say this but it seems like when, back in the sixties for some reason when the African Americans seemed to do better during that time. I’m not saying let’s go back to it. I’m just saying there was a sense of family. I can remember growing up and having Black friends. They had a mom and a dad. They lived in a house. Their parents worked. Some of them were doctors. They were professional people and there wasn’t that sense . . . Now in the cities, everyone’s included here, there’s something different.”

Like Carol, and to an extent Jack, John assumes a stable, two-parent middle-class family life should be accessible to anyone today. There is also an implication that this type of existence is the most valuable in society. These respondents seem to be viewing society only through very limited and sanitized lenses and are ignorant of forces at work that account for the marginalization of non-White people. It is as if, without their noticing, society went from one state to another almost overnight.

*Zero tolerance discipline and no interruptions, please!*

Discipline is one of the most complex issues schools face. It seems that whenever the virtues of many schools and school officials are extolled one is bound to hear the phrase, *strong on discipline*, as a distinguishing quality. Arguments rage about the right way to enforce discipline to the point that entire workshops are devoted to the issue. Teachers invariably complain that their schools’ discipline policies are flawed and that students need more discipline. Discipline issues are often the bane of many teachers’ careers. But what does the word *discipline* really mean, and is it a positive thing or negative? Many of the following narrative accounts that argue for substantive disciplinary action carry a sentiment that such action is actually in the best interests of the well-behaved students who have to endure losing valuable instructional time while teachers address problematic



behavior. But is it really about the students? I have placed narratives accounts around discipline in this section because I question whether such strong sentiments around discipline are actually intended for the well-behaved students or teachers' peace of mind.

Below, Vernon, shared an incident that took place at his school.

“I walked in and observed a partner teacher of mine my first year at the school and the principal saw a child roll up a paper, walk around the class and hit every kid in the class on the head with the piece of paper, and then turn to the teacher and say, ‘you have not set up solution structures for this child to succeed.’ To me this is an outrage. To me the child should leave the room immediately. That's not unfair to him at all, in my opinion, at all. There are certain things you have to do to be in a school. And I'm not imposing my culture on you to say you can be quiet. This is a culture of human beings. You don't interrupt another human.”

Principals often take a progressive stance around discipline issues in the way illustrated above. Rather than be reactively punitive such progressive measures aim to be inclusive and not exclusive. As stated in the introduction, issues like this are difficult for teachers who have to manage complex classroom dynamics and it seems much easier to simply dismiss problematic students from class for someone else to deal with. Below, Vernon continued with his philosophy around discipline.

“So, what I have seen is that people make excuses for the behavior. They know there's an achievement gap and they feel bad about it so they excuse outrageous behavior. . . . In the name of being considerate of the pain that kids bring to school they have excused behaviors that are atrocious and outrageous and allow the child to wallow in their particular kind of pain. And what it does is ease their transition from being a victim to being a victimizer.”

Vernon makes a compelling point about feeling bad about an achievement gap and therefore making excuses for defiant behavior but his outrage over interruptions and disruptions seems to suggest an inner conflict or perhaps a challenge to his ego.

Below, Carol voiced similar concerns about the well-behaved students who often suffer as a consequence of disruptive students.

“They know they're not going to get kicked out of school. They know that when they go to the office there's not to going to be . . . they've learned over the years, it's a pretty friendly place in the office, you know. It's not a place for discipline. It can be really frustrating at times because if you have four or five kids like that in a classroom of 30 the other 25 suffer for those five who will take you to the limit, who will try anything and do everything and I just think it's their personalities. They've been allowed to and I think a lot of them have been left alone a lot so they . . . there's no consequence that this is the place where they interact because they don't have any other interacting so they interact here, which is too bad.”

Carol, again, refers to the home environment for being responsible for issues students bring to schools. Below, Vernon makes a reference to external factors as well.

“The kids' ability and the way they're raised and how to get along with others and get a job done peacefully impacts my ability to do the high leverage curriculum I want to do. And if the principals do not support discipline in such a way that there is not someone talking all the time in my class then that's an obstacle.”

Much like the narrative accounts presented in the previous section on alibis, here Vernon cites both the way the students were raised as well as the principal's supposed intransigence on the issue as barriers to his ability to perform his job.

Below, Carol talked about suspension.

“You can't tell a kid you're suspended. You almost have . . . you have to kind of do something almost physically harming almost, I mean. You just can't. I've seen it. I mean, it's to the point we can't even talk about it. Our school board won't talk about it. And if you do talk about it you're considered racist. I mean, it can't be considered. I think anybody who does this, I don't care what, they could be pink, yellow, blue, whatever. If a child gets to that point and they've not been helped, wow!”

Here, Carol touches upon the issue of silence around discipline. Pollock (2004) found that many teachers do not speak out on sensitive issues for fear of seeming racist.

As Nancy's narrative indicates, a strong discipline policy is often what attracts teachers to schools.

“They're [her school] strong on discipline. They hold kids responsible. Basically, as long as I cover the curriculum nobody's going to tell me how to teach my classroom.”

Here it seems that Nancy needs an overarching authority to relieve her of discipline issues. When I asked her what things about her school environment most helped her accomplish her work she replied,

“The accountability of students. The sign, wherever it is, that says no excuses, no shortcuts. The no excuses.”

Responses like this compel me to question what is really at the heart of discipline philosophies such as those presented in this section. For example, Nancy’s sentiments below seem to indicate that student expectations around behavior are more geared for teacher comfort than for classroom climate.

“I’m going to teach what needs to be taught and I always tell them, you don’t have to like me but you’re going to do what I want you to do and you’re going to learn or you’re going to suffer the consequences.”

This type of domineering attitude seemed to pervade Vernon and Sara’s philosophy as well, especially in regards to interruptions. They both emphatically stressed how intolerant they were of interruptions to the learning environment. Below, Sara stated,

“We have this agreement that you know, they know that I have certain requirements that I don’t want any other students’ learning process to be interrupted.”

Below, Vernon reflected upon a phrase someone passed on to him.

