A Call for an Education About Whiteness: Intersections of Teaching and Leading for

Antiracist Education

By

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Abstract

The role and practice of antiracist teaching and leadership is an eternally evolving process. Acknowledging the overwhelming majority of white principals and teachers, it is imperative to interrogate the attitudes and practices of white educators adopting antiracist teaching and leadership. This study took place during the increased national attention to race and (anti)racism amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This multi-site critical case study explores how three principals and teachers at their respective schools understand and adopt antiracist-centered teaching and leadership. This study employs critical whiteness studies and antiracism together as a conceptual framework to examine the implications in relation to white educators and antiracist education.

I explain the ways in which educators' wrestling with their whiteness influenced their adoption of antiracist-centered teaching or leadership. While doing so I highlight the role of white emotionality and race consciousness. I also put forth a framework for understanding the factors that influence teachers' decision-making concerning antiracist-centered teaching. These factors were illuminated through teachers' descriptions of teaching, their antiracism "journeys," and perceptions of leadership. This framework can advance principals' ability to lead for antiracist education.

Finally, I conclude with recommendations and implications for practicing teachers and principals as well as those for future research and policy. This study illustrates the intentional learning educators must engage in to adopt antiracist identities and practices.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> The issue at the heart of racist schooling is not whether or not there exist
> individuals who are dedicated, talented, and successful. The issue is that our
> educational institutions, policies, and practices are structured by White
> supremacy, and as such, they deny Black and Brown youth the myriad
> resources necessary for equitable schooling. It should not be an accident or
> stroke of good fortune that a Black or Brown child receives a good education.
> It should be a systemic, structural guarantee - Sabina Vaught (2011, p. 209)

In the wake of calls for racial reckoning and increased national attention to race and

racism, school leaders find themselves amidst the appeals for fundamental changes in their

schools and for students of color. Communities are demanding the decentering of whiteness and

the affirmation of Black[1] lives. The presence of racial injustice, white supremacy, and anti-

Blackness is exemplified by the difference in educational experience students of color receive.

Institutionalized structures and routinized practices harm and dehumanize students while

perpetuating the inequities faced by historically and currently marginalized groups. As structural

inequities manifest across all facets of students' educational experiences, educators are called to

evaluate and question systems and practices currently in place (including but not limited to

instruction, testing, discipline, and hiring). Adequately acknowledging and addressing racism

and inequities has become daunting for school leaders and is one of the most significant

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[1] I follow the work of Dumas (2016), Matias and colleagues (2014), and Welton and Diem (2020) who explain why they capitalize Black and Brown and do not capitalize 'white' to decenter whiteness. I capitalize Black and Brown throughout when referencing people and organizations as it represents the racial identity of the group. However, I defer to the authors' capitalization decisions when using direct quotations from cited works. Dumas (2016) explains how Black is "understood as a self determined name of a racialized social group that shares a specific set of histories, cultural processes, and imagined and performed kinships" (pp. 12-13) whereas white is "nothing but a social construct, and does not describe a group with a sense of common experiences or kinship outside of acts of colonization and terror" (p. 13). Furthermore, Matias and colleagues (2014) also explain how intentionally using lowercase for white can "challenge white supremacy in language" (p. 302).

challenges they face. Despite well-intentioned initiatives and efforts, most schools continue to reproduce societal inequities every day (Castagno, 2014; Delpit, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Lewis, 2003; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). While schools may make commitments to "close the achievement gap" or "level the playing field," programmatic changes largely ignore the underlying problem that the educational system as it exists was not designed with Black children in mind (Dumas, 2016) while implying the system was intended to be equal from the start (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Baldridge, 2020). Moreover, Castagno (2014) argues educators are also lacking "an understanding of how power, race, and whiteness influence the education system" (p. 2). Until racism is named as the problem, we will continue to address racial disparities in education (Kohli et al., 2017).

As racial inequities persist, there is an increasing need for school leaders to have direct conversations with teachers about race and racism in their schools (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). However, school-level equity and race-based initiatives and efforts do not necessarily articulate clear outcomes or address impacts for teachers. Teachers implement many of these policies and practices and they carry a significant responsibility in doing so, given that they have the greatest amount of daily interaction with students. While policies and educators seek to apply concepts of "social justice" and "equity," they sometimes do so in ways that distort the original intent (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Accordingly, we must investigate how teachers are conceptualizing and implementing antiracist and equity-centered practices. Furthermore, we must interrogate how they understand and experience the practices of school leaders committed to antiracist leadership and education (e.g., through policies, initiatives, professional development) in relation not only to teachers' behaviors and attitudes, but also concerning their instructional practices.

Whiteness is a central tension in this work. There is a significant racial mismatch between white educators and the racial diversity of students in K-12 schools. While students of color are no longer the minority of the student population, an overwhelming 78% of school leaders are white and 80% of teachers are white (NCES 2018, National Teacher and Principal Survey). Both the research and policy initiatives in K-12 largely center on students of color and not the role of whiteness.

As teachers have the most significant interaction with students, it is critical *white* educators "have conversations about the understanding of power and privilege and how they enact it on Black bodies" (Newton, 2017, p. 60). However, they must move beyond solely identifying their white racial privilege. Matias and Mackey (2015) argue that to

> *completely* teach diversity and antiracist theories… [educators] essentially...must learn the foundations of race first before doing the work of dismantling white supremacy. For how can one commit to antiracist teaching if one does not understand the underlying reason for why it is needed in the first place? (emphasis in original, p. 38)

Perhaps it is no surprise that whiteness is found to be a challenging subject for white school leaders when adopting antiracist-centered leadership (McMahon, 2007). Again, given the predominance of white educators and this challenge, there is a critical and urgent need to specifically investigate how white school leaders are approaching policies and practices concerning equity and antiracism. To move beyond the superficial implementation of reforms and initiatives associated with "equity" and "diversity," it is necessary to understand how white supremacy functions in schools at the classroom, school, and programmatic levels in a way that "protects White educators and White interests over the students and communities" (Sondel et al., 2019, p. 6).

It is unquestionably critical that educators confront all forms of oppression (e.g., racism, classism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, etc.). Race is a key organizing

category in the U.S. because of how deeply ingrained racism is. Given racism is an inherent

component of American life, it must be analyzed along with other forms of oppression in order

to understand such inequalities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Due to the permanence of white

supremacy and racial ideologies, the focus on race and antiracism are key organizing indicators

for inequities in the United States. For these reasons, this study centers on race.

Problem Statement

Research on social justice and equity in education acknowledges and addresses the call

for leaders and teachers who are committed to social justice in schools and is starting to

investigate specific attitudes and practices in response. However, there is limited research that

specifically addresses *antiracist* leadership; thus, there is a current demand for further inquiry

(Diem et al., 2019; Diem & Welton, 2020). More specifically, there is a notable scarcity of

research specifically raising questions concerning how *white* principals are taking up antiracist

leadership. This line of inquiry is critical as racism cannot only be a problem for people of color

to address, it must be taken up by those with privilege: in this case, the vast majority of white

principals in positions of power. Given the overwhelming prevalence of white educators, it is

imperative we interrogate whiteness and how it manifests in education. Furthermore, more

research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of how principals name race issues with their

staff (McMahon, 2007; Swanson & Welton, 2019). Swanson and Welton (2019) argue research

"should provide a more authentic representation of the internal struggle with whiteness that a

White principal would most likely face when practicing antiracist leadership" (p. 734). There are

significant implications for practitioners. As Diem and Welton (2020) recently argued,

"expanding research on anti-racist leadership will give educational leaders the practical tools

needed to guide their district/school communities through change processes that are important to

racial equity work" (p. 3) and can have direct implications for principal preparation programs and professional development for practitioners.

While research investigates the practices of school leaders, it fails to address how those practices can shape and influence teachers' attitudes concerning antiracist education and their instructional practices. In Capper and Young's (2014) work on the "ironies and limitations" of leadership for social justice, they argue schools are receiving a "plethora of equity initiatives" from all levels, but that these do "not address how educators should coalesce and implement all of the suggested practices" (p. 161). Teachers are called to make sense of the policies and practices initiated by district and school leaders and implement them accordingly. Welton and colleagues (2018) argue, "building the capacity of others to lead and shoulder the responsibility for facilitating antiracist change only increases the number of those throughout the institution who are accountable for and committed to accomplish the goals for racial equity" (p. 12). As students' experiences at schools are greatly shaped by teachers, it is imperative we understand how leadership practices in schools are influencing the attitudes and practices of teachers, both interactional and instructional.

The purpose of this study is to address these voids by investigating how, if at all, teachers are adopting antiracist attitudes and practices as shaped by the practices (e.g., policies, initiatives, professional development) of their white principals who are committed to antiracism. In this study, I move beyond the discussion and evidence of the importance of antiracist leadership and what it should look like, towards an inquiry into how this type of leadership shapes teachers' attitudes and practices. As such, I will investigate how educators grapple, or do not, with their whiteness as they consider antiracist leadership and teaching.

<div align="center">**Definitions**</div>

In this section, I discuss the evolving definitions of racism, antiracism, the specificity of anti-Black racism, and whiteness. Afterward, I provide the background and definition of social justice education as a precursor to a working definition and understanding of antiracist education that will be used in this study.

Racism

To define antiracism, we must first address the system of racism. It is critical to understand race and racism to understand whiteness. Racism is pervasive and patterned (Bell, 1992; Omi & Winant, 1994) and produces structured hierarchies. It is necessary to define racism objectively in a way that goes beyond ideas and includes a structural perspective in order to provide an analysis of how racism operates. This will allow for an explanation of both overt and covert racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 475). There are three levels of racism operating at the school level: individual, institutional, and societal (Young & Laible, 2000). Young and Laible (2000) describe how "White racism works in schools through each of the three levels" (p. 378) and argue "its effects on both children and adults, as well as on both Whites and people of color, are powerful and detrimental" (p. 382). While racism is expressed in attitudes, behaviors, and institutions (Colin & Preciphs, 1991), one must be cognizant that racism is more than personal attitudes and behaviors: it is also their institutional formalization (Meehan, 2010). Acknowledging systems of power and institutionalized control is critical for understanding racism as it is deeply woven into the fabric of our society (DiAngelo, 2011) and for providing a theoretical framework from which to analyze race (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). DiAngelo (2011) explains that racism has a "historical accumulation and ongoing use of institutional power and authority to support the prejudice and systematically enforce discriminatory behaviors with far-

reaching effects" (p.22). Racism is not to be defined narrowly as the set of actions and assumptions depicted by most of the white mainstream public, but rather "racism is a complex, multifaceted, and constantly changing set of practices and beliefs that have the effect of disadvantaging, disempowering, marginalizing, and stigmatizing entire groups. Racism cannot be understood in isolation from wider...inequalities" (Gillborn, 2008, p. 246). Institutional racism has influenced school, and continues to do so (Gillborn, 2008; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006; Vaught, 2011)

There is a full, growing spectrum of working definitions and understandings of racism. Lewis and Diamond (2015) describe how social scientists capture the current, more implicit understandings of racism using different languages. Some of those labels are "'new racism,' 'Color-blind racism,' 'laissez-faire racism,' 'symbolic racism,' 'racial apathy,' or 'aversive racism,'" (p. 8). The authors argue it is the *way* racism works that has changed and explain that "the practices that sustain racial inequality (and ultimately White supremacy) have not gone away but simply grown more elusive" (p. 8). As many white people may be quick to defend and claim they aren't like "other whites," they are the exceptional white, describing the new problem we face: we have few racists but racism thrives (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Other working definitions of racism, such as Williams' (1987), include the related oppression and crime of racism. Williams (1987) defines racism as "an offense so deeply painful and assaultive as to constitute something I call 'spirit-murder'" (p. 129) as it robs people of color of their humanity. She argues racism is traumatic because it is the loss of protection, nurturance, safety, and acceptance. Within the institutionalized structures of schools, spirit murdering is the denial of inclusion or acceptance, a lack of protection and safety because of "fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism" (Love, 2013, p. 302). Ultimately, in research on race and education, racism is not

defined as much as it is contextualized in schools. Racism is fiercely argued as widespread and deadly in our schools: "White racism is also unnecessary, inexcusable, and unacceptable in all places, but especially in our educational institutions where the achievement, and ultimately the lives, of millions of children are at stake" (Young & Laible, 2000, p. 405).

Antiracism

Antiracism is "the practices of resisting or opposing racism and/or intervening in ways that subvert its impact and relax its hegemonic clasp on persons, institutions, schools, and other such entities in society" (Ohito, 2020, p. 19). In the context of education, Young and Laible (2000) put forth these three central characteristics of antiracism;

> (a) its focus on the system of White racial dominance in our society rather than difference alone, as in most multicultural perspectives; (b) its emphasis on understanding how White racial dominance works through and on our society, our institutions, and ourselves in reproducing the relations of domination in U.S. society; and (c) its commitment to preparing individuals to take actions that oppose the existing system of White racism. (p. 390)

This definition highlights how antiracism is dynamic by nature with the potential to change and transform existing situations that are harming currently and historically marginalized groups of people. When exploring how whiteness operates in schools, Castagno (2014) points out that "lost in much of this work is a clear understanding of the way race, power, and Whiteness form the foundation of our educational system and, indeed, our society" (p. 2). Jean-Marie and Mansfield (2013) refer to race as "the elephant in the room" that "few are willing to examine how it shapes the educational landscape of students of color" (p. 20). Within education leadership research, there has not been a recognition that antiracism leadership and change are imperative to invoke educational equity (Welton et al., 2018). Even the language of antiracist leadership is relatively new to this field of research (Welton et al., 2018) and is only just starting to make its way into districts and schools broadly. Naming this type of leadership as antiracist and not hiding under

the umbrella of social justice explicitly acknowledges there are systemic issues that must be dismantled, not solely goals to work towards. Accordingly, Brooks (2019) argues that "while the rise of social justice in the field is promising, it seems to have come with a decline in the number of studies focused on race, racism and race relations" (p. 46). Whereas Gillborn (2015) posited that using antiracist-centered language may "shift educators' focus from color-evasive practices towards pedagogy and practices aimed at addressing racism, whiteness, oppression, and the structural roots of these systems" (p. 498).

Anti-Black Racism

Finally, it is imperative to address and understand anti-Blackness as a specific form of racism. As racism is endemic to American society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Omi & Winant, 2014), so is anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016). It is evident in structural and overt racism as well as in microaggressions (Newtown, 2017). Anti-Black racism must be named specifically (Baldridge, 2020). Anti-Blackness is understanding the Black condition and how the dehumanization of the Black population has resulted in historical and modern acts of violence towards Black people (Dumas, 2016). Anti-Blackness attempts to deny Black humanity and block Black people from the public sphere. Anti-Blackness "fuels the constant surveillance, mutilation, and murder of Black people" (Sondel et al., 2019, p. 6). As such, it results in an inability to see the historic and current oppression against the Black population and instead creates a deficit-perspective viewing Black people as the problem. Dumas and ross (2016) define anti-Blackness as "not simply racism against Black people…. refers to a broader antagonistic relationship between Blackness and (the possibility of) humanity" (p.429). Dumas (2018) explains how anti-Blackness is different from other forms of racism because "in the white supremacist imagination, it is positioned at the opposite end of

whiteness, and plays the primary pivotal role in the discursive and material operationalization of race and racism" (Dumas, 2018, p. 32). Wun (2016) reinforces why it is imperative to name the specificity of anti-Black racism and not make conflations or comparisons because doing so only serves to "undermine the specific centrality of anti-Blackness to U.S. society, its institutions, policies and practices" (p. 175).