*“I will not let you disrupt the learning environment for any reason whatsoever. I will not let you interrupt the learning environment for any reason whatsoever. It took me a lot of years as a teacher to get to the point where such a simple sentence could be uttered. It seems so obvious. And yet every day in classrooms across this country it is run roughshod over, utterly. Because some kids who like to talk, and that often tends to be the kids who don’t read as much, because that’s their other mode of expression, they don’t realize that when they talk they’re shutting up 30 other people. They’re silencing 30 other people by talking. They’re preventing 30 other people from thinking.”*

I have to wonder what is behind this type of compassion for the rest of the class who

are not being problems because I myself have fallen into this mindset. Is this really about the rest of the obedient dream kids who make teachers' lives easier or about self-comfort and anger with the ones who are on some level screaming for help? And this is not just a White teacher issue either. When the problem child angers us our thoughts seem to immediately go to the other kids who have to bear the brunt of the problem child. But could these other kids be somehow recruited as solutions? The zero tolerant teacher does not seem to ever consider this. I believe it has more to do with self-comfort and an object for anger. It is easier to blame the victim instead of taking advantage of a teachable moment.

Though I have not included any of Pete's narrative accounts in this section I was struck by his candid comments about feeling as though his masculinity were challenged when dealing with bold and disruptive students. Teachers, in their passion, and as human beings with pride and ego, often view their classrooms as extensions of their selves. What they hope to cultivate for themselves is a climate of peace. Therefore, any disruption to this peace is met with hostility.

As I have argued, for particular White teachers that are already constrained by race evasiveness, have hunkered down in career-ending positions protected by tenure, have been dulled by years of being handed a script from which to parrot knowledge, have acquiesced to an overarching system of oppression, and have contrived classroom tactics in the interests of self-comfort, interrogating their racial subjectivities only adds to the complexity of the task at hand. Teacher educators in service to White pre-service and in-service teachers face the vexing task of teasing out debilitating traits of whiteness from learned or imposed pathologies resulting from institutional constraints which have

festered in education unabatedly for decades, perhaps centuries. One must wonder, however, what came first, Whiteness in education or institutional formalism? Or, are the two one and the same? As Warren and Hytten (2004) argued,

If multicultural education continues to rely on the dominant liberal narrative of democracy—a White Western ideal of social interaction—then are we not continuing to perpetuate a social order that sustains the power of Whiteness rather than challenge it? How is this not a reinstatement of cultural power? (p. 335)

### **Conclusion of Non-Constructive Criticalities involving Race and Pedagogy**

My initial inclination upon analyzing respondent data was to develop teacher types. I soon realized, however, that this approach ran against the spirit of my core philosophy around identity in that I do not believe in monolithic types or hierarchically structured categories. I then began to realize that the traits—positive and negative, constructive and non-constructive—that were evident among my respondents were universal and seemed to manifest and recede and flow through all respondents in various degrees rather than wholly define them as individuals. Though my assignment of non-constructive and constructive criticalities seems to indicate an either-or classification, they are merely taxonomies that subsume various traits found among the respondents.

Having resolved this vexing detail of analysis I was heartened to find scholarship that followed the same line of reasoning. In their study involving White educators participating in graduate courses on whiteness, Warren and Hytten (2004) assigned what they called “faces of whiteness” that were temporarily donned and changed by their participants. Faces reflected fluid, non-essential constructions in regards to beliefs around whiteness, which I believe, constructively formulate discourse on whiteness that avoids

essentializing ways of being White. All of the faces Warren and Hytten outlined, with the exception of one, were equated with pitfalls into which their participants fell when engaging whiteness in the literature (p. 323). The other face, which they termed the “Critical Democrat,” represented a more constructively critical position regarding whiteness. I will comment on this face later.

Rather than comment in detail upon each individual face, I find it more useful to illustrate what traits evident among respondents in my study reflected what Warren and Hytten found in their participants. John’s comments that he was embarrassed during celebrations around Black history and Martin Luther King, Jr. suggested a presence of guilt that he has yet to sufficiently address. Other comments made by John such as “kids are kids” reflect a colorblind approach, which further reveals problematic notions of his whiteness. John manifests positions to which Hytten and Warren might assign their “Torpefied” (p. 325) face.

Sara and Vernon however, might be assigned the “Missionary” (p. 327) face. This position, that elsewhere I have referred to when commenting on narcissism, reflects a savior mentality. Sara and Vernon’s consistent and passionate accounts of how they provided their students the tools and inspiration needed to rise above their travails reflected an attitude that they knew what was best for their students. Specifically, Sara’s accounts of volunteering her services for marginalized peoples and her early career devotion to inner city kids are consonant with this face (p. 327). Though one should not be so quick to judge these tendencies—as they appear to seem innocuous and empowering, and in many cases are—like Warren and Hytten’s Missionary, this attitude often simplifies

the process of student empowerment. Additionally, such a face is so consumed with what it believes in it has difficulty listening to others.

Carol seemed to have often worn the “Cynic” (p. 328) face. Warren and Hytten described this pessimistic face as one that acknowledges the existence of racism but believes it too engrained, complex, and indomitable to confront and dismantle. Consequently, a powerless position is assumed. Though Carol did not explicitly articulate an acknowledgement of racism, which is telling, her deficit beliefs about some of her students and parents, as well as the way she glossed over pedagogical talk, suggested a jaded attitude. As I will explain later in this dissertation, Carol’s long-term position in a highly scripted environment, at a school buoyed by high performing Asian American students, suggests she has acquiesced to a systemically oppressive educational institution.

The final face proposed by Warren and Hytten provides an ideal transition to the next section of this chapter, which examines respondent constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy. This face is called the “Critical Democrat” (p. 330). This face is particularly noteworthy because it occupies a position that, in my judgment, too few education scholars have commented on, and one I will comment on in detail in the conclusion of this dissertation. I refer to a liminal position, “balancing the opposing tensions [of the other faces] and negotiating meaning betwixt and between multiple positions” (p. 330). Warren and Hytten argued that Critical Democrats are very conscious of others around them, listen carefully to others, and carefully consider their place in relation to others before vocalizing what they have to offer (p. 332).

### **Constructive Criticalities involving Race and Pedagogy**

Undertaking research that led to this dissertation involved encountering literatures that portrayed many White teachers in less than positive ways. In reading such literatures I admit to having agitated and defensive reactions. Early rounds of data analysis reflected these defensive reactions, as I was compelled to demonstrate, through respondent narratives, that White teachers were well equipped to teach across difference. Even as I painted a rosy picture in early drafts I was aware of non-constructive criticalities around race and pedagogy in the data. With assistance from my advisors I attended to the problematic beliefs of my respondents and therefore my own. That journey from defensiveness to openness was part of a necessary and valuable process that led to what I hope was a competent analysis of respondent non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy.

Having provided analyses around non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy, this next section does not represent a last gasp effort to sing the praises of well-equipped White teachers. Rather, in presenting respondent constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy I intend to further illustrate complexities of White identity and fulfill the purpose of this study by complicating whiteness in education. Though evidence of respondent constructive criticalities around race and pedagogy was significant, I will only provide analyses on those narrative accounts that I believe are pertinent to my argument.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, respondent constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy were commonly consonant with race-privilege cognizance, low incidence of problematic race talk, and evidence of student-centered, culturally



sustaining pedagogical tendencies. The following narrative accounts bear testament to this argument.

**Race-privilege cognizance.**

As explicated numerous in this dissertation, a preponderance of scholarship in the field of whiteness has concluded that White teachers who are race evasive and in denial of their privileges as White people operate from such a consciousness in order to protect privilege and maintain the status quo. A main concern of this scholarship is the potential for such a consciousness to adversely affect the pedagogies of White teachers who teach racially diverse students (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Bersh, 2009; Hytten & Adkins, 2001; McIntyre, 1997, 2002; Sleeter, 1993b, 2001). In short, race evasive White teachers are poorly equipped to affirm the identities of their students and enact culturally sustaining pedagogy. Though I will comment on this argument as well as challenges to it in a later section, in this subsection I present respondent race-privilege cognizant identifications that appear to be confluent with culturally sustaining pedagogical tendencies and constructive criticalities of self.

Narrative accounts that evinced constructive criticalities in regards to race also revealed an openness to reflect upon whiteness in non-evasive ways without deflecting the topic by shifting it to the subject of non-White people. For example, responses to being asked to reflect upon being a White teacher in a multicultural setting were immediate, critical, and included statements of self-identification as a White teacher. When word of individuals who differed racially was offered it was for the purpose of elaborating on the implications the teachers' whiteness had on historically marginalized students. The following narrative accounts substantiate the aforementioned assertions.

A.M.: “So, you're a White teacher in this diverse setting. You have any reflections on that, about being a White teacher?”

Vernon: “It feels weird sometimes. I worry about whether I'm heard because I spend a lot of time trying to explain my life to the kids or give examples from my life that I think they can relate to, and examples from things I've seen. But there's some chance that there's kids in the class who are not relating to me, who are like, yeah, but that's not my life. Yeah, but that doesn't relate to me.”

Even though, as stated previously, Vernon admitted to having a superiority complex, this commentary suggests he is aware that his being White is an issue that needs to be addressed.

A.M.: “What are your feelings about being a White teacher?”

Jane: “I think I have to be careful to not judge kids and to try and give my best self so that if they've had negative experiences they don't . . . they have, like, a positive experience with me or an experience where they maybe see a White person in a kind of a less . . . separated from themselves. I try to make them feel like I have some shared experiences with them. And I do have shared experiences.”

Here, Jane shows she is aware that students may have issues with whiteness and she attempts to bridge that gap.

A.M.: You're a White teacher with students who differ. Any reflections on that?

Maggie: “Couple times . . . if they feel like I'm picking on them, they'll call me racist. That's the sort of thing, it's hard to come back from that, you know, so it really, it's a sharp blow. But, so what I've learned how to do when kids do that is I try to figure out what are they actually saying. Like, if they really think that there's an injustice and we really have to talk it out then I take the time to talk that out. Like, why is this happening? Let's review the situation.”

Although Maggie shifted the focus to her students, her intention in doing so was to illuminate how her whiteness might play out in school. It is clear she went directly to reflective commentary. Maggie frequently reflected on her whiteness in relation to her obligations as a teacher.

When I initially asked Pete to be part of my study he accepted enthusiastically. When we finally sat down to talk the first thing I asked him was why this topic seemed so important to him. Below is his response.

“Just historically, White people being in power position with Black people, people of color, is a worry of mine. I feel like it's an incredible privilege. Not just in a negative sense but in a positive sense. There's incredible potential in it for good things to happen, but incredible potential for really bad things to happen in it. I remember feeling like I was under . . . for a long time I kind of searched in my work with Black kids, I sort of searched for my qualifications, what made me so qualified to do any of that, you know, and believed that White people just weren't equipped to possibly work with Black kids. But I was still really drawn to it. And I needed a lot of reassurance and looked for a lot of reassurance from Black people that what I was doing was okay. As White people in America we just owe so much of who we are and our existence to Black people and people of color.”

I was struck by Pete's reflection and his need to reach out to Black people as allies for his development (Kincheloe, 1999). When multicultural scholars usually speak of allies it is in reference to White people being in alliance with marginalized peoples in the interests of social justice. Here, Pete is mindful of the important role people who differ from him racially play in his ongoing development as a critically conscious person and educator. On a similar note Lensmire (2010b) showed how important people of color were to the identity development of some of the White people in his study, both in positive and negative ways. This also connotes the importance of recognizing relationality. As Lensmire concluded, “White people are always already in relationship to people of color and always already ‘know’ them. How would our pedagogies shift if we assumed relationship and knowledge?” (p. 36).

Though I did not mention Henry in the preface above, his commentary below is appropriate here.

“The percentage of Black teachers and Latino teachers is very small in this district compared to the percentage of Black and Latino students. And I think one of things we have to address is that we need more teachers of color, particularly Latino and Black teachers in the classrooms who aren't necessarily going to be better teachers but I think that it's good for the students to see more teachers of color in the schools. Right now if you go to (Anonymous) High when the kids are looking for workers at (Anonymous) High, they're seeing the secretaries, the IAs, and the custodians predominantly Black or Latino. Then they go into the

classrooms and they see predominantly White teachers. I think by the time the kid gets to high school they're noticing this. And so they're not seeing people, professionals who look them and I think that has a negative impact on what their expectations are post high school. And I think we need to deal with that.”

As illustrated in the previous section on respondent non-constructive criticalities involving race and pedagogy, Henry at times offered problematic commentary. In contrast, his commentary above reflects the complexities I have referred to, particularly in regards to what I would call vacillating criticalities.

**Culturally sustaining pedagogy and constructive educational philosophies.**

Though I make no claims to positivist notions of teacher effectiveness, I argue that the following narrative accounts reflect constructive educational philosophies as they relate to engendering culturally sustaining pedagogy.