While discussions of racism and people of color may often center on inequities, Dumas (2016) explains how anti-Black racism is "not merely a concern about disproportionality or inequality, but also a concern with the bodies of Black people, the signification of (their) Blackness, and the threat posed by the Black to the educational well-being of other students" (p. 11). Anti-blackness is marked by a denial of humanity and by violence and general dishonor (Wilderson, 2017).

Anti-Black racism takes many forms and manifests in various ways in education (Dei, 2013; Newton, 2017; Turner, 2015). Newton (2017) identifies three manifestations of anti-Black racism in education: silencing, isolation, and tokenism. We see this with the stereotyping of Black caregivers, underrepresentation of Black teachers and principals, push-out of Black students in schools, over disciplinary action of Black students, negative stereotypes, dress and hair policies, name-calling, and lower expectations (Dei, 2013; Dumas 2016; James et al., 2010; Newton, 2017; Sexton, 2010). Additionally, Brown and Brown (2020) argue the American educational curriculum is "one of the strangest promoters of historically defined anti-Black racism" (p. 72) and has taken on a specific role in advancing anti-Black racism. They explain the role curricula play to disconnect the past from the present and mask the enduring reality of racism and suffering:

The process of anti-Blackness was accomplished through the construction of ahistorical narratives in school curriculum that disconnected the past from the present. Black people, and the inequalities they faced in society, have no structural/institutional ties to past or present injustices in society. When either erasing the institutional ties of anti-Black racism (e.g., lynching, incarceration, and racial antagonism) or rendering it as simply as the predilections of a few 'bad men doing bad things,' (Brown & Brown, 2010) the present societal effects of Black suffering (e.g. poverty, miseducation, etc., as opposed to curricular Black suffering) too often is attributed to the individual choices and actions of African Americans. (p. 76)

This is further evidence of dehumanizing the Black experience and the role Black people played in the shaping of the United States, as well as evidence of a continued failure to recognize racial suffering.

Anti-Black racism must be explicitly named when Black students are experiencing such types of inhumanity and violence (Baldridge, 2020). Newton (2017) explains how many of these impacts of anti-Black racism are covered and explained by white educators by "managing difference rather than addressing institutionalized racism [which] does little to challenge anti-Black racism and white supremacy" (p. 51). The context of larger systems of oppression is critical to understand in order to implement policies and strategies in schools to educate Black students in meaningful ways (Dumas & ross, 2016). It is necessary for white educators to learn how they are involved in these processes and how they influence Black students' experiences (Newton, 2017).

Education policy has historically theorized that Black students and communities are the problem, casting them as either unworthy or uneducable (Dumas, 2016). Desegregation is the best example of this. Being an antiracist leader means one must conceptualize how schooling is centered around anti-Blackness: "a theorization of anti-Blackness allows one to more precisely identify and respond to racism in education discourse and in the formation and implementation of education policy" (Dumas, 2016, p. 12). Reform efforts, such as those who attempt to

decrease the "achievement gap" or "opportunity gap," are treating symptoms of a system that is inherently anti-Black. The stakeholders who make and implement policies tend to overlook rather than diagnose the underlying issues. Without this understanding and consideration of anti-Blackness in education, "the humanity of Black youth is not simply disregarded, but not even considered" (Baldridge, 2020, p. 749).

Whiteness and White Supremacy

White supremacy is the belief that white people, and their thoughts, ideas, and actions are superior to those of people of color. Whiteness is how white supremacy persists and is carried out to maintain and lift up the priority of white people. Gillborn (2006) and Ansley (1997) explain that white supremacy is not only, nor primarily, extreme racist hate groups, but rather as Ansley (1997) defines, white supremacy refers to

> A political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (p. 592)

Together, white supremacy and whiteness are the drivers of racism and anti-Black racism.

While there is much agreement that whiteness is connected with power, there is less consensus on what whiteness *is*. Some explanations have included that whiteness is a norm from which all else is measured (Fine et al., 1997; Frankenberg, 2001), that it is a set of unearned privileges white people receive, or a conflation with property (Harris, 1993). As an ideology, whiteness references the "systematic reproduction of conceptions of whiteness as domination" (Chennault, 1998, pp. 300-302). Whiteness is in existence without having to think about it and yet it still impacts others (Leonardo, 2009; Matias, 2012). As Gillborn (2006) explains, white people only see the "world" and don't consider the idea of a "white-world" because "its white-

ness is invisible to them because the racialized nature of politics, policing, education and every other sphere of public life are so deeply ingrained that it has become normalized - unremarked and taken for granted" (p. 319). This white perspective is what Gillborn (2009) describes as an "exercise of power" beyond white privilege and can only be described concerning "power and domination…it is about *supremacy*" (p. 319). Moreover, Castagno (2014) explains that "racial power and inequities are at the core of whiteness, but all forms of power and inequity create and perpetuate whiteness" (p. 5)

In her examination of whiteness operating in schools, Castagno (2014) explains,

Whiteness refers to structural arrangements and ideologies of race dominance. Racial power and inequities are at the core of whiteness, but all forms of power and inequity create and perpetuate whiteness. The function of whiteness is to maintain the status quo, and although White people most often benefit from whiteness, some people of color have tapped into the ideological components of whiteness for their own financial and educational benefits. Whiteness maintains power and privilege by perpetuating and legitimating the status quo while simultaneously maintaining a veneer of neutrality, equality, and compassion. (p. 5)

Picower (2021) elucidates that "*whiteness* is the ideology and way of being in the world that is used to maintain it…White supremacy is the *what*, White people are typically the *who*, and Whiteness is the *how*" (pp. 6-7). As whiteness does not function solely within the bounds of individuals, Castagno (2014) posits that whiteness is an "umbrella system that organizes and coordinates multiple and various sites of power and dominance" (p. 8) as opposed to only seeing whiteness through individuals. As such, we must understand the relationship between policy, practice, and whiteness in education.

Social Justice Education

We have seen social justice become a catchall for diversity, equity, and equality (Diem et al., 2019). The overuse has led to ambiguity and passivity. Social Justice, equity, and antiracism are used frequently – and sometimes interchangeably despite variances in their meaning – in

regard to issues facing and advocacy for currently and historically marginalized groups in K-12 education. As such, it "has no fixed or predictable meanings" (Bogotch, 2002, p. 153). Many of these buzzwords can have different meanings for people. For example, diversity can mean race, language, or culture as forms of diversity but can also be applied in a colorblind way. Moreover, because of this ambiguity, we have to look at whether schools are defining the language they use and how they implement corresponding initiatives and goals.

The use of "social justice" has its roots in pedagogy and curriculum. It is now used regularly in research and the K-12 space to describe individual leaders, teachers, and advocates as well as policy initiatives, goals for professional development, and concerning instructional practices. While using this terminology can be useful as it provides an entry point to the conversation given its familiarity in the field, it can also be problematic. Many have put forth definitions in an attempt to align the theories of social justice and educational leadership (Bogotch, 2002; Dantley & Green, 2015; Dantley & Tillman, 2009; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Theoharis, 2007). These definitions demonstrate the lofty intentions of social justice. To provide a working definition of social justice, I refer to Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) as a starting place. They define social justice as "the exercise of altering...institutional and organizational power arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions" (p. 162). A critical component of social justice-based leadership is an emphasis on the actionable components of social justice. Dantley and Green's (2015) definition of social justice leaders highlights the necessity of breaking down inequities: a leader who "disrupts, dislocates, and destabilizes

asymmetrical relations of power and inequities that marginalize historically underrepresented communities" (p .824).

To incorporate the assumed well-intentions of social justice, a conceptualization of a social-justice-oriented leader must include a notion of *humanity* and address to *whom* this applies. Blackmore (2002) does this in her argument that social justice is "about human rights and obligations towards fellow human beings;" it must always answer the questions of "for whom and for what" (p. 212). When advocating for social justice, educators must ask, *who* decides what is *fair* in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions? Using the terminology of social justice opens up space for ambiguity, exclusion, and the potential softening of the work towards racial equity. The wide umbrella of "social justice" has provided demonstrable space for educators to interpret what is *just* and for *whom*.

Castagno (2014) articulates how "whiteness compels us to embrace the diversity-related policy and practice uncritically and to praise any effort tagged with words like *multicultural, diversity,* and *equality*" (p. 4). Diversity and multicultural centered practices tend to center on differences, highlighting diversity and pay less attention to injustices, oppression, or racism (Galloway et al., 2019) and tend to be "expressions of culture" (McMahon, 2007, p. 688) such as assemblies or celebratory months that focus on othering rather than challenging systemic issues. It is more common for *multicultural* or *diversity* curricula to include "feel good" history like the Underground Railroad. Such initiatives and practices do not address the root causes of structural inequities or racist practices. As a result, practices described as "multicultural" or "diversity-centered" fail to make gains for students of color or other minoritized groups.

All too often (best) intentions are emphasized before outcomes are prioritized. We see how the well-intentioned approaches only serve as "allies to Whiteness" (Castagno, 2014, p.

170) because they "are often tropes for policies and practices that do very little to advance equity or stop injustice" (Castagno, 2014, p. 4). When policymakers and educators argue *everyone is benefiting* from multiculturalism and diversity, we are left with a "soft-focus notion of universally acceptable change" (Gillborn, 2008, p. 249). In a study of developing "socially-just teachers," Whipp (2013) argues that teachers' use of such buzzwords allows them to believe that they are able to care and meet the needs of all students while still permitting space to discount students' race in ways that highlight how structural inequalities impact school experiences. As Lewis and Diamond (2015) argue, "it is...in the daily interaction among school policy, everyday practice, racial ideology, and structural inequality that contradictions emerge between good intentions and bad outcomes" (p. xix). While schools' implementation of using *social justice* began with lofty goals, as defined above, it has become an umbrella term for initiatives that may in fact fail to provide justice to marginalized populations.

Antiracist Education

The language, attitudes, and practices associated with social justice and antiracism may be roughly depicted by a Venn diagram: there are distinct differences and some overlapping concepts. Lewis (2003) also problematizes multicultural and social justice-based initiatives and cites Rezai-Rashti (1995) for the notion of "antiracist education [that] concentrates on examining the histories and the practices that prejudice supports. Anti-racist education insists on closely studying and revealing the sites, institutions, and ways in which racism originates" (p. 36). Welton and colleagues (2019) argue that "the complex racial politics school leaders confront suggests a need for a more explicit focus on antiracist orientations than on those shaped by general frameworks associated with 'social justice" (p. 628) and furthermore, that this is especially important in urban contexts where the majority white school leaders and white

teachers serve majority students of color. Using antiracism puts an explicit emphasis on white racial dominance, how that dominance is maintained and reproduced, and the role individuals play to oppose or work against the system (Young & Liable, 2000).

A more explicit commitment to antiracist leadership minimizes any space educators may have had when utilizing the terminology of social justice to depoliticize or water down the critical work necessary for racial equity (Irizarry, 2009). Such watering down, or "softening" (Irizarry, 2009, p.194), may be understood in its categorization as "heroes and holidays" in multicultural education (Amorsa & Gorski, 2008). Words such as "diversity" and "culturally relevant" have become buzzwords used in discussions surrounding policies and solutions amongst stakeholders. Galloway and colleagues (2019) highlight research that has argued how practitioners' conceptions of these terms "may center more on honoring difference, celebrating diversity, and ensuring representation, with less attention to racism, injustice, or the systems and structures that create disparate outcomes for students of color and other minoritized groups" (p. 486). This can lead to the perpetuation of "safe spaces." Ultimately, the buzzwords become tropes for policies that accomplish very little in the effort of achieving equity (Castagno, 2014) and only protect the maintenance of white privilege.

Scholars are beginning to explicitly use terms that name race: antiracist leadership (Brooks & Witherspoon Arnold, 2013; Irby & Clark, 2018; Welton et al., 2018; Young & Liable, 2002); antiracist pedagogy (Pollock, 2008; Yosso, 2002); antiracist leadership preparation (Diem et al., 2019) and whiteness in teaching and leading (Picower, 2021). Racism must be specifically and accurately named (Kohli et al., 2017) and there must be an intentional interrogation of the policies, practices, and norms that make up our racialized institutions (Solomon, 2002). Until this is done, and until racism is named as the problem, educators will continue to face the racial

disparities in the educational system and initiatives will never be transformative (Kohli et al., 2017; Solomon, 2002). Educators must explicitly name issues of race, take an antiracist stance, and move beyond general notions of social justice (Welton et al., 2018). It is because of these contradictions and arguments for explicit language that I will focus on antiracism instead of social justice.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter provides an overview of literature relevant to my line of inquiry – antiracist-oriented leadership and related topics – but it is not exhaustive. To conduct the review, I used the following indicators and keywords: *principals*, *school leaders*, *leadership*, *race*, *racism*, *whiteness*, *antiracism*, *anti-black racism*, *critical whiteness studies*, *social justice*, and *equity*. I largely included qualitative, theoretical, and conceptual sources and reference studies that utilized quantitative and mixed methods. While my study is qualitative in nature, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are informative to review. I retrieved sources from peer-reviewed journals, books, and other academic publications within the last three decades. I excluded dissertations and public media (e.g., newspaper articles). I organize the discussion into four categories: 1) antiracist leadership, 2) teachers' behaviors and attitudes concerning antiracism, 3) professional development concerning antiracism, and 4) challenges and resistance to antiracist leadership. Within these categories, I will also expand on the conceptual frameworks, theories, and method designs utilized. Lastly, I address how these issues are relevant to this study and how the study will contribute to the existing literature.

Antiracist Leadership

Education leadership research is moving beyond what has historically been a managerial focus and shifting to borrow from theories that advocate for equity (Brooks et al., 2007; Young & Liable, 2000). A majority of studies in antiracist leadership utilize qualitative methods including case studies and ethnographies (Solomon, 2002; Swanson & Welton, 2018; McMahon, 2007; Philip, 2011; Vaught & Castagno, 2008) and multiple scholars use critical race theory (CRT) and antiracism as conceptual frameworks for their studies (Solomon, 2002; Theoharis &

Haddix, 2011; Theoharis, 2018; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Few studies specifically investigate

the practices of white principals (McMahon, 2007; McManimon & Casey, 2018; Swanson &

Welton, 2019; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

      Literature on antiracist leadership includes urgent appeals for such leadership. Diem and

Welton (2020) argue that antiracist leaders must receive specific training, lead with urgency,

model antiracist practices, and gain teacher buy-in. This requires leaders to communicate *why*

working towards racial equity is paramount. The specific work of antiracist leaders is to

dismantle practices and work against racist attitudes (Welton et al., 2018). They must identify the

ways in which their practices are, or are not, reproducing inequities and marginalization (Jean-

Marie & Mansfield, 2013). Principals committed to antiracism critique and dismantle these

structures, policies, and practices. Solomon (2002) discusses both antiracism in terms of theory

and practice in a national investigation of administrators' awareness of racial inequities.

Solomon argues antiracist leaders must confront and work to change power structures that are

inequitable and that serve to safeguard white privilege (Solomon, 2002). These practices require

a principal who "interrogates racism and its manifestation in everyday life" (Solomon, 2002, p.

194).