***Empowering lessons that connect to broader contexts and personal lives.***

Culturally responsive educators teach their students about the challenges that people of color have historically faced and overcome and connect such experiences to the personal lives of their students through presenting marginalized peoples in ways that are not token (Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011). Epstein et al. (2011) also noted that culturally responsive teaching includes lessons about European Americans, whose historical experiences in some ways ran parallel to the discrimination of marginalized peoples, and the contributions they have made to our country. The following narrative accounts reflect such teaching as well as suggest that the racist nature and history of the United States has not been glossed over and that these teachers have used their positions to empower their students in the interests of social justice (Henfield & Washington, 2012). Finally, the following accounts show evidence of building “a culture of

responsibility whereby students were prepared to understand that their education was training them to respond to injustice” (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 626).

Below, Sara refers to a lesson on Anne Frank.

“Giving them that experience beyond just the written word and being able to visualize it. And then to have the discussion that says, how does this relate? How is this like something in your own life? And making sure that those connections are meaningful so that as they go on with their studies in world history and where they're going to learn more about what happened in Europe during World War I and II and a particular group of people who are oppressed, what did we learn about their ability to move forward? How did they persevere through the tragedies that were going on around them that's not so different than maybe the tragedies in this neighborhood?”

Similarly, on a theme of perseverance, Vernon offered,

“So giving them real-life experiences as actors in their real world and giving them thinking experiences and learning experiences where they go to their families and they talk and they learn more about themselves and find their sources of pride and their sources of weakness that they need to build. And we write all these poems about it and use all these sentence frames. I give them all kinds of language to develop empathy for other people and empathy for themselves and their own struggles that they're going to have to go to, and steel themselves through the struggles before them because there's so much that they have to overcome.”

In relation to Vernon’s account above, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) advocated for gathering the oral histories of students for the purposes of “dignifying” student cultures (p. 611). On this point, below, Carol reflected on successful and engaging lessons.

“We do the parent interview. . . . The whole storytelling unit. We do an interview and I have them do an oral report. They have to interview somebody in their family and they have to really follow through with it. And then they give an oral report.”

Referring to lessons involving Ruby Bridges, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Nelson Mandela, Jane offered,

“So I think that that's important for children, especially kids from different cultures, to understand that you need to start asserting your rights as a child and that you can do it and you can make changes. . . . And they understand then . . . how other people like them can make changes in a culture. . . . Kids can begin to

make changes and then as adults it's their right and even almost their duty to try and make those changes.”

On connecting broader contexts to personal lives John reflected,

“Sometimes we would read stories about Russia, you know. It meant nothing to them. But if you tied it in to their story and how it related to their parents, tried to compare what was going on there in Vietnam, make the comparison that they're all the same, you know, they looked at it differently.”

On the racist history of the United States, Henry offered,

“I teach a very rich ethnic-studies-type American History and it's actually very Afro-centric. . . . I want my Asian and Latino students to understand American history through the lens of racism, and that the things that African Americans went through Latinos and Asians have gone through, maybe not to a great extent, although if you studied the history of Chinese in the West Coast there were a lot of lynchings. Chinatowns were burned. And kids need to see, you know, the ugly side of this country's history. And I feel by focusing on that I'm able to, you know, reach the students. They know I'm not prettifying American history. I'm actually exposing the underbelly so they have a better understanding of the history of the country.”

According to Duncan-Andrade (2007), teachers with a critically conscious purpose, build intellectually rigorous lessons that are relevant to the real and immediate conditions of their students' lives so that students can think and respond critically for themselves. They share with students their hope that they will become the agents of change that are too few today. This kind of teaching purpose, hopeful but not naive, is likely to produce well-educated young people prepared to fight for a more just world. (p. 627)

Duncan-Andrade (2007) also argued that the most effective urban teachers were always prepared and kept revising their lessons. Respondent narrative accounts that reflected constructive criticalities included detailed elaboration in regard to lessons, which suggests rhetoric was put into practice.

***Student-centered engagement.***

Of great concern to multicultural education professionals is the degree that White teachers project their racial conditioning onto their students (Douglas et al., 2008; Jay, 2005; Picower, 2004; Williams, Garza, Hodge, & Breaux, 1999). In the interests of space as well as not overdoing narrative accounts I will comment on this section's subject matter without respondent quotations.

Both Vernon and Sara stressed that they were mindful that their own imprint did not belong on their students. Vernon stated that he did not want a blind obedient function, which is often instilled by parents, from his students. He stated that it was more important for his students to command respect from one another than from him. Likewise, Sara claimed to be very cautious of the power teachers can have over their students and that it was important for her to engage her students to touch knowledge rather than it being dumped on them.

On the topic of student engagement, Jane often commented about giving her students structures in which they can work together constructively, affirm one another's successes, and trust one another. She also spoke of the importance of students having rules of engagement, a language of collaboration, and character targets embedded into the lessons.

**Constructive reflection.**

Grant (2012) argued that teachers' self knowledge of themselves was crucial to their pedagogies and in reaching their students. In relation, respondent constructive criticalities around race and pedagogy included being self critical, understanding how deep-seated beliefs manifest in teaching practice, and a willingness to be ever reflective.

And as Pajak (2012) stated,

Successful teachers, working as true scientists, make adjustments along the way for what they learn about the students, about the learning process, and about themselves, in pursuit of an ephemeral truth that can change as often as one moment to the next.

(p. 1205)

Sara reflected candidly about her beginning years as a teacher and at being very good at pouring knowledge into her students to the point where they outperformed other classes. To her shock, however, when such performance was not duplicated the next year she attributed this to her failure to give those students the tools to continue being successful.

Jane spoke about the rewards of teaching, especially the opportunities to learn about other cultures, why and how people arrived in the United States, and the aspirations her students' parents had for themselves and their children. She also spoke of the process of shedding preconceived ideas and of being careful to not project her own understanding of things onto her students.

Maggie spoke about undergoing a cultural learning curve and the imperative of figuring out what her students would be interested in. This process involved gaining knowledge of things such as music, movies, and books her students were interested in. As she stated, western history is very "whitewashed," and her challenge was to devise culturally relevant curriculum. She also spoke to the importance of cultivating relationships with her students and their families.

Henry stressed the importance for teachers to look beyond their own individual selves and engage in collective action to improve the education of oppressed peoples. He also



stated that it was important to not feel sorry for marginalized peoples and that although he is not successful in turning all of his students around, it is his professional obligation to try.

Pete warned that when adults do everything by themselves and do not collaborate they model for children individualistic and capitalistic traits, which can be pitfalls to success. He also candidly admitted that when he is having difficulty with a student and sees another person who has a strong rapport with the student he will approach that person, admit he is having difficulty, and learn about the student's strengths from the person. Pete was very reflective about his own character flaws and how issues of his own ego and manhood often arise during clashes with young children asserting their own selves. He stressed that confronting the various issues teachers experience was an ongoing process and that honesty and humility have been most important in this process.

Nancy stressed the importance of getting to know her students as individuals and to remember that every day was a new day. She also stated that one can never know when they might touch a student by what is said positively or negatively, therefore it wise to not expect accolades, if there are any, to come immediately. What one does may touch a student ten years down the road. Nancy placed much importance on how she approaches her work. She argued that if "it is a job you just want to get through the day, but if it is a profession then you are going to care about a lot of things."

### **Conclusion of Constructive Criticalities involving Race and Pedagogy**

As I believe respondent narrative accounts have illustrated, constructive criticalities within teachers potentially engender efforts to humanize curriculum in the interests of cultivating for students a positive self-identity, a sense of purpose, and hope (Duncan-

Andrade, 2007, p. 635). In addition, constructive criticalities potentially lead teachers to view students' shortcomings as their own (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 635) and not, as non-constructive criticalities often engender, making excuses and alibis for students' poor performances. Finally, as Duncan-Andrade (2007) contended, "great teaching will always be about relationships and programs do not build relationships, people do" (p. 636).

## **Conclusions**

### **Complex selves (criticality and conflict).**

Respondent narrative accounts have revealed individual consciousnesses that are both constructively critical and problematic. For example, high incidence of constructive criticalities and structural understandings pertaining to issues of race and oppression were sometimes juxtaposed with problematic commentary, characterized in part by race evasiveness and deficit views of non-White people. Race evasiveness was often typified by ventriloquy, and deficit views frequently attributed student academic disengagement to troubled home-life circumstances. In contrast, low incidence of constructive criticalities pertaining to issues of race and oppression were often juxtaposed with cogency, suggesting structural and self-racial awareness.

Complexity and contradiction highlight the enigmatic nature of White identity. Given a predominance of whiteness literatures linking race evasiveness with efforts to avoid implication and protect privilege (Winans, 2005), scholarship that has questioned these interpretations reads like lone voices. Though such scholarship recognizes predominant postulations around White race talk as important contributions to the study of whiteness, it also argues that these conclusions are too simplistic.

Aside from subtle efforts to protect privilege, Lensmire (2010b) suggested that White race talk "might also function to minimize or manage conflict *among White people*," (p.

37) therefore allaying potential breaches. He also questioned if it is just privilege White people are protecting and suggested they may be protecting an identity that has already been attacked by the White establishment for having "embraced" the *other* (2010a, p. 169). According to Lensmire (2010b), ordinary White people, by and large, are not in agreement and are often embroiled in conflict regarding matters of race (p. 37). Unless these fractures among White people are more carefully analyzed, efforts in formulating antiracist pedagogies are compromised. Perhaps this is why scholars such as Moon and Flores (2000) and Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) have argued that research on whiteness has yet to produce a unified and credible vision for the future. If we do not more adequately understand the varied and complex ways White people approach race, and if we resort to sweeping conclusions that equate whiteness wholly with racism, we blind ourselves to the possibilities that conflict, complexity, and contradiction among White people offer for antiracist practice. As Zingsheim & Goltz (2011) argued,

What is less present in the literature are the ways differing responses from White students can be productive. If everything from silence and diversion to speedy adoption of the ideas presented in theories of whiteness can be constituted as reasserting White privilege, what options remain for students, particularly White identified students, when called to process their own racialized social positions? What limitations and foreclosures are placed upon whiteness pedagogy, instructors, and students when so many avenues of response, engagement, and processing are marked with suspicion, labeled as privilege-sustaining resistance, or framed as diversions? What conditions enable White students to adopt antiracist positions? (p. 218)

In further regard to interpreting White subjectivities, Dickar (2008) suggested that White teachers' perceived defensiveness may actually mask more complex phenomena regarding race. Dickar suggested that sensitive issues regarding race are often sidestepped by White teachers not only for fear of sounding racist (Pollock, 2004) but because the teachers "doubt their knowledge of the unwritten rules for navigating complex racial terrain" (p. 125). Paradoxically, White teachers' deployment of colorblind tactics might be due less to racial myopia and more to a fear of saying the wrong thing.

Challenges to predominant conclusions on White identity should not be interpreted as insidious manifestations of whiteness. Allies in the work for social justice challenge simplistic appraisals of perceived problematic White race talk in order to advance discourse on whiteness, not mimic its maligned machinations. Careful attendance to the complex workings of White race talk beyond mere race evasiveness informs our pedagogies and sets the stage for alliance with marginalized people towards social justice.

### *Affect.*

As alluded to above, whiteness literatures have offered sparse consideration to how complexity and conflict may serve efforts to equip White teachers in their ongoing journeys as antiracist pedagogues (Lensmire, 2010a; Perry & Shotwell, 2009; Rich & Cargile, 2004; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). On this point Perry and Shotwell (2009) have challenged predominant scholarship around White antiracist practice and have issued a call to more carefully consider the manner in which affective factors are processed in the transformation of White racial consciousness. Perry and Shotwell contended that "although scholars discuss the guilt and anger Whites often express about race and/or

whiteness, the opportunities those feelings offer for shifting White racial consciousness are not explored” (p. 40).

The structural edifice under which teachers find themselves captive is so seamlessly part of their existence that “we all fail to notice where we collude with oppressive power structures” (Altman, 2004, p. 443). Altman referred to the “double-edge swords” (p. 443) of guilt and shame. In regards to respondents of this study some used guilt and shame, as well as other emotions, to constructive use. For example, Pete’s early feelings of shame, engendered by his feelings of being a naive White person, seemed to have been a catalyst for future cognizance and social justice actions. Also, the image Pete saw as a boy of a Black person being lynched made a powerful impression upon him and gave rise to profound reflections on White racism. His narrative also illustrated ways in which he monitored conflicted feelings and remained reflective. Jane’s traumatic experience as a child witnessing an attack on her mother and sister because of their dark skin impacted her in ways that engendered feelings of compassion for oppressed peoples. Her narrative also indicated a high degree of personal reflection regarding race. Henry’s account of his childhood experience of witnessing a young Black girl sustain attacks from racist White people made a significant impact on his consciousness, which he believed ultimately positioned him in service to social justice. Vernon, being a child of holocaust survivors, believed these impressions gave him an empathic link with other oppressed peoples (Diller & Moule, 2005). Sara’s experiences growing up with an extremely prejudiced father caused her to exercise vigilance in not replicating such behavior herself. And like Pete and Jane, her narrative revealed her value of reflection.