      There is scarce literature on leadership that explicitly states the *antiracist* strategies

principals should implement to achieve systemic change. Historically, most policies, plans for

professional development, and practices use terminology such as "social justice," "equity," and

"diversity," as discussed earlier. McMahon (2007), Irby and Clark (2018), Solomon (2002), and

Swanson and Welton (2019) are examples of scholars who *do* explicitly investigate and discuss

antiracism and leadership. Solomon's (2002) study examined strategies of antiracist school

leaders and put forth five actionable strategies: 1) develop an antiracist environment for all, 2)

cultivate a school-wide antiracism curriculum, 3) hire diverse faculty, 4) encourage the

participation of all perspectives and confront any controversy, and 5) build relationships with

equity-focused organizations.

Both Green and Dantley (2013) and Theoharis and Haddix (2011) examine the practices

of white principals engaging in antiracist and equity-based leadership specifically. In a narrative

highlighting one white principal's early career, Green and Dantley (2013) share the principal's

growth through racial consciousness. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) investigated the work of six

white principals who were making gains in specific areas. The principals had pre-existing

commitments to creating equitable educational experiences for communities that were

historically and currently marginalized. The participating principals had demonstrated gains in

student achievement; a sense of belonging for students, staff, and family; increased access to

learning experiences; and improved curriculum (p. 1333). Both studies make recommendations

for principal preparation programs and development for practicing principals. Green and Dantley

(2013) recommend that teacher preparation programs address students' own privilege (namely

white privilege), students' motivations for working with marginalized populations, strategies and

methods for the destabilizing privilege, neoliberal reform policies, and discussions on racism (p.

90). Incorporating such identity work in principal prep programs and PD for practicing

principals is necessary to

> prompt school leaders to look inward to consider the ways that race and racism
> were and are present in their own life histories and experiences and to then
> consider differences that exist between their social locations and the locations of
> the urban student populations that they serve. This is a beginning step toward
> cultivating school leadership that takes on issues of race and racism directly and
> explicitly. (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011, p. 1347)

Theoharis and Haddix (2011) posit that emphasis on race consciousness and racial identity work

is a "necessary and critical step" (p. 1347) for school leaders to engage in antiracist leadership.

Even though there is limited research on the practices of antiracist principals, we have access to previous research on the practices of social justice-oriented principals (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Kose, 2007; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2010). Throughout this body of research, it is evident that the field is increasingly concerned with making connections between leadership theory and everyday practice (Larson & Murtadha, 2013). Before shifting the focus to interpersonal practices (e.g., collaboration and relationship building), multiple studies argue that in order to facilitate any type of development on social identity reflection, school leaders must do intrapersonal work to build their own racial identity and racial literacy, especially given that the majority of leaders are white (Brooks, 2018; Kose, 2007; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Theoharis, 2018; Young & Laible, 2000). In different case studies of equity-based school leaders, Solomon (2002) and Kose (2007) put forth those leaders must do the reflective work to unpack and understand their racial identity and be comfortable leading the dialogue on race. Theoharis (2018) describes this as the intrapersonal work white leaders specifically must do to confront racism and privilege. This work includes learning about positionality, race, the history of racism, and the experiences of people of color (Theoharis, 2018). He further argues that principals must learn to see whiteness, to recognize it, and to understand its privilege before they can lead teachers in this understanding (Theoharis, 2018). Such reflexivity includes an awareness of the "oppression, exclusion, and marginalization" that exists in their schools and communities (Brooks, 2018, p. 47). Principals must acknowledge that schools do not exist in a vacuum but can be sites of reproduction of, or resistance to, injustices as a part of a greater system (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013). While there is value in reflection and scholars argue it is necessary, it isn't enough. Reading and reflecting on racial identity does not automatically generate meaningful change.

Through interviews with social justice-driven principals, studies found that increasing transparency, open communication, and gaining the trust of teachers are recurring themes among the practices of social justice leaders (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Hirsch & Hord, 2010; Mullen & Jones, 2007; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). These practices include emphasizing teacher relationships and development, communicating openly with staff, setting and maintaining the values of the school, and teaching and developing staff toward a social justice orientation. Rivera-McCutchen (2014) identified three strategies principals employed to create and grow communities of educators committed to social justice: "fostering honest and open communication; setting and monitoring values; and teaching and developing the staff towards an equity-oriented model of school" (p. 757).

Another component of social justice leadership identified in the literature is taking a critical lens to put oneself in a position to dismantle and disrupt existing structures (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Solomon, 2002; Theoharis, 2010). Dantley and Tillman (2006) acknowledge this quality in their description of a social justice leader as someone who "interrogates the policies and procedures that shape schools and at the same time perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization due to race, class, gender, and other markers of otherness" (p. 19). In practice, this entails identifying policies and procedures in schools that uphold existing systems and perpetuate inequalities and is identified as an important task for social justice or antiracist school leaders (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Theoharis, 2010). Having a critical lens leads educators to ask whose interests are ultimately served by these policies and procedures.

Theoharis (2010) identifies four types of injustices that social justice-based principals "disrupt": 1) school structures, 2) a professionalized teaching staff that they argue needs focused staff development, 3) a school climate that needs to be more welcoming to marginalized families

and communities, and 4) disparate student achievement outcomes (Theoharis, 2010). Solomon (2002) argues that when leaders and educators are engaged in the critical examination of existing structures and practices, the hope is that connections between the systems of oppression and individuals' lived experiences will be illuminated. However, only identifying the inequality is insufficient (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). School leaders must also have the "necessary competencies to take actions in ways that replace pre-existing structures of inequality with more equitable structures" (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014, p. 847). This is an example in which acknowledging an inequity within a structure (e.g., one of the four Theoharis identifies) can languish as rhetoric and fail to manifest as an actionable change.

Leaders committed to antiracism must be prepared for the "backlash" of white educators who are "fearful of their privileges being threatened" (Welton et al., 2018, p. 12) and equipped to respond. In a study exploring how white principals attempt to lead conversations around race to disrupt inequities, Swanson & Welton's (2019) main findings center on structures of whiteness and teachers' resistance to talking about race. This study identifies what made those conversations challenging and makes three recommendations: 1) principals need development before leading conversations on race and how to make a change towards racial equity; 2) coaching for racial equity must be prioritized; and 3) ongoing development must be supported for the principal (Swanson & Welton, 2019). In the end, Swanson and Welton (2019) argue "the principal cannot be the sole leader driving race talk" (p. 754). Similarly, in the aforementioned study, Solomon (2002) also posits the entire school community must be on board and committed to creating an antiracist school or "antiracism becomes nothing more than a symbolic gesture" (p. 191).

Various studies investigating social justice and antiracist-oriented leaders uniformly recommend shared-ownership or distributed leadership (Brooks et al., 2008; Brooks, 2012; Hirsch & Hord, 2010; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Wasonga, 2009). This approach necessitates identifying grade level or department leaders who are committed to antiracist education and practices to lead conversations in team meetings. Principals train and prepare those team members who then, in turn, drive their colleagues' thinking (Swanson & Welton, 2019) and increase the number of stakeholders committed to and responsible for the schools' goals for racial equity (Welton et al., 2018). Similarly, this can be a means of PD in which social justice initiatives are led by teachers (Hirsch & Hord, 2010). These groups of teachers are referred to as professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs are not unique to social justice initiatives but can focus on any interests that teachers or school leaders may express (e.g., content areas, instructional practices, new policies, etc.). Similarly, Brooks and colleagues (2008) propose a distributed form of social justice leadership that provides leadership opportunities for teachers. Mullen and Jones (2007) identify that having both school-based leadership opportunities and PLCs is a primary feature of high-performing schools "making a difference" concerning social justice (p. 337).

Literature on antiracist leadership addresses both ideology and related practices. For instance, Welton and colleagues (2018) posit the need for school leaders to understand organizational change to implement successful systemic antiracist change. They argue institutions need to make more antiracist changes and mindsets need to shift to achieve racial equity for students (Welton et al., 2018). As schools are institutions, these large changes are difficult and call the norms and practices that have become routinized and normalized into question. This phenomenon is why Welton and colleagues (2018) argue individual commitments

are good, but schools must have systemic level commitments. To make this argument, they point to the imbalanced amount of research that is teacher-centered and not around systemic change (Welton et al., 2018). Vaught and Castagno (2008) also make the argument for focusing on systemic change. They assert that no matter the intention or execution of a policy or program, "without structural transformation, the fact and practice of racism will go unaltered and may even become even further entrenched" (Vaught & Castagno, 2008, p. 111).

Teachers' Behaviors and Attitudes Concerning Antiracism

There is limited research that specifically investigates teachers' behaviors and attitudes concerning antiracism. A majority of research concerning teachers and antiracism looks at teacher preparation programs (Matias & Mackey, 2015; McManiman & Casey, 2018; Ohito, 2020) or teachers' responses to professional development (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Schniedewind, 2005), or examines *how* to teach about antiracism. Scholars investigating teachers' behaviors and attitudes concerning antiracism utilize CRT and critical whiteness (Matias & Liou, 2015; Ohito, 2020; Picower, 2009; Vaught & Castagno, 2008) in predominantly qualitative studies (Hooks & Miskovic, 2010; Matias & Liou, 2015; Stoll, 2014; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). This body of literature largely focuses on teachers' attitudes about antiracism and infrequently addresses explicit behaviors or practices.

Vaught and Castagno (2008) look at teachers' attitudes in response to PD concerning antiracism. Using CRT as a theoretical lens, Vaught and Castagno (2008) conducted an ethnographic study to examine teachers' attitudes about race, racism, and white privilege in response to anti-bias PD. They found three interconnected themes: "white privilege, individualism, and cultural awareness" (p. 95) and argue that "these thematically-grouped racial attitudes expressed by teachers...are illustrative of larger structural racism that both informs and

is reinforced by these attitudes and their manifestation in practice" (p. 95). As teachers expressed, they gained greater awareness, Vaught and Castagno suggest that without an understanding of structural racism, self-awareness is limited.

To garner further insights on teachers' racial ideologies and how those play out in schools, Hooks and Miskovic (2010) examined how cultural and racial similarities and differences between teachers and students affect that relationship and how it is shaped by racial ideology. As a result of the study, they argued that educators "must be willing to accept that race is a factor intricately woven into our thinking and behavior," and not only that but "we must be willing to explore and dismantle the dominance paradigm that exists in our classrooms. We must be honest about our beliefs and race to begin to eliminate the injustices of past and present racism" (Hooks & Miskovic, 2010, p. 204). This argument points at the antiracist attitudes teachers must develop and the greater awareness to be gained.

As Hooks and Miskovic further explain, racial ideology does not "tell" actors what to do but lies in the "power of interpretive choices that teachers use to tell the stories about the school and students" (p. 191). Teachers are not acting in a vacuum (Vaught & Castagno, 2008) and as such, they cannot be studied in a vacuum (McManiman & Casey, 2018). They are not individually making their own meaning but are "tapping into" pre-existing constructs and practices that exist not only in schools but within components of society as well (Vaught & Castagno, 2008, p.102).

Stoll (2014) explored teachers' attitudes towards race and schooling and the way they "do" race in contemporary learning environments. It was evident teachers are still using colorblind ideologies to make sense of race in schools. Stoll references Pollock's (2008) four foundational principles for doing antiracism in schools (described earlier) to convey her findings

concerning teachers' conception of race and racism. When asked to define racism, teachers included the first three principles but not the fourth, "challenging systems of racial inequality" (p. 701). They posit that "not surprisingly in an era of color-blind, post-racial politics, teachers' definitions of anti-racism were almost always framed as something that occurred on an *individual-level*" (emphasis in original, p. 701). As such, almost all of the teachers in the study identified themselves as an antiracist (Stoll, 2014). Stoll (2014) argues a need for more antiracist committed teachers, not just teachers of color: "regardless of race, therefore, we are in need of *antiracist teachers* in an institution and society that remains highly racialized" (emphasis in original, p. 703).

In their proposal of a pedagogical approach designed to both enact an activist critical race in "urban" classrooms and to "disrupt the Whiteness in schools,", Matias and Liou (2015) presented the counterstory of a Black teacher who implemented "critical race teacher activism" (p. 601). They utilized the theoretical understandings of CRT to inform pedagogy and curriculum. The teacher in the study gave one example: "[the] CRT tenet to *challenge dominant ideology in interdisciplinary ways* compelled me to incorporate a critically raced curriculum that transformally resists the false silencing of race in textbooks" (emphasis in original, p. 611). Changing text, discussion prompts, and assignments were components of developing a "critically raced curriculum." Developing a "methodological" and "routinized approach [to] include race in the daily context of classroom teaching" (p.612) is another practice described. To accomplish this, both content and critical race objectives were developed for every lesson. The teacher shared that if this was not done, "it would fall into the defaulted path of silence" (p. 612). This study puts forth concrete strategies teachers can implement to dismantle "Whiteness in schools."

However, Matias and Liou (2015) do not address how teachers' attitudes concerning antiracism may influence the implementation of these strategies.

To make the connection between practice and attitude, Ohito (2020) conducted a study of teachers' enactments of whiteness in antiracist pedagogy. Ohito argues that "the development of antiracist pedagogy that moves beyond the rhetoric insisting rather than reinforcing Whiteness - and therefore, that contributes meaningfully to racial justice - requires attunement to effects produced via interbodiment, in theory and practice" (p. 17).

Professional Development Concerning Antiracism

The research on social justice-based leadership and antiracist leadership argues the importance of "building teacher capacity" (Theoharis, 2010; Young & Laible, 2000), but collectively, this body of research does not fully articulate or expand upon what that capacity is or explicitly entails. Overall, there is a scarcity of research on teacher development on antiracism (McManimon & Casey, 2013) specifically to investigate teacher learning and integrating theory and practice (Kennedy, 2016, as cited in McManimon & Casey, 2013, p. 398). Young and Laible (2000) suggest that while scholars and teacher developers may agree on the end goal of antiracist teaching, the recommendations for how to achieve that goal differ. We know that professional development is widely regarded as indispensable to improving teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & Skyes, 1999) and that any teachers' unequal, biased, or discriminatory treatment can influence students' school experience and learning (Dover, 2009). Therefore, there is great value in investigating teachers' attitudes and practices concerning professional development around equity and race.

Ample research identifies the one-off nature of PD on race that teachers experience including repeats of "Racism 101" and sessions from "fly-in-fly-out" experts (McManimon &

Casey, 2013) as problematic and ineffective. In response, multiple studies investigate the

common characteristics of quality teacher development related to social justice and equity

(DeMatthews et al., 2015; Hirsch & Hord, 2010; Kose, 2007, 2009; Mullen & Jones, 2008;

Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). First, the depth of such PD's content must be recognized. Young and

Laible (2000) conclude "the incorporation of a few competency entries that include the words

race, gender, culture, and diversity do not reflect a serious attempt at addressing these critical

problems" (p. 387). Principals cannot take shortcuts in this area or have surface-level

conversations (Kose, 2007). At the least, taking shortcuts will lead to misconceptions. School

leaders must use scaffolds and differentiated strategies rather than a "quick fix" (Kose, 2007).

This scale of change and/or teacher development must be systematic and systemic (Vaught &

Castagno, 2008) as well as ongoing and long-term (McManimon & Casey, 2013; Welton et al.,

2018). Vaught and Castagno (2008) argue

> there is an inherent and problematic tension in attempting to address a systematic and
> structural problem...solely through individual transformation...this awkward pairing of a
> structural problem with an individual solution is *both* illustrative of the entrenchment of
> race and racism in the United States *and* fails to result in both greater equity in schools.
> (p. 98)

As such, this development is a "continual (lifelong) process" (Young & Laible, p. 30). Currently,

the existence of repetitive and one-off sessions demonstrates how such a commitment "largely

fails at sustaining *ongoing* work to combat structural racism" (McManimon & Casey, 2013, p.