In contrast to the affective processes referenced above, other respondents, such as Carol and John, although their guilt and shame appeared to be obscured beneath their race talk, did not seem to be constructively mobilized by such feelings. Mitchell (2001), as cited in Altman (2004), calls this denial of responsibility, “guiltiness,” which is often accompanied by apologies akin to talk I have termed *alibis*. This again brings to the fore the significance of affect and the transformative potential that can be realized through processing seemingly debilitating racially related emotions (Lensmire, 2010a; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Perry & Shotwell, 2009; Yep, 2007; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). Other indications of how guilt and shame manifest outwardly are condescending behaviors and notions of caretaking and rescue (Altman, 2004). Sara and Vernon’s consistent accounts of freeing their students from the circumstances of their challenging lives reflect this.

### **Implications.**

#### ***Critical consciousness-raising interventions.***

Battling racism intuitively leads to efforts to dismantle hegemonic whiteness. With this objective it is natural to focus on the problematic nature of White identity in order to begin the difficult work of dismantling oppression. It is at this crucial point, however, that our efforts are often thwarted. I contend that if an antiracist White alliance is to be realized in education we must ensure that White teacher subjectivities are looked upon for the promise they hold to meet the needs of non-White students. With respect to this point Lowenstein (2009) argued that it would behoove multicultural teacher education to dispose of views that regard White teachers as deficient learners and espouse views that consider White teachers as capable learners who bring resources of their own in understanding matters of diversity (p. 172).

For the purpose of situating research on multicultural teacher education, the legitimacy of the demographic imperative seems to serve as license to apply a deficit view to all White teacher candidates, a view in which teacher candidates are characterized as deficient learners when it comes to studying issues of diversity.

(Lowenstein, 2009, p. 167)

Although the assertion made above by Lowenstein may be criticized for its suggestion that *all* White teacher candidates are viewed as deficient learners, it may also be wise to consider the implications of her argument. As I have explicated in the review of the literature and elsewhere in this dissertation, the growing demographic rift between White teachers and non-White students presents one of the biggest challenges multicultural education faces. And the very nature of this challenge has to do with how well equipped White teachers are in handling matters of diversity in educational settings. As Sleeter (2001) argued, White pre-service teachers “bring very little cross-cultural background, knowledge, and experience,” and they, as well as in-service White teachers “are ambivalent about their ability to teach African American children” (p. 95).

Though Sleeter’s position was offered over a decade ago, recent scholarship that critiques essentialist tendencies in whiteness literatures suggests that extant streams of scholarship, regardless of volume, approach White subjectivities with deficiencies greater in mind than capabilities. The implication of such deficit-oriented views of White teachers should concern all multicultural education scholars. To this point I reference an interview with *Rethinking Schools* in which Sleeter reflected upon her time as a teacher of students with learning disabilities. Sleeter noted that with respect to this student population she was trained to “focus on what the kids couldn’t do, rather than on what the

kids could do” (2000/2001). Once she began to focus on her students’ capabilities rather than their disabilities her expectations rose and her approach changed from one characterized by remediation to one focused on cultivating student capabilities, which were numerous. This approach reflects Lowenstein’s (2009) concern that when White teachers are not viewed as capable learners such a perception could carry tremendous weight as far as a self-fulfilling prophecy is concerned.

Lowenstein (2009) also noted that while culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse students has been importantly conceptualized, devising a “parallel pedagogy” (p. 176) for teacher education has been ignored. That most teacher educators are White themselves demands that they “aggressively interrogate [their] own practice and tenderly work with others” while “navigating and interrupting White racial knowledge” (Galman et al., 2010, p. 234). The fact that White teacher educators grapple with the same issues of identity as their White students do, as well as lack experience both in contact and duration with diversity (Lowenstein, 2009, p.170), looms heavily on a parallel pedagogy that must balance interrogating White racial knowledge all the while holding onto a view of White teachers as capable learners.

### ***Towards antiracist teaching.***

Numerous scholars have questioned critical consciousness-raising interventions of White teachers (Dickar, 2008; Jupp & Slattery, 2010a, 2010b; Lensmire, 2010a; Lowenstein, 2009; Sleeter, 1993b; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). Others have cautioned that renouncing whiteness risks reifying it (Kincheloe, 1999; Mayo, 2004; Moon & Flores, 2000; Sharma, 2010). Besides noting a lack of empiricism of antiracist pedagogy (Hartmann et al., 2009; Kim, 2011; Niemonen, 2007; Torkelson & Hartmann, 2010),



more compellingly, however, scholars have also noted that multicultural education theorists have yet to connect race cognizance of White teachers with successful antiracist teaching and that there is no assurance that one leads to the other (Brandon, 2003; Lawrence, 1997; Sheets, 2000; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). These arguments suggest that the transformation from complicity to racism to antiracism, if it happens at all, is an extended process (Marx & Pennington, 2003; Perry & Shotwell, 2009; Raible & Irizarry, 2007), sometimes lasting a lifetime. Though I understand that most proponents of White identity development towards race cognizance for both pre-service and in-service teachers do not expect overnight results, their “here to there” expectations lack an appreciation for the complexities of consciousness redress and reflect an over-simplified understanding of transformational antiracist praxis. I agree that race cognizance better equips the White teacher to enact antiracist pedagogy, and believe my study substantiates this confluence, however, race cognizance is but one component.

***Liminality.***

One of the more significant findings of this research is what I call *vacillating criticalities*, or, consciousness that is both critical and non-critical, race evasive and race cognizant. This hybrid-like characterization of White identity in whiteness literatures is not rare (Eichstedt, 2001; Frankenberg, 2001; Hartmann et al., 2009; Magnet, 2006; McDermott & Samson, 2005;). References to whiteness as a liminal state, however, are. *Liminal* in basic terms refers to occupying a position on both sides of a threshold. Given rare reference to whiteness as liminal I argue that this concept needs to be more adequately advanced and theorized. Warren and Hytten’s (2004) aforementioned “Critical Democrat” is one of very few references to a liminal state of whiteness and one

that warrants repeating. According to Warren and Hytten, the White individual occupying a liminal position is able to balance opposing tensions (p. 330) and “possesses the ability to listen with a new heart” (p. 335).

I offer a view of liminality not as border consciousness, nor middle ground in a hierarchical or horizontal continuum sense, but as fertile ground, a space of potential, however tenuous. Though esoteric, multicultural educators may benefit from such a distinction in light of my aforementioned arguments around deficiencies versus capabilities. Rather than view the White teacher, pre-service or in-service, with a focus on deficiencies and in need of consciousness redress, perhaps we might begin to see the White subject emerging from a liminal space, “removed from previously held social roles or positions but not yet conducted ritually into the new social status which is the end of the initiation process” (Hopcke, 1991, p. 117).

Consciousness redress is not a subject to be taken lightly, and as Altman (2004) reminded us, redressing White consciousness entails substantial psychoanalytical work that must be done with a high level of skill, care, and adequate time. Whether the redress of White consciousness is termed rehabilitation, rearticulation, disruption, or interruption, it is process; and this process, which is usually uncomfortable, has only just begun. We cannot supplant a problematic White consciousness with a healthy one simply by means of intervention. Such an undertaking might be better viewed as unfolding along a nonlinear continuum fraught with potential, however tenuous. A liminal framework for whiteness redressed might assist us in this process.

*Affect reprised.*

Though affect was addressed in a previous section it is appropriate to briefly return to it here with respect to implications. Though I have cited Perry and Shotwell's (2009) argument regarding the potential that conflict presents for antiracist praxis, we might also carefully consider more nuanced understandings they offer around propositional, tacit, and affective knowledge. Perry and Shotwell (2009) argued that in regards to paths toward antiracism, "research on White racism tends to privilege propositional knowledge; whiteness literature focuses on the role of . . . tacit knowledge; and research on antiracism privileges affective knowledge" (pp. 33-34). Though these three forms of knowledge are individually significant, the relational dynamic one understands between self and other, which is crucial in transforming consciousness, comes about as a result of a confluence of propositional, tacit, and affective knowledge (p. 34). In addition,

Unless the respondents had, through some cognitive breakthrough on the level of their "common sense," developed a critical awareness of power and their own social location within that, and experienced a felt sense of compassion and accountability, and were provided alternative ideological, conceptual, and interpretative frameworks with which to give language and structure to their cognitive and emotional shifts, then an antiracist praxis did not catalyze. (p. 42)

**Suggestions for further research.**

*Narcissism and teaching.*

One factor that adds another layer to the complexities I have noted is the notion of narcissism. As extant literatures have elucidated (Hess, 2003; Pajak, 2011; Pajak, 2012) it is critical that discourse around narcissism in education be advanced. In consideration of

this argument I am prompted to cite Pajak's (2012) references to Waller's (1976) work regarding what teaching does to teachers. Given the structural formalism that has for decades, perhaps centuries, defined the institution of education in the United States, education scholars might be well advised to attend to the historical line that teachers, 90% of whom are White, follow. That such institutional formalism may give rise to narcissistic tendencies in teachers does not provide an alibi for detrimental effects of whiteness in education. Rather, an opportunity to examine where problematic White teacher identity and narcissism intersect seems ripe. As Pajak (2011) argued, "For educators who choose not to continue legitimizing a system of education that is institutionalizing and furthering destructive narcissistic processes in society, this means that change must begin from within oneself" (p. 2038). With this in mind, more research that explores the courageous journeys that teachers—who view their work as social justice—undergo in the face of institutional constraints, and how they can be supported in their endeavors, would be welcome.

***Career contexts and curricular autonomy.***

Pajak's above-referenced assertion is telling. In recognition that schools, as institutional outposts, are places where racial identities are formed (Pollock, 2004), teacher identities, of which a plurality are White, are subject to institutional forces as well. Given entrenched institutional forces that have historically defined the teaching profession, "it might be said that teachers were [and are] thereby denied the chance to ever fully know themselves" (Pajak, 2012, p. 1190).

The paragraph above is a preface to one of the more intriguing confluences of this study. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, respondent non-constructive

criticalities involving race and pedagogy were commonly consonant with an acquiescence to an overarching, oppressively-tending educational structure (complicity), an adherence to a highly scripted implementation of curricula, and a tendency to give voice to language that justified one's assumed position within the structure, thereby escaping culpability for student academic failure. Though I have intentionally avoided portraying respondents as monolithic types regarding criticalities around race, there appear to be patterns regarding career choices and criticality.

I begin with Carol and John. Carol's overall narrative showed signs of criticality but for the most part indicated race evasiveness and excuse making in regards to her students. She often seemed to remove herself from being a part of a solution to the problems she complained about and positioned herself within an overarching system of oppression in which she seemed powerless to defy. In so many instantiations she professed deep care and outrage as contribution and service to the suffering of others but made little mention of being an active participant in service to others. Similar to Carol is John. John seems to be a committed teacher but his overall narrative indicated a preference for rhetoric, which was frequently contradicted by problematic commentary around race.

Carol and John, whose overall narratives suggested high incidence of non-constructive criticalities around race, have both worked at the same elementary school for decades. Though such a commitment could be considered commendable, the school in which they work is highly beholden to scripted curricula and has escaped administrative scrutiny because of a high academic performance index due in great part to the academic performance, as measured by standardized testing, of one racial subgroup. As their narratives indicated, they both frequently glossed over questions regarding pedagogy and

often resorted to a *blame the victim* mentality. If an oppressive master narrative is the paradigm educators seek to rewrite, and scripted curricula reflects this narrative, it should not be so surprising that some White teachers, such as Carol and John, succumb to institutional constraints without challenge. Their career-ending contexts seem to reflect and define how they have constructed their respective identities (McDermott & Samson, 2005) as teachers in diverse settings.

In contrast to the scenarios referenced above, teachers to whom constructive criticalities and culturally sustaining pedagogical traits were most often associated performed their duties with considerable degrees of curricular autonomy. Data from this study suggest that for these teachers, their individual career trajectories reflected their inner journeys as mindful humans and teachers; they were not satisfied with settling for any position or following a script, societal or curricular. Rather, they found positions most consonant with their core identities and pedagogical philosophies (Hammerness, 2008). Furthermore, they rose to the challenge of creating curriculum, not following it. Unlike teachers who yielded to an overarching educational system of oppression, allowed their pedagogies and educational philosophies to be adversely affected by local contexts (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012), and constructed beliefs and belief systems that attempted to give meaning to the positions they accepted within the structure, the constructively critical teachers, though aware of an overarching oppressive structure, sought ways to transcend structurally oppressive constraints and empower their students.