395). Leaders must recognize these factors in the planning of their policies and teacher

development.

The type of professional development is another component of the literature on PD for

social justice and antiracism. Various models of PD to promote teaching social justice *and*

academic excellence are proposed including, but not limited to: subject matter expertise and

social identity development addressed together (Kose, 2007, 2009); professional learning communities (Mullen & Jones, 2007); and differentiated options for teachers (Kose, 2007). PLCs are recommended as opportunities to both empower teachers and build their development through collaborative structures (Capper & Young; 2014; Mullen & Jones, 2007). Kose (2007) recommends two strands of development for teaching social justice *and* achieving academic excellence: subject area and social identity. Kose argues, "the absence of enhancing subject matter expertise or social identity development content areas would limit opportunities of organizational or teacher development toward teaching and learning for social justice" (p. 301). However, there is no "one size fits all" for this type of PD. Kose (2007) also acknowledges leaders must know the needs of individual teachers, groups of teachers, and the school as they pertain to social justice and provide tailored PD opportunities in response. PD cannot look the same across districts and states given the different student populations each school serves.

Vaught and Castagno (2008) describe larger school-based professional development and "diversity" workshops that focus on teacher bias to address the racialized achievement gap. They use critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical lens to investigate how teachers perceive messages about racism and what teachers' attitudes reveal about structural dimensions of racial inequity in schools. Vaught and Castagno argue these professional development efforts are indicative of an "awkward pairing of a structural problem with an individual solution [which] *is* both illustrative of the entrenchment of race and racism in the United States *and* fails to result in greater equity in schools" (Vaught & Castagno, 2008, p. 98). As a result of their study, they found that awareness around whiteness and equity "did not lead to empathy amongst teachers, but resulted instead in a reinvention of meaning that reified existing, culturally constructed, racist framework" (p. 110). Vaught and Castagno concluded "efforts at raising individual awareness cannot serve as the

singular remedy for the achievement gap...without structural transformation, the fact and practice of racism will go unaltered and may become even further entrenched" (p. 111). Similarly, Philips (2011) cautions that teacher development must address the "racialized nature of teachers' sensemaking" and teachers' "resources, agency, and ability to change" (p. 327).

When discussing professional development opportunities and experiences, more recent research moves beyond the commonly assumed notion of a "PD" in-service session. Following an examination of principals with a social justice orientation, Rivera-McCutchen (2014) argues professional development aimed towards social justice should not be limited to explicit PD *on* social justice but should include principals engaging in modeling and practice "in order to further develop the teachers' orientation towards community and fighting injustice" (p. 756). In her literature review of social justice-based leadership, Desimone (2009) concludes that the research knowledge must be applied to improve our conceptualization, measures, and methodology to study the impact PD has on teachers and students. She references the scarcity of studies on the processes or results of this PD.

Lastly, at-scale social justice and antiracist change will never truly happen without the widespread commitment and action of larger institutions in addition to all individuals (Welton et al., 2018). Schools best at achieving social justice-based change are found to have *all* staff members committed to professional learning (Hirsch & Hord, 2010). However, it is unclear how this commitment manifests in teachers' attitudes and instructional practices. Studies on professional development for social justice argue principals must consider gaining teachers' trust and buy-in in addition to how to sustain the professional development (Hirsch & Hord, 2010; Kose, 2007). While making this argument, the studies do not provide concrete examples of what this would look like in practice beyond open communication or opportunities for shared

leadership (Capper & Young, 2014; Hirsch & Hord, 2010; Mullen & Jones, 2007; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). There is a need to investigate the implications for teachers' attitudes and practices.

Challenges & Resistance to Antiracist Leadership

Antiracist leadership is often met with resistance. Placing "race and racism on the agenda, let alone at the center of the debate, is deeply unpopular" (Gillborn, 2015, p. 277). School leaders pursuing more critical analysis and action toward antiracist practices can be perceived as too antagonistic towards existing structures or too "in your face" by teachers (Stengel, 2008) for using such antiracist strategies and language. Castagno (2014) discusses how even using "whiteness" can make white people feel threatened and induce sentiments that all white people are bad (p. 11). In her work on white fragility, DiAngelo (2011) discusses white individuals' tendencies to respond to dialogue around race with fear, anger, defensive behavior, or lack of change in mindsets. These types of reactions could lead to backlash, refusal, or a general lack of response from educators in a professional development context. When teachers shut down during or retreat from difficult conversations around race, they perpetuate and maintain systems of racism (DiAngelo, 2011). This effect is the same when educators avoid conversations concerning race (Swanson & Welton, 2019). This fear may be one reason why antiracism is not used more frequently with practitioners and thus, one reason why we fail to see more substantial change.

Collectively, there are intrapersonal, internal, and external barriers to authentic antiracist leadership. Solomon (2002) conducted a case study of self-identified antiracist principals and identified two main challenges they face in implementing antiracist campaigns: "1) a limited conceptual and practical knowledge, and 2) their discomfort in implementing a politically potent

policy that sought to level the playing field for all stakeholders" (p. 193). The two specified challenges indicate both intrapersonal challenges and external barriers school leaders may face.

School leaders must first face intrapersonal challenges. Being knowledgeable and engaged in their own racial identity work is critical not only for school leaders to guide and develop teachers but for their preparedness to brace challenges in doing so. As such, "school leaders can change others' minds only to the extent they change their own" (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013, p. 27). A lack of school leaders' preparedness inhibits their ability to facilitate conversations around race. Swanson and Welton (2019) posit leaders "should be cognizant of how whiteness can potentially be a barrier to race-conscious school improvement" (p. 735). They argue that whiteness is a barrier and explain that principals need to be prepared for teachers who will automatically engage in practices that are race-neutral to avoid addressing race or "overt tactics of resistance that derail any anti-racist efforts" (p. 735). Not only must leaders be prepared to facilitate conversations on race and whiteness. Welton and colleagues (2018) argue for significant change to ensure leaders must be "able to withstand the resistance and pushback that comes when members try to avoid engaging in discussions about race, let alone changes that push them to alter institutional policies and practices" (p. 11).

The second set of challenges to overcome are external barriers such as district policies, existing structures and procedures, and community-based groups. Antiracist principals must acknowledge the necessity of having a level of political savvy (Carpenter, Diem & Young, 2014; Solomon, 2002). The district leaders, or the "higher-ups," can pose as barriers to school-level leaders' goals if they have conflicting interests (Brooks, 2018, p. 46). Principals may view district policies as "red tape" inhibiting their ability to achieve their equity-based objectives. Even the potential for how initiatives will be received can present anxiety about how

stakeholders such as district leaders, teachers, or community members may respond (Brooks, 2012). Such political environments can slow desired change (Oliva et al., 2009).

As discussed previously, while the research on antiracist leadership is limited, we have research on social justice practices and related challenges. Leaders work with interest groups (e.g., specific groups of caregivers, students, teachers, or community members) that can exert influence and pose challenges to antiracism initiatives. Both a deeply seeded mistrust between the school and community and an absence of communication between the school and historically marginalized groups (Larson & Murtadha, 2002) can present as external challenges for school leaders in their efforts to implement antiracism initiatives.

Rivera-McCutchen (2014) acknowledges that while a social justice-oriented leader "has the potential to disrupt traditional managerial models," there is a risk because they "are under the constant pressures and demands of an increasingly accountability-driven educational climate" (p. 758). These related policies, pressures, and any fears school leaders may have can lead to instances of leaders' missions becoming rhetoric and falling short of action. However, Rivera-McCutchen (2014) found the leaders in her study "avoid the pitfall" of aims of equity becoming only rhetorical "primarily because their leadership practices grew out of a moral grounding...they aimed to fight for equity and against injustice" (p. 758). Again, Rivera-McCutchen's findings point to previous arguments that leaders' predisposition for social justice-based leadership provides a foundation for increased likelihood for increased success (Blackmore, 2002; Brooks, 2018; Jean-Marie, 2008; Kose, 2009; Marshall & Oliva, 2009; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2010).

Discussion

The body of research on antiracist-based leadership requires an increased understanding of antiracist leadership practices (e.g., policy implementation, decision-making, and teacher development) specifically in relation to how this influences and shapes teachers' attitudes and practices. A critical majority of studies making recommendations for further research on antiracist leadership, specifically investigating the role of whiteness, have taken place within the last few years. Diem and Welton (2020) argue the limited research on antiracist leadership is in relation to three areas: "problem identification, recognizing that leaders need better preparation and professional development on how to be anti-racist leaders" (p. 3)

Galloway and colleagues (2019) acknowledge the call for equity and cultural relevance to be at the center of education while arguing that "few studies have examined how practitioners understand the concepts or how using the terms in professional learning and school change efforts may guide the kinds of practices educators identify" to embody these concepts (p. 486). In a critical review of studies on racial inequity, Kohli et al. (2017) found that few studies on educational inequity center racism in the analysis. Unsurprisingly, several studies recommend a need for further research to examine educators' conceptualization of these concepts and how they play out in practice (Galloway et al., 2019; Solomon, 2002; Swanson & Welton, 2019). After identifying the critical role that naming race and racism plays in shifting teachers' focus, Galloway and colleagues (2019) recommend that because existing studies "did not explore how the educators enacted antiracist pedagogy," "future research should examine what happens when educators are asked to engage in antiracist work in their settings" (p. 498).

In a discussion of challenges to implementing antiracist-oriented leadership, Solomon (2002) argues there is a "serious discontinuity from principle to practice" (p.179) and as a result,

explores school leaders' conceptualizations of racism and racial inequities within their schools. This study investigates teachers' conceptualization of antiracist teaching and what factors influence their adoption of antiracist teaching. However, what is missing is an investigation of the process of "principle to practice" – and "*principal* to practice" – concerning teachers' conceptualizations of racism and the racial inequities as influenced by school leaders. The current study addresses this void by interrogating teachers' experiences and perceptions of principals' leadership practices.

Recent literature continues to recommend research on the work of school leaders concerning antiracism and the relationship with teachers and community (Capper & Young, 2014; Swanson & Welton, 2019). After arguing that principals must move beyond rhetoric (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013) and must challenge the status quo (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013; Solomon, 2002), further research is needed to interrogate how "challenging the status quo" manifests in practice and shapes the behaviors and practices of teachers. In their work evaluating the "ironies and limitations" of social justice leaders, Capper and Young (2014) make a call for future scholarship to further investigate "how leaders work with their leadership teams, teachers, and communities to collaboratively build inclusive and integrated communities and hold one another responsible for effective practice, positive student experiences, and strong student and community outcomes" (p. 126).

Swanson and Welton (2019) argue that "scholars and practitioners should pay closer attention to the ways in which principals may be struggling to raise issues of race" (p. 733). In another recent study, Diem and colleagues (2019) call for more research on the everyday practices of leaders: how are they purposefully engaging in antiracist practices and leading from an antiracist orientation? As such, more empirical research is needed to better understand how

principals are working with their respective staff members to name systemic school problems as racial issues.

Most of the research on teaching that targets antiracism is contextualized in pre-service teacher programs (Ohito, 2020; Picower, 2009). There is a dearth of studies addressing the learning and development of practicing educators (Diem et al., 2019; McManimon & Casey, 2018). The current study addresses this lack of research by investigating specifically how antiracist leaders' practices do, or do not, influence practicing teachers to adopt antiracist attitudes and practices.

A significant portion of the literature on practices for antiracist leadership centers on principal preparation programs (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015) rather than on practitioners. However, there are still implications for practicing principals to be made from those studies' findings. In their study of aspiring principals, Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) defend the importance of developing racial identity, or "racial autobiography," for principals to understand how their beliefs influence their decision-making and therefore "support the critical examination of individual, cultural, and institutional racism and dismantle the structures that perpetuate the current opportunity gap that students of color experience in schools" (p. 247). While this study was in the context of pre-service principals, the implications are transferable to the development of practicing principals and are parallel to recommendations from other studies.

The studies discussed predominantly highlight principals' voices and the principals' experiences (Solomon, 2002; Theoharis, 2007; Swanson & Welton, 2019). Teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding antiracism initiatives and development are a significant scarcity in this body of research. This study will investigate practicing teachers' attitudes,

behaviors, and practices (e.g., interactional and instructional) and how teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership may shape or influence their own practices.

While there has been growing national attention to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, the hate-filled speech of the national president at the time (between 2016-2020), and the growing dialogue around racism, there has been little research investigating how racial oppression operates in education (Kohli et al., 2017). Following the increase in attention to race and antiracist education nationally, there is an increasingly urgent need to investigate ways racism is, or is not, being confronted in education (Kohnli et al., 2017). There is an observable scarcity of research on the role whiteness plays in education (Diem & Welton, 2020), and even fewer acknowledge this gap.

Research Questions

This study addresses four research questions in response to the gaps in education research as outlined in this literature review. Broadly, the study investigates the beliefs, practices, and decision-making of white educators. The first question seeks to gain understanding of how teachers are conceptualizing antiracist teaching. As described in greater detail in Chapter 4, this study investigates the perceptions and experiences of white educators. Accordingly, this study interrogates how white educators are, or are not, wrestling with their whiteness. In the discussion section above I described the need to understand how teachers perceive the principals' practices to influence their own concerning antiracist education. This study addresses this area as well as what other factors may shape teachers' practices.

The four research questions are:

1. How, if at all, are teachers adopting antiracist attitudes and practices?

2. How, if at all, are the principals and teachers wrestling with whiteness as they seek to adopt antiracist practices?

3. To what degree, if any, do teachers identify the practices of white principals committed to antiracism as an influence on their own antiracist attitudes and practices?

4. What are the factors that influence whether and how teachers adopt such attitudes and practices?

CHAPTER 3

Conceptual and Theoretical Considerations

I couple antiracism and critical whiteness studies as conceptual frameworks for this study. In this section, I discuss and detail how both frameworks inform current research.

Antiracism

Antiracism as a theory and practice has evolved over time. Solomon (2002) describes this evolution and the objective of antiracism to be "the elimination of the marginalizing, oppressive, and self-destructive impact of racism on people of color" (p. 176). To help conceptualize antiracism, Young and Laible (2000) provide three central characteristics:

> (a) its focus on the system of White racial dominance in our society rather than difference alone…; (b) its emphasis on understanding how White racial dominance works through and on our society, our institutions, and ourselves in reproducing the relations of domination in U.S. society; and, (c) its commitment to preparing individuals to take actions that oppose the existing system of White racism. (p. 390)

In education and other institutions, antiracism is designed to operate at several levels (Jean-Marie, 2013; Solomon, 2002) where we see these characteristics manifest. Solomon (2002) elucidates three levels: individual, behavioral, and institutional. These scholars describe how the first two levels interact as "antiracism focuses on the attitudes and actions of individuals in an attempt to eliminate behaviors that impact negatively on people of color" (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013, p. 176). This includes challenging belief systems, mindsets, and attitudes that are harmful to historically and currently marginalized groups. Conversely, institutional antiracism "critically examines the structures and policies that entrenched and reproduce racism" (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013, p. 176). Antiracism is operationalized in schools at these three levels. At the individual and behavioral levels, antiracism aims to eliminate behaviors and practices that oppress people of color. At the institutional level, antiracism works to disrupt and

dismantle racist structures, policies, and practices. These practices may include components of schools (e.g., curriculum, discipline policies, student tracking, and components of testing) that have operated under an assumption of racial neutrality yet necessitate examination.

Figure 1

Antiracism as a Theoretical Concept and How it is Operationalized in Schools

Antiracism as a Theoretical Concept	Antiracism	Antiracism as Operationalized in Schools
Individual — Interrogate, analyze & challenge Behavioral — Understand, reflect Institutional — Critically examine	Institutional Behavioral Individual	Individual & Behavioral — Eliminate behaviors and practices that oppress people of color Institutional — Disrupt and dismantle AR structures, policies & practices

Welton and colleagues (2018) caution that using antiracism as a theoretical concept alone does not provide direction on how to implement change. When addressing antiracism, we must consider how it will be operationalized. Figure 1 illustrates how we approach and think about antiracism as a theoretical concept and examples of how it is operationalized at the three different levels. Solomon (2002) emphasizes the need for utilizing antiracism to not only promote change in practice but to interrogate assumptions and existing structures. To do so, Solomon (2002) argues the goal of antiracism is to "analyze, challenge, and change power relations; advocate for equitable access of people of color to power and resources, and ensure their full participation in racially diverse societies" (p. 176). Utilizing antiracism as a conceptual framework allows researchers to better understand the attitudes and behaviors of school leaders

and teachers as they engage in professional development aimed to decrease racist belief systems and practices. The intersection of antiracism and critical whiteness studies helps to identify racial identity and power of race. Furthermore, incorporating critical whiteness studies is helpful for acknowledging the racial identity and power that intersects with antiracism. Matias & Mackey (2015) describe that using critical whiteness studies "provides a *ying* to the *yang*" (p. 38) with other theories of race.

Critical Whiteness

As an analytical tool, critical whiteness studies allows for an analysis of racial power that works with and against other factors of power. Critical whiteness studies draw from Black intellectual origins: Black scholars have been interrogating the existence and operation of whiteness for a long time (Du Bois, 2015; Fanon, 1967; hooks, 1994). Long before it was an area of research, critical whiteness was a subject of fiction, journalism, art, and more (e.g., James Baldwin and Toni Morrison). White people have long had access to this writing on the operations of whiteness. It is only new to those white people engaging in the work for the first time (Leonardo, 2009). Leonardo (2009) reminds us that theory is not "something separate from practice," but it provides a framework for practices: "the production and application of theory is a part of the overall search for transformative knowledge (p. 13). Matias and Mackey (2015) explain how critical whiteness studies "uses a transdisciplinary approach to investigate the phenomenon of whiteness, how it is manifested, exerted, defined, recycled, transmitted, and maintained, and how it ultimately impacts the state of race relations" (p. 37) and thus problematizes the normality of whiteness.

Critical whiteness studies provides a framework to interrogate white people's contributions to racial production (e.g. tracking, disciplinary policies, disproportionate funding),

even when they do not believe they are included as a part of race (Lipsitz, 2006 cited in Matias et al., 2014, p. 291). As Leonardo (2009) explains, the permanence of race and racism has been maintained and perpetuated without the acknowledgment of whiteness.

Critical whiteness studies breaks down the normalcy of how white people are racialized and allows the deconstruction of the "material, physical, emotional, and political power of whiteness" (Matias & Mackey, 2015, pg. 38). To apply critical whiteness studies to the exploration of white educators' commitments to antiracism and adoption of antiracist education, I organize critical whiteness into four categories:1) white racial frame (Feagin, 2020), 2) critical race consciousness, 3) disruption of the normalcy of whiteness, and 4) identification and disruption of white privilege and white supremacy.

White Racial Frame

Engaging in the identification of one's white racial frame (Feagin, 2020) is important to enabling the disruption and deconstruction of systems and practices rooted in white supremacy. I draw on Feagin's conceptual paradigm that he calls the "white racial frame" as a component of critical whiteness. The white racial frame is "the dominant racial frame that has long legitimated, rationalized, motivated, and shaped racial oppression and inequality in this country…[and] operates to assist people in defining, interpreting, conforming to, and acting in their everyday social worlds" (Feagin, 2020, pp. 4-5). Feagin (2020) describes the five overlapping dimensions that the white racial frame encompasses: beliefs aspect (racial stereotypes), racial narratives, racialized emotions ("feelings aspect"), visual and auditory components (racialized language and images), and inclination to action (discrimination) (p. 19). These white frames surround two subframes: a "white virtuousness" subframe that is a strong positive orientation to white people and whiteness and the "unvirtuousness subframe" which is a strong negative orientation towards

"others" who are oppressed (p. 19). In everyday practice, we see how these dimensions are carried out "by white individuals acting to impose or maintain racial identity, privilege, and dominance vis-a-vis people of color in everyday interactions (Feagin, 2020, p. 14).

Educators' racial ideologies influence their daily practices and therefore have implications for students and school communities. As Feagin (2020) explains, the white racial frame "routinely operates in the micro (interpersonal), meso (small-group), and macro (institutional) areas of society" (p. 5). In order to understand their white racial frame, educators must ask and reflect on questions such as the following (Toure & Thomson Dorsey, 2018): how do I reinforce the white racial frame? How does it get reproduced? How does it influence my decision-making? How can I make positive framing of students of color more prevalent? How can I include more counter-stories to the dominant white racial frame?

Deframing and reframing one's white racial frame is essential: "*deframing* involves consciously taking apart and critically analyzing elements of the white racial frame, while *reframing* means accepting or creating a new frame to replace that white frame" (Feagin, 2020, p. 246). As Feagin (2020) argues, there is great utility in comprehending the white racial frame in order to "make sense" of racial oppression (p. 32). Educators can be in a position to counter racial discrimination and stereotypes and interrogate oppressive practices, and therefore can be sites for deframing or reframing the white racial frame (Toure & Thompson Dorsey, 2018).

Critical Race Consciousness

A consideration of race consciousness is instrumental in the use of antiracism and critical whiteness as a coupled conceptual framework. Critical reflection and increased awareness of race around oneself is the first step necessary for educators to engage in antiracist work. Swanson & Welton (2019) define a racially conscious person as one who is "able to readily

identify the problems associated with racism and are willing to participate in critical discussions about race" (p. 736). Swanson & Welton (2019) argue antiracism is "a praxis of race consciousness" (p. 736), emphasizing the required coupling of *action* with acknowledgment and reflection, as the goal is for educators to work from an antiracist perspective and adopt antiracist practices. Without race consciousness, educators are "indifferent, uninvolved, unconcerned, disengaged, detached, and even inactive" (Swanson & Welton, 2019, p. 737). Moreover, failing to acknowledge whiteness perpetuates the maintenance of racism (Allen, 2001 cited in Matias et al., 2014, p. 291).

Disruption of the Normalcy of Whiteness

Critical whiteness allows for a focus on "problematizing the normality of hegemonic whiteness" (Matias et al., 2014, p. 291). First, to define whiteness, Castagno (2014) compiled researchers' definitions of whiteness to describe "a set of unearned privileges enjoyed by white people, a normalization of what is right, and a norm against which everything else gets measured" (p. 7). Moreover, DiAngelo explains how whiteness is used as the "norm or standard for human" and as such, people of color are "a deviation from that norm" (p. 25). Such othering perpetuates the normalcy of whiteness. In her ethnographic research on whiteness in education, Castagno (2014) argues that "understanding the links between whiteness and diversity-related educational policy and practice, therefore, is an important, and yet relatively unexplored, task for educators" (p. 5).

Colorblind ideology, a manifestation of whiteness, reinforces the normalcy of whiteness. When teachers participate in colorblindness, it is in contradiction to antiracist or race conscious efforts. This practice often manifests as statements such as "I don't see race; I treat all races the same" and demonstrates a denial that race and racism exists (Bonilla-Silva, 2017).

Colorblindness is "conceptualized as an ideology wherein race is immaterial. Efforts to not 'see' race insinuate that recognizing race is problematic " (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 147).

Claiming to be blind to race and evading conversations about race reinforces racial hierarchies and therefore, strengthens whiteness. Critical whiteness affirms how colorblindness will "flourish" when white teachers "feel emotionally uncomfortable to engage in dynamics of race in the classroom" (p. 601) because "it presumes (a) many white teachers are missionaries trained to save and (b) urban schools are pathological deficits that need to be saved" (p. 601).

Scholars argue colorblindness is a new common form of subtle racism (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Carr, 1997). Carr (1997) argues that colorblind ideology reinforces the status quo in that whiteness is the dominant cultural norm and the standard to which other groups must assimilate. The theory and practice of colorblindness may have begun with good intentions, but it is highly problematic. DiAngelo (2018) explains how this theory has "served to deny the reality of racism and thus hold it in place" (p. 42) as it denies an ability to address unconscious beliefs concerning racist socialization. As Bonilla-Silva (2017) explains, supposed race-neutral systems and practices in education silence or downplay any conversation about race. This comes from the concept of colorblindness that inhibits the possibility that race matters (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Many policies and practices, even when designed to ameliorate racial inequities, tend to be race-neutral and deficit-based, and fail to address structural racism. They often contain deficit-based language and fail to acknowledge racist systems and practices, ultimately perpetuating racial inequities. As Castagno (2008) contends, "silence is both indifference and highly problematic" (p. 330). Even an educator with "good intentions" who may claim to "not see race" is exercising whiteness by demonstrating an unwillingness to acknowledge the racism that exists in education (Bonilla-Silva, 2013).

More recently, scholars have put forth color-evasiveness to rename the concept and practice of colorblindness (Annamma et al., 2017; Diem et al., 2016; Holme et al., 2014; Gillbon, 2019). Color-evasiveness can be used to describe the deliberate avoidance and denial of structural and everyday racism (Annamma et al., 2017). Annamma and colleagues (2017) describe the connection between not seeing the prevalence of race and racism and the deficit-based conception of people with disabilities (particularly those who are blind or have visual impairments). Race-based terms that use disability as a metaphor (e.g., "deaf to the argument" or "racism cripples") "are inherently problematic, as they do not accurately depict the problem of refusing to acknowledge race while simultaneously maintaining a deficit nation of people of disabilities" (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 153). Evading topics and conversations concerning race remove the "inherent ableism" in colorblindness (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 154). Gillborn (2019) puts forth three advantages of using the new terminology of color-evasiveness: (1) it clarifies the avoidance is deliberate; (2) using evasion, instead of blindness, moves away from the ableist and exclusionary notions; and (3) "the stance neatly acts as both color evasion (we should not talk about race) and racism denial (racism is not worth discussion)" (p. 99). Ultimately, teachers' color-evasiveness "perpetuates an educational culture in which the status quo is maintained" (Castagno, 2008, p. 329). Colorevasiveness absolves educators of responsibility and accountability; whereas naming race allows educators to identify the root causes of inequities (Irby & Clark, 2018).

Identification and Disruption of White Privilege and White Supremacy

Using critical whiteness as a theoretical framework allows for the deconstruction of how white privilege accumulates beyond naive acknowledgments (McIntosh, 1988). Taking a critical approach to interrogating white privilege and white supremacy in education is an imperative

departure from McIntosh's (1988) popularized explanation of white privilege as a knapsack of privileges with which white people must come to terms. This critical approach explains how "privilege is granted even without a subject's cognition that life is made a bit easier...and despite a subject's attempt to disidentify with the white race" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 75). These privileges may be "taken for granted by whites and that cannot be similarly enjoyed by people of color in the same context (government, community, workplace, schools, etc.)" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 24). Leonardo (2009) cautions that "discourse on privilege comes with the psychological effect of personalizing racism rather than understanding its structural origins in interracial relations" (p. 79).

A critical analysis of white privilege must be accompanied by an examination of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2004). This examination requires looking at white supremacy as "a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantages or the *state* of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it" (p. 137). Leonardo (2004) describes white privilege as "the notion that white subjects accrue advantages by virtue of being constructed as white" (p. 137). This notion upholds white domination over people of color in society (McMahon, 2007) and thus, in education.

In their work to understand white privilege, Kendall (2001) explains that "the creation of a system in which race plays a central part - one that codifies the superiority of the white race over all others - has been in no way accidental or haphazard" (p. 2). However, acknowledging white privilege does not address the issue of power and domination. Leonardo (2004) argues that doing so can shield the structures and operations of white supremacy: "the theme of privilege obscures the subject of domination, or the agent of actions, because the situation is described as

happening almost without the knowledge of whites...the study of white privilege begins to take on an image of domination without agents" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 138). This is why McIntosh's knapsack metaphor is inadequate; it fails to address systems of power and acknowledges that white people perpetuate and uphold racial domination (Leonardo, 2004, p. 139). The role of white supremacy must also be named: it makes up the cultural, economic, and cultural systems in which white people maintain their power and domination. Educational systems and practices are not unaffected.

Whiteness is the backdrop before which all this work is being attempted, given that the overwhelming majority of school leaders and teachers in the U.S. are white. Reforms described as "liberal" or "progressive" often fail to achieve lofty goals of ending inequities; when reforms do not address race, racism, and privilege, they perpetuate systems that benefit those in power (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Thus, such reforms fail to problematize how whiteness is privileged in education and can furthermore be "self-serving for White principals" (Green & Dantley, 2013, p. 82). As all white people benefit from existing inequitable educational systems, it is the responsibility of white people to disrupt and dismantle them (McMahon, 2007, p. 687). Principals are in a position of power to disrupt such practices (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) and as such, must confront and challenge structures and practices that are marginalizing (Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Jean-Marie et al., 2008) and maintain white privilege (Solomon, 2002). Critical whiteness "disrupts the centrality of Whiteness in teaching by questioning what constitutes normalcy and how teachers implicitly and explicitly participate and reproduce it" (Matias & Liou, 2014, p. 610). As Castagno (2008) explains, equity is often not defined when it is used in mission statements, professional development, and action plans, thus leading to inaction and perpetuation of the dominance of whiteness.

Figure 2 illustrates how critical whiteness and antiracism are used together in this study's interrogation of school leaders' and teachers' conceptualizations of antiracism and whiteness. As Matias and Mackey (2015) argue, "if racism is the symptom, then enactments of whiteness that uphold white supremacy is the disease; to cure such a disease we cannot simply apply antiracist approaches without thoroughly understanding the disease itself" (p. 37).