With respect to this argument I am chiefly referring to Jane, Maggie, Pete, Vernon, and Sara. In my judgment, Jane, Maggie, and Pete were the most constructively critical in terms of race and pedagogy. They were never race evasive, were very cognizant of the

implications their racial identity had on their students, and did not make excuses for their students. Jane and Maggie went into great detail on questions of pedagogy and seemed to offer substantive knowledge of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Pete's overall narrative seemed to epitomize affective processing and the journey a White subject makes from realms of shame and conflict to cognizance and action. Sara and Vernon, one the other hand, exemplify the reason I resist assigning monolithic taxonomies to teacher types. Rather, like Warren and Hytten (2004) have done, I reference vacillating criticalities that oscillate in liminal fashion. The overall narratives of both Sara and Vernon indicated critical rhetoric and culturally sustaining pedagogy juxtaposed alongside occasional contradictions as well as a passionate savior mentality. In their passion and conflict they seemed to embody the "multifarious messes of thought and feeling" that Lensmire (2010a, p. 170) referred to in describing White racial identities. My prevailing point is that Jane, Pete, and Vernon work at an elementary school with total curricular autonomy. Maggie, as a high school resource specialist, has a high degree of autonomy as well. Finally, Sara works with considerable autonomy at a charter middle school.

*Concluding remarks on curricular autonomy.*

Grant (2012) acknowledged the ever-growing predominance of curricula defined by bodies other than teachers and that such a trend compromises teaching as an act of social justice. In this dissertation I have likewise cautioned against this institutional constraint and its effects on even highly critical teachers. Grant's concern bolsters my assertion that curricular autonomy, though not an assurance for socially just pedagogy, provides greater opportunities to devise student-centered curricula built around student lives rather than adherence to a predetermined script. I argue that curricular autonomy, to the mindful

pedagogue, provides an optimal environment in which to cultivate relationships with students and devise culturally sustaining pedagogy because, among many reasons, it necessitates a horizontal, dialogic exchange (Freire, 1970/2007 as cited in Pajak, 2011) between teachers and students. In addition, the following quotation from Pajak (2012) is another argument for curricular autonomy.

Waller (1976) framed his recommendations for improving the teaching profession around an image of schools as living social organisms. The vitality of schools is constantly threatened from within . . . by a lifeless institutional formalism, which emphasizes duty over purpose, transforms means into ends, focuses on parts rather than the whole, and is preoccupied with facts instead of learning. (p. 1184)

Teachers “will always need discretionary space and the educational imagination to invent practices that are appropriate for not only the individual child, but also suitable for the particular time and situation in which something is to occur” (Eisner, 2002, p. 7). To this end, further research on the effects of curricular autonomy on teaching and learning as well as confluences between curricular autonomy and race cognizant teacher identifications would be an important contribution to multicultural education.

*Autobiographical critical analyses for teacher candidates.*

Findings regarding constructively critical teachers and their pre-teaching lives seem to be supported by Sleeter (2001) in citing Haberman (1996) in that what teachers bring to the profession might be more important than what they learn in teacher education schools. With respect to this point teacher education might facilitate for pre-service candidates an autobiographical critical analyses of formative experiences as well as an



instructional protocol related to affect (Reason et al., 2005) in the interests of racial consciousness redress.

**Final remarks.**

Having arrived at the end of this dissertation with newer understandings of whiteness I was compelled to go back to the beginning and *fix* what I believed were erroneous postulations as well as general errors. Fortunately, I quickly realized that doing so would be in violation of scholarship ethics and not show the evolution of my understandings of the topic. One such folly of this research is that while I argue to unhinge whiteness from White bodies (Carrillo Rowe & Malhotra, 2007), and even from race, I conflate whiteness and White by habit, and to great error. Though my understandings of whiteness have predictably evolved, I still hold to the basic problem put forth in the first chapter, that being a preponderant emphasis in whiteness studies on privilege and race evasiveness. I would add to that problem a dichotomy of extremes, which still pervades whiteness literatures, characterized by emphases on either White racism or White alliances, with sparse reference to spaces between. But what are the spaces between and why would elucidating them be appropriate? Is it not enough to focus on allaying or eliminating White racism and promote White alliances?

For me, some of the space between involves walking side by side with my whiteness, to speak of it, to resist its deafening silence. I believe humans, upon realization that they embody a certain malady, are naturally inclined to imagine gaining great distance from the detrimental trait, or banish it altogether. But in pushing away something that is so powerfully bound, its very tension has the potential to spring it back. I would prefer to walk with my whiteness, to keep it in view, to prod it, rather than to believe I have the

power to banish it altogether. Such a walk with whiteness is a metacognitive undertaking, itself a pedagogical opportunity.

As I have attempted to complicate whiteness in education through identifications of 10 veteran White teachers who work in multicultural settings, without surprise, coming to know their personal stories has prompted me to more carefully reflect upon my own personal and professional life as a White person. In doing so I am compelled to reflect upon one of the most enduring arguments made in whiteness literatures. This argument submits that White people must acknowledge their privilege as a primary step in deconstructing complicity to oppression. Though scholars have questioned how an acknowledgement of White privilege actually begets antiracist sensibilities, the argument has prompted others to reflect upon what *privilege* really is, as well as whether its coveted rewards are actually beneficial (Logue, 2005). In making such a remark I can hear the backlash and admonishment for having misconstrued Freire's argument that the oppressor is likewise oppressed and dehumanized. Perhaps, one has to live a certain White life to know what I speak of. Perhaps I am mistaken.

Though it may seem outrageous to some that I would question privilege, I believe some antiracist ambitions are suppressed by the weight of it. I simply caution the use of the word. Privilege is a complex and varied thing. But if we are to understand the real workings of racism and consequently end it we must be careful about how blame is assigned and to whom. The distinction between whiteness and others has been explored, but what characterizes the distinction between whiteness and White? I believe we err when we unequivocally link whiteness to White bodies as well as to race. As Zingheim and Goltz (2011) argued,

Asking students to embody and perform theories of identity, but then limiting that performance, or our discussions of it, to a singular facet of what is always already complex, shifting, and intersectional sets them (and us) up to fail. . . . We oversimplify embodiment by reducing the body to only race, and oftentimes only to one race. (pp. 226-227).

As an educator, what concerns me most is how an intense fixation on whiteness as well as an expedient attachment of whiteness to White bodies, and too often to race, could draw attention away from a more insidious force that would undermine our capacity to attend to our respective relationships with our selves so that we can co-construct relationships with our students, and to question information and be enlightened so that we can instruct our students to do the same.

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