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework: Antiracism and Critical Whiteness
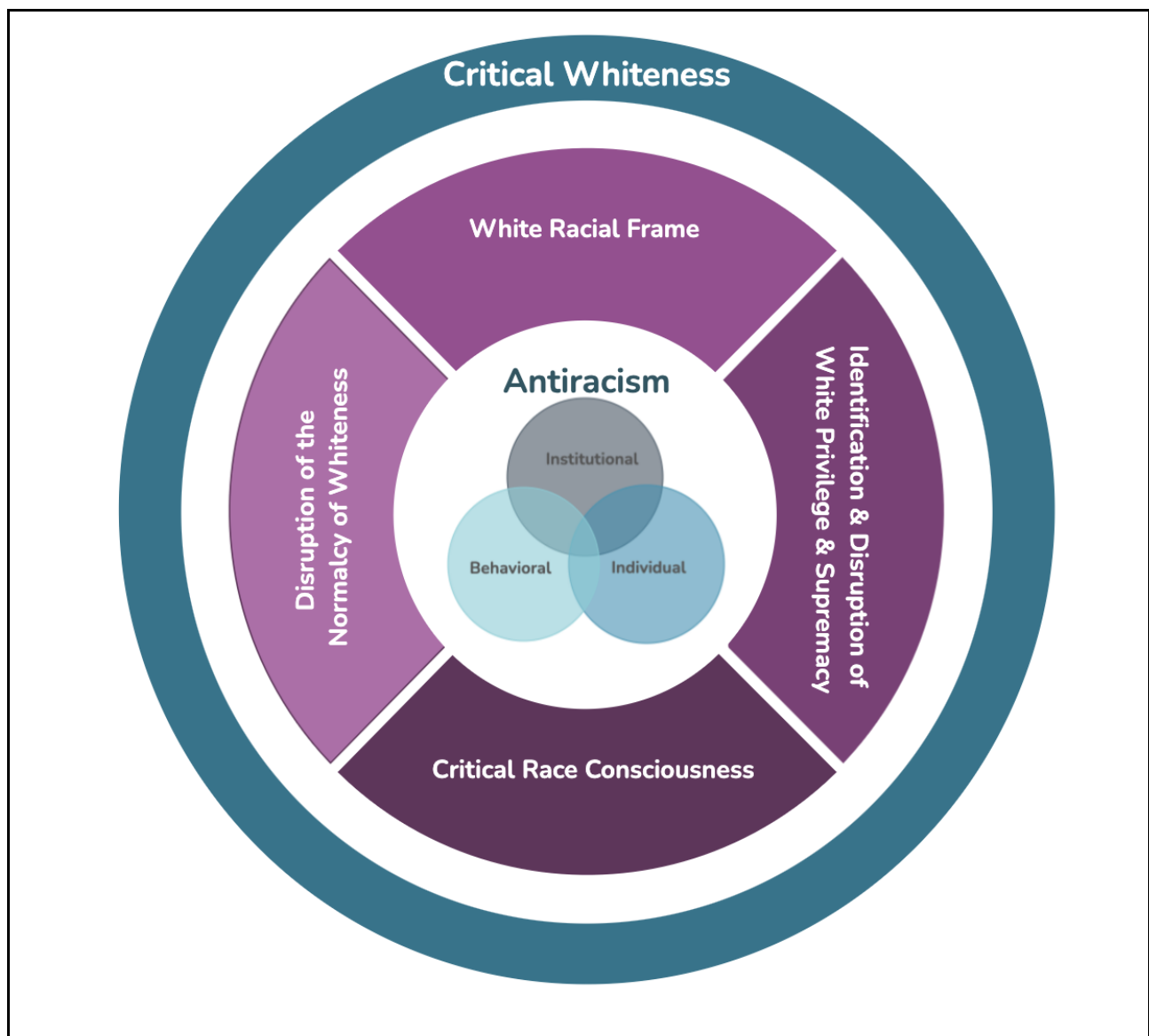
CHAPTER 4

Methodology

Research Questions

This study seeks to address four interrelated research questions, all designed to investigate the beliefs, practices, and decision-making of white educators.

1. How, if at all, are teachers adopting antiracist attitudes and practices?

2. How, if at all, are the principals and teachers wrestling with whiteness as they seek to adopt antiracist practices?

3. To what degree, if any, do teachers identify the practices of white principals committed to antiracism as an influence on their own antiracist attitudes and practices?

4. What are the factors that influence whether and how teachers adopt such attitudes and practices?

This section describes the elements of the research design in relation to those questions and outlines the method used to collect data and inform the study.

Research Methodology

I draw on critical methodologies for this case study. Critical theory is both a mindset and actions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that center on the importance of challenging "societal power inequities" (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). It highlights interpersonal relationships between the researcher and the participants, including positionality. In critical theory research "questions are asked about who has power, how it's negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 61). I investigate behaviors and practices related to equity and racism and there are many dynamics of power at play within the bounds of this study: the racial and ethnic makeup of students and staff, the gender of staff, the

staff members' years of experience in the field, and the seniority of the administrators who are leading teachers. Drawing on critical theories was influential in both my data collection and analysis. Reflexivity within the research is another key component of utilizing critical theories (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018). I elaborate on how I reflected on the research process – including my relation to the topic, experience through the process, and positionality within it – later in this chapter. Critical theory is instrumental for this study as it "allows researchers and participants to challenge norms that oppress marginalized communities in order to bring about change" (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018, p. 11).

Research Design

I utilized qualitative research methods to conduct a multi-site case study. This approach is appropriate given the research questions posed because it allowed the opportunity to investigate and examine how teachers are adopting antiracist attitudes and practices and what factors, including principal leadership, may be influential, as well as how principals and teachers may engage in reflexivity as it pertains to their white racial identity.

My cases are three schools and their associated data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe a case study's ability to provide an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit" (pp. 232-233). I was able to garner the larger picture of principals' practices and teachers' perspectives through this multi-site case study model which I could analyze within and between sites. My methods of data collection included six components: (1) teacher questionnaire; (2) formal semi-structured interviews; (3) principal and teacher focus groups; (4) observations (e.g., meetings and PD sessions); (5) practitioners' reflexive journaling; and (6) document analysis (e.g., student enrollment data, school improvement plan, and curricular materials). These methods permitted an in-depth understanding of each case (Creswell, 2013).

The various semi-structured interviews and focus groups best shed light on teachers'

experiences, understandings, and practices and allowed me to gain rich, detailed data.

Sample Selection

There were several factors that impacted the sample selection that were either practical or

theoretical in nature. After obtaining approval from the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Internal Review Board (IRB), identifying a school district, and receiving approval from the

district, I worked with the district-level representative to identify principals for my study. This

identification would further inform the sites for my study. The district's assistant superintendent

provided a recommended list of principals to contact based on the eligibility requirements (see

Appendix A). They also shared that one principal was in the last year participating in another

study and was not available. At that time there were eight PreK and elementary principals, of

which four were white and three were principals of color. Of these, six were female, and two

were male. Out of the middle and high school leaders, two of three were white including one

interim leader. Ultimately, I selected two elementary and PreK school sites. In terms of practical

factors, there was only one eligible leader between the middle and high school as one was in an

interim position and thus, would not meet the eligibility requirements. Theoretically, I was

interested in the ways in which antiracist leadership and teaching were being adopted and how

race was discussed with younger students. The majority of existing research investigates either

high school educators (including Brooks et al., 2007; Dantley & Green, 2013; Hooks &

Miskovic, 2010; Irby & Clark, 2018; Philips, 2011; Swanson & Welton, 2018) or both

elementary and high school educators (including Casey & McManimon, 2018; McMahon, 2007;

Solomon, 2002; Theoharis, 2010; and Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Accordingly, this study

advances the field's understanding in the elementary school context.

This identification immediately narrowed my eligible participants to the four white elementary and PreK principals. I was not looking for a "model" principal or school or a principal implementing a specific model of antiracist leadership. Rather, my eligibility requirements communicated a search for principals who are committed and working to further antiracist education in their schools. The requirements entailed several criteria: 1) a white identifying principal; 2) minimum of two years in the position or as a principal; 3) identifies as committed to antiracist leadership; 4) have attended or participated in a training on antiracist leadership, and 5) leads a school with a diverse student racial demographics (not described as predominantly white). I was interested in working with a white principal as this demographic reflects the 78% majority-white principal population of public schools, according to the most recent national data collection (NCES, The Condition of Education Report, 2020). I focused on a white principal to pay specific attention to both the role whiteness plays in this racial imbalance between educational leaders and students nationally and how, if at all, white educators are addressing antiracism even if they work in a school with a predominantly white student population. Additionally, it is imperative that white educators take up issues concerning race and inequities, as these cannot be the burden of educators of color alone.

I contacted principals by email to coordinate initial meetings at which we could discuss the study and assess their interest in participation. At this time, I included an initial screener (Appendix B) for principals to confirm their eligibility as described above. After each principal indicated interest in the study, we met online to discuss the aims of the study, what participation would entail, and to provide a space for questions. After principals confirmed interest in participating and gave consent, I joined a staff meeting at each site to share the aims and objectives of the study with the teaching staff. Joining the whole staff meetings allowed me to

initiate transparency and begin building trust and relationships with the teachers. This was especially important given that the study would take place entirely on a virtual format. At the conclusion of each staff meeting, I sent an electronic questionnaire to all teachers and instructional leaders (Appendix D).

The questionnaire was used to identify teacher participants. This questionnaire was used to collect demographic information (e.g., racial and gender identity), and to assess their confidence in their ability to teach antiracism as well as assessing their commitment to antiracism. It was developed based on the implementation and success of a similar questionnaire used in a pilot study conducted in 2019, which was used at that time to obtain baseline data on teachers' familiarity with microaggressions and to identify study participants. Further details of the questionnaire content will be discussed later in this chapter.

The options for participation for teachers and other instructional leaders were: 1) an interview and focus group or 2) an interview only. Providing an option for teachers and instructional leaders allowed for an increased number of participants. Initially, all but one participant chose to participate in both an interview and focus group.

School and Community Context

This study took place within a PreK-12 suburban school district including a total of 3 school sites: two K-4 elementary schools and one PreK school. Western Springs School District (WSSD) sits adjacent to a mid-size city in the Midwest. The district serves just over 7,000 students, 31% of whom are students of color (see Table 1), and where both leaders and teachers are overwhelmingly white (see Table 3).

The idea of "suburban" is stereotyped as white, middle-class, and desirable (Lewis-McCoy, 2016). Yet, in the last 20+ years, people of color have been moving into suburban areas

and have diversified historically white areas. With this increase comes a larger responsibility for schools to educate students of color. This demographic change can present significant challenges to schools (Evans, 2007). In the last 10+ years, studies have found that suburban districts overwhelmingly rely on race-neutral and color-evasive practices and policies that have failed to respond to the increasingly racial diversity of the districts (Diamond & Lewis, 2016; Evans, 2007; and Welton et al., 2015).

School Sites

At Lakeside and Sandburg, the two participating elementary schools, the percentage of students of color is notably higher than that of the district as a whole (see Table 1 below). However, between the two schools, the racial makeup of students is different. While white students only make up 49% of the student enrollment at Lakeside, Asian students make up 40% of the population. There is a more distributed and diverse racial student population at Sandburg. Lakeside and Sandburg are two of three elementary schools in WSSD (out of a total of seven) with more racially diverse student populations. The PreK program, the third study site, can be considered predominantly white with 70% white enrollment. This is more reflective of the overall district student enrollment.

Table 1

District and School Enrollment Data for 2020-2021

	Western Springs School District	Lakeside	Sandburg	PreK
2020-2021 Enrollment	7270	392	338	305
Asian	894 (11%)	145 (40%)	25 (7%)	47 (14%)
Latinx	676 (9$)	10 (3%)	40 (12%)	26 (9%)
2 or More Races	408 (5%)	25 (7%)	20 (6%)	8 (4%)
Black	358 (5%)	2 (1%)	45 (13%)	8 (3%)
White	4905 (69%)	178 (49%)	208 (62%)	8 (3%)
American Indian	22 (<1%)	2 (<1%)	0 (<1%)	2 (1%)
Nat. Haw./Pac. Islander	5 (<1%)	0 (<1%)	0 (<1%)	1 (<1%)

Description of Participants

Teacher and other school leader participants included a total of 21 individuals: 19 teachers and two school leaders (e.g., instructional coaches) between the three sites (see Table 4). Of the 21 participants, 20 identify as female and one as male. All participants identified as white. This is reflective of all three sites' staff demographics as they are predominately white and female. There were only two teacher participants at the PreK site. It was harder to recruit teacher participants at this site. This could have been due to the grade level of the students, the smaller pool of potential teacher participants, or the overall interest in or commitment to antiracist and equity-centered education. The site and its two participants are included in the study but are referenced less often both due to the smaller number of participants and due to the difference in

grade level. Pseudonyms are used for all participants' names to protect their confidentiality.

Table 2 provides pseudonyms for all participants at each site.

Table 2

Participant Pseudonyms

Lakeside		Sandburg		PreK	
Principal	Anna	Principal	Riley[a]	Principal	Kathy
GET	Blair[a]	SST L	Mary[a]	PreK T	Kaley
Int T	Jocelyn	GET	Courtney[a]	PreK T	Krista
SST	Becca[a]	Int T	Marsha[a]		
SPED	Jamie	GET	Meredith[a]		
SST	Jenna[a]	GET	Marissa[a]		
Int T	Justine	GET	Mark		
GET	Jackie[a]	Int T	Cecilia		
GET	Brooke[a]	SST	Caroline[a]		
Inst L	Joanna				
SET	Jill[a]				

Note. GET = General Education Teacher; Int T = Intervention Teacher; SST = Student Support Team; SPED = Special Education Teacher; Inst L = Instructional Leader; SST L = Student Support Team Leader; PreK T = PreK Teacher

[a] Participant was on their respective school's equity team.

In addition to the three principals, the majority of participants were classroom teachers (nine) and others were special education teachers, interventionists, and members of the schools' student support teams (e.g., school psychologist or social worker). Of the 19 teacher and other school leader participants at Lakeside and Sandburg, 12 were on their school's equity team. The PreK site did not have a comparable team. Having individuals on the equity team participate in

the study is not surprising, as it's reasonable to assume that individuals who volunteer or agree to be on a school's equity team would also be likely to express interest in a study on equity and antiracism.

Both Lakeside and Sandburg have formal equity teams that meet regularly and were observed throughout the course of the study. Each school calls its team a different name (e.g., referring to social justice, climate and culture, or restorative justice in the name). For the purposes of maintaining confidentiality, I am using "equity team" as a pseudonym to represent both teams. These teams consist of teachers and instructional leaders as well as the principal at Sandburg. All members of the equity team at Lakeside were full participants in interviews (and some in a focus group). This was true for nearly all equity team members at Sandburg. The members of the team at Lakeside were all white females and either teachers or student support staff (e.g., social workers or interventionists). The team at Sandburg consisted of all females, of whom one was a staff member of color, and all were either general education or special education teachers. Lastly, Table 5 below includes the principals' qualifications and experiences.

Nearly all participants grew up in central Midwest states (e.g., Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin). Of these Midwest states, over half of participants (15) grew up in the state they now teach in, where the study took place. Most participants described the places they grew up as rural areas or small towns that were predominantly white spaces. 14 participants also attended universities in their state's public system.

Table 3

School Staff Demographics for 2020-2021

	Lakeside Staff	Sandburg Staff	PreK Staff
Total Staff	54	70	NA[c]
Female	46 (85%)	63 (90%)	
Male	8 (15%)	7 (10%)	
Non-Binary	N/A[a]	N/A[a]	
White	47 (87%)	64 (93%)	
Black	1 (2%)	2 (3%)	
Latino	2 (4%)	3 (4%)	
2 or more races	N/A[b]	N/A[b]	
Asian/Pacific Islander	4 (7%)	0 (0%)	

[a]District does not offer non-binary as a gender choice. [b]District does not offer 2 or more races as a choice for racial identity. [c]District does not have PreK staff data.

Table 4

Teacher and Instructional Leader Participant Data

	Lakeside	Sandburg	PreK
Participant Demographics			
Other School Leaders	1	1	0
Teachers	9	8	2
Female	10 (100%)	8 (89%)	1 (100%)
Male	0 (0%)	1 (11%)	0 (0%)
Non-Binary	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
White	10 (100%)	9 (100%)	2 (100%)
Black	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Latino	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Asian	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2 or more races	0 (0%)	0 (0%)[a]	0 (0%)
American Indian	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Nat. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

	Lakeside	Sandburg	PreK
Participants' Current Position			
General Education	3	4	2
Special Education	2	1	0
Student Support[b]	4	3	0
Instructional Leader	1	0	0
Average Years at Current School	1 year[c]	3-5 years	4 years
Average Number of Years in Education	5-6 years	11-15 years	7 years

[a]One teacher on Sandburg's Equity Team identifies as biracial. She only participated in meeting observations and thus is not included here as a full participant. [b]Student Support includes interventionists, school social workers, and psychologists. [c]Lakeside was in its first year of operation and therefore it was every staff member's first year at the school.

Table 5

Principal Qualifications and Experience

	Highest Degree(s) Earned	Years as Principal	Previous Position	Total Years in Education
Anna (Lakeside)	Masters in Ed Leadership	2	Instructional Coach	16
Riley (Sandburg)	Masters in Social Work Masters in Ed Leadership	5	Director of Student Support Services	19
Kathy (PreK)	Masters in Ed Leadership Reading Specialist Masters	3	Curriculum Coordinator	21

[a]Kathy was also the district Curriculum Director and had been for a total of 10 years.

Data Collection

Data collection began in March 2021 for all participants and concluded before the end of the school year in May 2021 for teachers and in early June for principals, just after the end of the school year. Data collection included a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations, and a document review (Table 6). Observations included staff meetings (including equity teams and leadership teams) and PDs that were specific to antiracism and equity. The entirety of this study was conducted virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews and observations were held on Zoom and all other communication was done via email or virtual document sharing. While this posed various limitations as discussed later, there were also new experiences and discoveries from conducting an entire qualitative study virtually.

Table 6

Phases of Data Collection

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Data Collection Methods	Teacher Questionnaire	Teacher Interviews (Part 1 of 2)	Teacher Interviews (Part 2 of 2)	Teacher Focus Groups	Principal Focus Group
		Principal Interviews (Part 1 of 3)	Principal Interviews (Part 2 of 3)		Principal Interviews (Part 3 of 3)
Observation Methods	Meeting Observations				
	Practitioner Reflexive Journaling				
	School and District Level Document Review				

Teacher Questionnaire

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I shared a questionnaire (Appendix D) with teachers and instructional leaders in the format of a Google Form after attending an initial staff meeting at each school site. I sent it three times to each site over a period of time. The questionnaires asked

for general demographic information (e.g., how teachers identify in terms of race and gender) and their educational experience (e.g., how long they have been at their current school). It also prompted them to share their experiences with antiracism and racism at their school, their experience with any professional development devoted to antiracist teaching, and their levels of familiarity and confidence with antiracist teaching. The questionnaire also invited teachers and instructional leaders to provide their own definitions of antiracist teaching. It is important that they were given this opportunity to self-define at the outset rather than being provided a specific definition of the concept, as this initial data provided a baseline for participants' understandings of antiracist education prior to entering the study. Finally, the questionnaire included information on confidentiality protection in the study and encouraged potential participants to share any questions or concerns.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the principals, other school leaders, and teachers. These took place three times for principals to generally reflect on the beginning, middle, and end of the study (see Appendices E-G) and twice for teachers and other school leaders (see Appendices H and I). In addition to the principal at each school, I was inclusive of all school leaders including student support coordinators and instructional leads as participants. This varied between the school sites due to leadership structures and participants. More recent research in this area recommends that principals cannot drive conversations about race alone (Swanson & Welton, 2018). As such, including additional school leaders in the study helped provide further insight into the role they play. Formal semi-structured interviews lasted around sixty minutes and took place via Zoom according to safety policies for COVID-19. All interviews and observations were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews solicited information about participants' background (e.g., K-12 experience), experience with PD concerning antiracist education, and their perspectives, attitudes, and conceptual knowledge around antiracism. Second interviews were developed in response to findings from the first round of interviews with all participants in addition to the inclusion of individualized follow-up questions.

Table 7

Interviews Conducted by School and Position

	Lakeside	PreK	Sandburg	Total Interviews by Position
Principal	Anna (3)	Kathy (3)	Riley (3)	9 Principal
Other School Leader(s)	Joanna (2)	N/A	Mary (2)	4 Other School Leader
Classroom Teacher(s)[a]	Jill (2) Blair (2) Jamie (2) Justine (2) Jackie (2) Brooke (2)	Kaley (2) Krista (2)	Courtney (2) Marsha (2) Meredith (2) Marissa (2) Mark (1) Cecilia (1)	26 Classroom Teacher
Student Support Team[b]	Jocelyn (2) Becca (2) Jenna (2)	N/A	AS (1)	7 Student Support Team
Total Interviews by School	23 Interviews	7 Interviews	16 Interviews	46 Total

[a]Classroom teachers here includes general and special education teachers. [b]Student Support Team includes counselors, psychologists, interventionists, and other related service providers.

Observations

Throughout the course of the study, I was able to observe multiple equity team meetings at both Sandburg and Lakeside, all of which were held online (see Appendix J). This was in addition to leadership team meetings at Lakeside and one district-level PD. This PD session was the only scheduled district PD occurring for the duration of the study. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the members of the equity teams were participating in the study. This was true for five of seven team members at Sandburg and five of six team members at Lakeside. Two participants at Lakeside, Jill, and Becca, were on both the Equity Team and leadership team. Nine educators were observed as members of either equity or leadership teams but were not participating in interviews or focus groups. They gave consent for observations accordingly.

Focus Groups

I held four focus groups near the end of data collection. Of the four groups, three were for teachers (two at Lakeside and one at Sandburg) (see Appendix L) and one was for principals (see Appendix K). The focus groups met after the teacher participants had all completed two interviews and the principal focus group took place after principals had completed at least two of their three interviews. The focus groups lasted 60-90 minutes on Zoom. The teacher groups were no more than five participants and the principal group consisted of the three participating principals. Focus group participants were reminded of confidentiality at the start of the group and asked to not discuss the conversation outside of the group. The focus groups consisted of sharing scenarios (from other participants) and asking participants whether those situations resonated with them and how they would react. Participants were also asked questions related to initial findings.

Reflective Journaling

Participants also had the opportunity to engage in reflective journaling throughout the study. They had the option to write journals on paper or electronically (e.g., Google docs) to be shared for the study. Online journals were shared on participants' personal email accounts to increase confidentiality and security in a space detached from their district network. This was done to encourage trust and safety for this practice.

Participants' journals included prompts for racial autobiography type reflection (e.g., "what are the situations and circumstances in which you believe yourself to be most racially aware?"), general reflection questions pertaining to race (e.g., "am I comfortable talking about race? What am I more/less comfortable about?"), as well as open free-write space (see Appendix M). Reflection was incorporated as a method both for collecting data and as professional development for principals and teachers (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009; Milner, 2010; Zimmerman, 2011). Journaling throughout the study can provide participants space for exploring racial beliefs and identity (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009); enhance and crystallize learning for principals (Zimmerman, 2011); and can further educators' development as reflective practitioners (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Zimmerman, 2011).

Document Review

I reviewed both district- and school-level documents that were relevant to the study. Relevant documents included data on student demographics, school improvement plans, mission and/or vision statements, materials for professional development, the schools' websites and Facebook pages, staff created materials (e.g., lesson plans and resources), and other texts teachers may come into contact with (e.g., handouts, notes to caregivers, meeting agendas, or anything distributed during the study's duration). Documents were obtained either from the

school or WSSD's website, as requested from the district or school as it pertained to the study (e.g., demographic information or strategy plans), or were shared by a participant voluntarily after a document was referenced in conversation (e.g., lesson materials or a district document). As time went on and I observed more meetings, participants voluntarily emailed documents and shared them on Google Drive as they believed them to be relevant to the study.

Data Analysis

My data analysis occurred throughout and upon completion of data collection as an iterative and ongoing process. This ongoing analysis permitted me to conduct member checks (Lewis, 2013) and provided time and space to pursue additional data sources. I used the constant comparative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) because of my different data sources (e.g., interviews and observations). This method allowed me to return to gain additional and different data, identify similarities and differences, and assign the data temporary names. Ultimately, this allowed for the identification of patterns. I took multiple passes at my data, revisiting with an eye to my initial themes.

As I describe below, I conducted three rounds of data analysis, each consisting of layers of in vivo and categorical coding. My three-stop coding process within the three rounds of analysis was an iterative process to turn my data into categories (Creswell, 2013). First, I used open coding, which involved low-level, or in vivo, coding. This included shorter codes that were primarily exact language from the data and were 2-5 words on average. Second, I identified initial themes and categories. This second level of coding included organizing lower-level coding into categories largely based on the conceptual frameworks of antiracism and critical whiteness using phrases and supporting paragraph summaries (e.g., white racial frame). These categories entailed grouping data with similar dimensions and the assignment of tentative names (Merriam

& Tisdell, 2015). Lastly, I used thematic coding as I identified and arranged patterns in the data (Creswell, 2013). This higher-level coding included inferences from the data confirmed by lower-level codes. This method of data analysis is useful for case studies.

These were the steps taken for each piece of data:

1. Listened to audio (of interviews, focus groups, or observations) and made additional memos while cleaning and editing transcription;

2. Read the entire transcript (interview, focus group, or observation);

3. Read the transcript again, identifying verbatim two-five word phrases to code statements;

4. Compiled verbatim codes into sub-categories (in Microsoft Excel document);

5. Compiled sub-categories into groups called categories or themes;

6. Skimmed the transcript again to attach sub-categories/categories/theme labels to in vivo codes.

This process was repeated for all interviews, focus groups, and observation transcripts. The subcategories and categories were later merged for analysis based on sites and roles as described below.

While listening to the interviews, focus groups, and observations while cleaning the transcription, I added a second part to my memo for each data collection. This second pass at the audio provided an opportunity to make high-level observations before starting the coding process. I refer to this as "listening analysis." This additional *listening* of the interview, observation, or focus group permits a different type of analysis than what can be obtained solely by reading the transcript multiple times, as I was able to pick up on the nuances of participants'

pauses, emphases, or other components of verbalizations that can only be gleaned through listening analysis.

Analytic notes permitted subgroups and codes for categories to surface. At this stage of data analysis, I employed my conceptual framework, antiracism coupled with critical whiteness, to drive my coding scheme. This started with looking at how principals and teachers are, or are not, wrestling with whiteness. Coding for antiracism and critical whiteness included coding for instances where antiracist behavior manifested such as a recognition of white racial dominance, opposing or dismantling that dominance, and other ways individuals take action against the existing system of white racism. Coding for critical whiteness also included instances of critical race consciousness and the white racial frame. Similarly, coding for ways antiracism is being taken up will include instances of analyzing, questioning, and dismantling existing power relations and inequitable systems.

The analysis following the completion of assigning initial codes consisted of three rounds of analysis (see Figure 3). I examined themes within and across groups (e.g., sites and roles) and distinguish this as between and within group analysis. In the first round, I looked at data between educators' roles: principals and other participants (e.g., teachers, student support staff, and instructional leaders). This process included grouping participants by role joining across sites. Second, I separated data by roles and looked between the three sites. Lastly, I explored between sites including all participants. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Rounds of Data Analysis
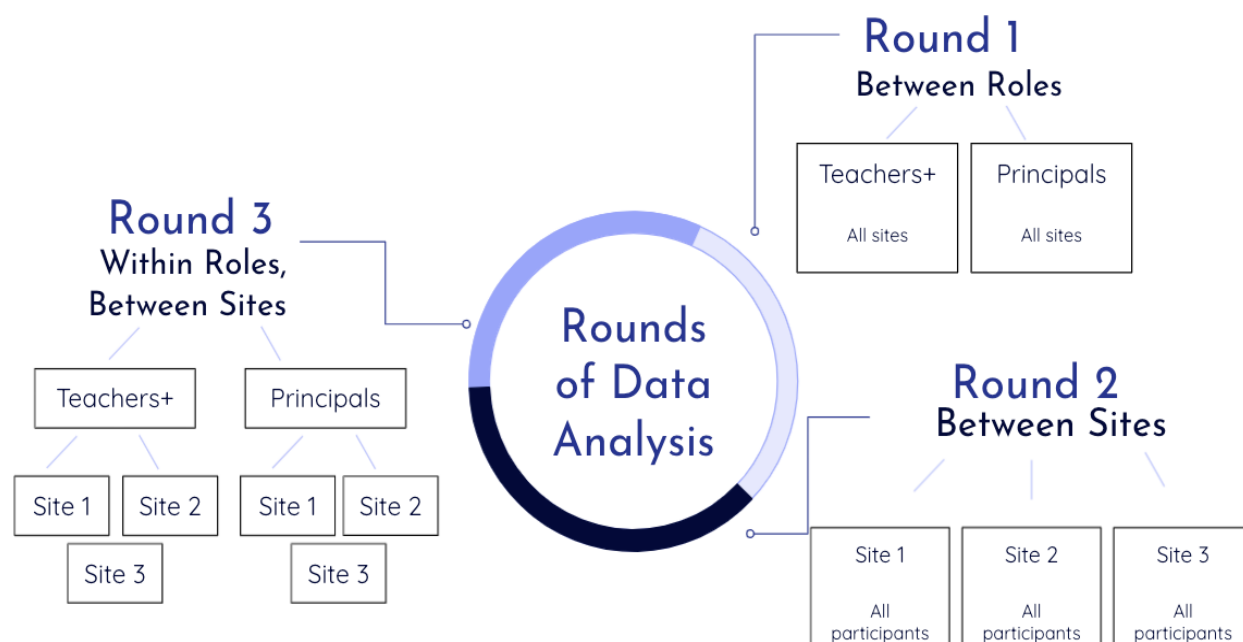
After each round of analysis either between sites or roles, I revisited my codebooks to see if new categories or themes surfaced.

Both my data collection and data analysis must be "considered in the light of racial power relations" (Chadderton, 2012, p. 376). Between analyzing the main themes and returning to the data collected, I was conscious of my biases and preexisting notions of antiracist education and leadership, as well as my own antiracism journey as a white woman. This step in my data analysis included asking questions such as, "what might [I] be projecting onto the data based on [my] own beliefs and life experience? How does [my] 'positionality or 'social location' affect what [I] see? How [am I] guarding against [my] biases?" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 208). Chadderton (2012) described how during data collection the diary can allow one "to engage in

the ongoing data analysis, which fed into the data generation and help(ed) develop the theoretical and methodological framework" (p. 367).

I also utilized analytical coding for my interpretation and reflection of the data analysis. This entailed noting my reactions while reading and rereading transcripts. For instances, if I made note that an interview answer was "interesting" I would note it and come back to it and ask, "*why* am I interested in it?" The answers to these questions became categories for my analytical coding.

Throughout this process I referenced both my detailed field log and personal journal. Chadderton (2012) describes how the use of this practice can provide a space to reflect on the "shifting understanding of processes of racial positioning" (p. 367), which allows for the researcher to better understand their role in the study. My personal journal continues to be used for self-monitoring and evaluation for subjectivity and bias in addition to my personal reflection and praxis on antiracist work. I elaborate further not only on my positionality and relation to the topic in an upcoming section titled as such, but also describe some of the reflexivity I engaged in as a white researcher during this study.

Validity & Reliability

I used triangulation, member checks, and rich descriptions to enhance the validity and reliability of my findings. Triangulating my multiple data sources and data collection methods allowed me to confirm my findings. While using multiple data sources it was critical that I analyze the various sources' interpretations and be cautious of what value I assign to sources. After conducting interviews, I used member checks by returning to participants to confirm the plausibility of my interpretation or gain further clarity. Given that I was the sole researcher analyzing and interpreting the data, asking participants to confirm my findings decreased the

subjectivity in this interpretive process. As described in the limitations section, it proved to be challenging due to the competing demands for teachers' time during the busy end of the school year. However, I was able to identify critical informants to participate in member checking. Participants responded with responses to my shared excerpts and questions via email as well as requesting an additional conversation on Zoom. Utilizing member checks allowed me to gain feedback on my interpretation and gain additional validity. Throughout the study, I was able to ask participants clarifying questions either in second interviews or focus groups to confirm my understanding and give them an opportunity to confirm or elaborate on what was previously shared. I utilized some of the focus group time to share selected initial findings and ask how they resonated with them. I also used summaries of anonymous excerpts from other participants' interviews (e.g., scenarios) to ask focus group participants to respond. Utilizing the focus groups in this way provided another opportunity to confirm my findings and elucidate further insights.

I also had trusted colleagues read transcripts (with pseudonyms only) to debrief and cross-reference codes I was developing. Later during my analysis, I discussed my findings with these colleagues to seek feedback, check any biases, and enhance my analysis.

Providing thick and rich descriptions of my observations and interviews provided space for me to "be able to determine the extent to which [my] situations match the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). Conducting a thorough document review further bolstered the ability to generate rich descriptions and provide context for the study. This is increasingly important given the unique circumstances of the context of the study concerning the two pandemics taking place. I will describe this context in great detail in Chapter 5.

Ethical Considerations

Given that this study took place entirely online (via Zoom), it was paramount that I gained the trust of the educators. Gaining this trust started from the beginning when I was able to have (virtual) facetime as I joined a staff meeting. I did this at each site to share about the study and provide a space to answer initial questions. This helped to put a face to the study before sharing the questionnaire even when there were physical limitations.

To ensure confidentiality, I use pseudonyms for both the district, school, participants' names, and sometimes position titles with the exception of principals. While I do use pseudonyms for all participants, there will also be times I do not include a respondent's name purposely to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the source. See Table 2 for a listing of all pseudonyms for participants at each site. Given that nearly all participants identify as female and provided their preferred pronouns like she/hers, I follow those preferences and use she/hers accordingly.

I also make modifications to team names (e.g., equity team and leadership team) and student service providers (e.g., counselors and interventionists). Confidentiality was extended to teacher focus groups to the greatest extent possible as teacher participants were asked to maintain confidentiality for the group discussion. These components of confidentiality were shared with participants at the start and throughout the study. Participants were also asked if they would like to choose their pseudonyms and were asked to provide feedback on modified service provider titles outside of classroom teachers (e.g., social workers and interventionists). Engaging participants in the process was done intentionally to further build trust and increase their confidence in confidentiality through this type of collaboration.

It was essential that I work with WSSD representatives and principals to identify benefits for participants. This is an ongoing process. This collaboration allows the participants, both principals, and teachers, to have confidence in the research *and* results. Communicating the rationale for the study and gaining participant buy-in and trust in the authenticity of the study started this process. Transparency surrounding the rationale and aim of the study increases trust and starts the relationship between the participants and researcher. I set out to be transparent and build trust with teachers at the first staff meeting while introducing the study to all staff. At the same time that I shared the study's purpose and what it entailed, I shared what it *was not* - it was not an equity audit, something they may be familiar with and with which they could have easily associated the study. This inclusion was one effort to decrease the potential evaluative nature of the study.

In the initial interviews, I started with introductory and contextual information. I shared with teachers that the aim of the study is to investigate antiracist practices and related PD opportunities at their schools. To decrease the evaluative nature of the study, I did not directly name the principals' practices as an aim of the study but did include PD and other learning or training opportunities. These questions were later addressed in teacher interview questions. At the same time, I did ask questions concerning development and learning, which did entail partially masking the second research question interested in what role specifically a white principal has in shaping teachers' practices.

While the primary goal is for me, as the researcher, to gain information about antiracism and education, I am still cognizant of what emotions may be provoked. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) acknowledge that these ethical issues can be situational *and* relational. They reference Tracy (2013) who argues that "a relational ethic means being aware of one's own role and

impact on relationships and treating participants as whole people rather than just subjects from which to wrench a good story" (Tracy, 2013, p. 245). It is possible there were instances when talking to educators about the way they think about, or talk about, these issues may have changed their responses as a result of my presence. Kemmis and colleagues (2014) explain that in critical research, change is ongoing. A component of ongoing critical research is the actual act of dialoguing about issues and experiences related to race, gender, class, or sexual orientation. Just by talking about these issues, individuals can change their consciousness about these topics (Kemmis et al., 2014). Because of these dynamics, it is important I recognized and was aware of these power relations throughout the course of the study (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012) and was conscious to observe any changes in the way educators were talking about race and education.

Positionality & Relation to the Topic

My identity is central to how I engage in the entirety of this research process. Reflexivity is imperative to qualitative research approaches (Creswell, 2013). I am not a neutral participant in this study. I am a white, cisgender woman who identifies as a growing antiracist educator. I have experience working as a special educator and administrator in public K-12 metropolitan schools, traditional public and charter, in major U.S. cities. During my time as a teacher and administrator, I participated in professional developments concerning equity, social justice, and antiracism. I participated both as an attendee and as a facilitator. I have developed and led such development opportunities and initiatives concerning equity. Doing so has shaped and contributed to the development of my line of inquiry, research questions, research design, and data analysis. These experiences also influence my biases and preexisting notions of what antiracist education and leadership should or could look like – and shouldn't look like – even as this is evolving.

As the researcher, I am the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis while conducting qualitative research. This has both advantages and shortcomings. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend, it is important that

> rather than trying to eliminate these biases or 'subjectivities,' it is important to identify them and monitor them in relation to the theoretical framework and in light of [my]...own interests, to make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (p.16).

My reflexivity does not end with awareness of my identity and its influence on my study, but as Probst and Berenson (2014) describe, reflexivity for critical researchers "is both a state of mind and a set of actions." (p. 184) Engaging in ongoing reflection on my identity throughout the study was essential to the process both in my interactions with participants and interaction with my analysis.

I am cognizant of the insider status I have as a previous educator, a *female* educator in the gender majority for an elementary setting, and as someone who identifies as having a commitment to antiracist education. I also acknowledge the dominant role I have as an outside researcher from a large university. These components of my identity can influence participants' perceptions, levels of engagement, and responses. My insider status as a white female potentially played a role when talking to participants, also white and majority female, about race. I considered this relationship when participants described "safe spaces" for them to talk about race. While none specifically named talking with other white people, they described peers and colleagues, while simultaneously describing nearly all of their peers and colleagues as white. One participant explicitly made this consideration herself when she named the interviews and focus groups "safe spaces." It is possible other participants also considered their interviews or focus groups to be "safe spaces" in which they could reflect and share.

From the inception of the study, I have been intentionally contemplative on the nature of both issues of power and representation associated with my identity as a white female researcher investigating questions concerning whiteness and antiracism. Chadderton (2012) argues, "as racial inequality remains such an important issue in education, we need to conduct research which in some way explicitly acknowledges the ways in which we are all constructed by racial structures, and also aims to destabilize these structures" (p. 387). Reflexive antiracism is essential to my researcher status as someone who strives to be an antiracist (Kowal et al., 2013, p. 325). To increase my reflection and self-evaluation on my role as a white researcher examining the practices of white educators, I reference the following tenets of reflexive antiracism from Kowal and colleagues (2013): take a reflexive stance towards my and others' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors; avoid essentializing people of color as "good" and whites as "bad"; accept my whiteness and recognize how I benefit it without being overwhelmed with anxiety and guilt, and avoid the danger of complacency (pp. 324-325). Throughout the study, I was actively examining and reflecting on my racial identity and furthering my own reframing of my understanding of race. I captured my reflections, noticings, and questions in my field notes and journal. While uncovering my findings I made note of any that surprised me or were unexpected and reflected on *why* I may have that reaction. This reflection entailed asking questions such as whether my reaction was in relation to a personal bias? Picower (2021), who also identifies as a white researcher, explains this process of continuously grappling with her whiteness: "monitoring my own reactions, my interactions, who I gravitate toward and why, how I engage with others, when to speak up when to lean back, when to say yes, and when to say no, and so on" (p. 16). Moreover, it is imperative I am actively cognizant of and reflective of my social positioning. My researcher status does not make me "raceless" or removed from power

structures. I am a white woman investigating the practices of white principals concerning commitments to antiracism, and these identities and dynamics will be ever-present in my study.

It is critical for white people to do antiracist work. This is one reason why this study is strongly situated in whiteness. Social structures influence research interactions including interviews, observations, and focus groups just as they influence interactions outside of research (Chadderton, 2012). My findings will include implications for white principals and teachers specifically. DiAngelo (2018), a white woman, acknowledges the identity politics in work that centers white people when the work concerns antiracism and whiteness. Her acknowledgment of this dilemma holds true for my work here. She writes,

> I am yet again centering white people and the white voice. I have not found a way around this dilemma, for as an insider I can speak to the white experience in ways that may be harder to deny. So, though I am centering the white voice, I am also using my insider status to challenge racism. To not use my position this way is to uphold racism, and that is unacceptable; it is a 'both/and' that I must live with. (pp.xiv-xv)

Due to the white participants, white researcher, and specific investigation of white educators taking up antiracist practices, this study centers whiteness. This centering is done because of the current reality of the whiteness of the principal population and teaching force in the U.S. However, it cannot stand alone as the only interrogation of antiracist work in education. It is for these reasons that I "keep my gaze on Whiteness" (Picower, 2021, p. 19) as a white person doing this work.

In acknowledgment of the dominant and non-dominant roles at play, both in relation to myself and the staff and in relation to the students and community, I adhere to the tenet of critical research "to do research *with* people, not *on* people" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 64). Being transparent around my inquiry and engaging and involving the principals and teachers in reflective conversations is crucial to achieving a more interactive approach. This approach

started from the commencement of the study when I aimed to clearly describe the study as an inquiry for understanding and not as an audit or inquiry to seek problems. Many participants shared they found the interviews and focus groups to be reflective times for them. Their unsolicited reflections concerning their experience are elaborated on further in Chapter 6.

This study was not evaluative and does not serve to be an accolade or indictment of any school leader or teacher. As a former educator, I am empathetic of the challenges school leaders and teachers face daily. However, I strongly believe and argue for the urgent need to address the racial inequities evidenced in our schools.

CHAPTER 5

Context of the Study: Dueling Pandemics

Dueling Pandemics

The start of the 2020-2021 school year brought an unprecedented time of reckoning that required school leaders to act amidst a multi-layered crisis: a global pandemic whose impacts were broad, but which affected low-income people of color disproportionately; a wave of unarmed Black Americans killed by non-Black civilians and police officers (such as the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and Rayshard Brooks); and what became known as the *racism pandemic* (Mills, 2020).

While the COVID-19 pandemic started to make headlines in March 2020, we also saw the rise of a second pandemic involving increasing national attention to (anti)racism. The year 2020 was marked by anti-black racism as Americans saw how racism persisted in the lives of Black people. This racism pandemic came to national attention with the murder of Black individuals at the hand of police officers and white civilians. Breonna Taylor was murdered by police on March 12, 2020, and protests followed. The protests increased when the public learned of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery by white civilians, which had occurred back on February 23, 2020 – a murder that was not reported until months after the crime. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis, MN. Protests followed across the country and internationally. Scholars and crowd-counting experts confirm it was the largest movement in our country's history. As the start of the school year grew closer, on August 26th, Jacob Blake was shot by police in Kenosha, WI. These are only the names of a few among a long list that continues to grow. The murder of George Floyd and the shooting of Jacob Blake were both caught on video. Some refer to the racism pandemic that came to light that summer as a *racial*

awakening. The events of 2020 highlighted that we are not living in a post-racial society. This brought for some a realization that racism *still* exists. The fact that this racism pandemic took place concurrently with the COVID-19 pandemic made this reckoning all the more powerful for many people. Asian American communities were also targeted by hate crimes (Kwon, 2020). It became impossible to tackle the realities and challenges of COVID-19 without grappling with widespread existing inequities (e.g., in housing, health care), as COVID-19 disproportionately impacted people of color across the country (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Oppel et al., 2020; Perry et al., 2020).

In the middle of these pandemics, we saw multiple ways white people responded as individuals and as organizations. Almost immediately, store bookshelves were cleared of antiracist best-sellers and Black history nonfiction. Jason Reynolds, co-author of *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*,[2] shared

> [I am] grateful that people are working to seek out information to help them better understand what's happening in our country, and I hope it's not a knee-jerk reaction due to shame and guilt and not wanting to be on the outside...it's a wonderful thing to say I'm a New York Times best-seller, but it would be more wonderful to be able to say we live in a world that is a little more anti-racist" (Reynolds quoted in Harris, 2020, para. 7).

White individuals and predominantly white institutions and organizations responded on social media, joined protests, made "equity statements" (and sent related emails), and made organizational name changes (Grundy, 2020). Social media was used to organize, educate, and document events. Educators and educational organizations were amongst those changing the names of schools representing segregationists, Confederates, or previous slave owners (Mitchell, 2020; Pietsche, 2022). Going into the 2020-2021 school year, there was an influx of teacher and

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[2] *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*: *A Remix of the National Book Award-winning Stamped from the Beginning* is co-written by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi.

leader training on equity/inclusivity/antiracism as well as an increase in the number of educators who expressed this was a priority PD topic for them (Chanter, 2020).

On March 11, 2020, I was at a local public school supervising student teachers when communication started to reach teachers about what we would later refer to as COVID-19 mitigation protocols. Little did I know, come July 2020, I would present two versions of the proposal for this dissertation: one to be in-person, if schools permitted, and one to be virtual pending the future of the pandemic. It was the beginning of an evolving, virtual, and critical qualitative study.

At the commencement of this study, school districts were between the end of the 2019-2020 school year – when they had quickly transitioned to online learning in response of the virus – and the start of the 2020-2021 year, which required intensive planning and complex decision-making. Given the uncertainty around how instruction would take place, the question of whether research could begin or continue in districts was not yet on the table over the summer. As I contacted districts in July and August 2020, I received a variety of responses from district representatives concerning research in the upcoming year: districts would not be permitting new research projects; districts would be continuing their application process as usual with no additional information concerning the current circumstances, or they did not have an answer at the time. This limiting scope of potential research sites presented an unplanned limitation. Ultimately, the study was accepted by the district described in the section on the School and Community Context section in Chapter 4.

My data collection began March 1, 2021 and concluded at the beginning of June 2021.[3] This period of data collection coincided with the trial of Derek Chauvin, the white police officer charged in the murder of George Floyd, and his conviction by a jury. During this time, we also witnessed increased rhetoric challenging critical race theory, talking about race in schools, and schools' efforts towards antiracism (Lopez et al., 2021).

It is likely these events and circumstances influenced the answers educators shared in the interviews, meetings, and study materials and how they think about race and (anti)racism both within and outside the context of education. While I asked participants to reflect and share if and how these events may have influenced their thinking and teaching, it is possible their answers may have been performative in some respects given the cultural environment of increased attention to race and (anti)racism both inside and outside of the classroom.

Rise of Anti- "Critical Race Theory"[4] Rhetoric and Policy

Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, there was an increase in organization and involvement by parents in local school boards, both in WSSD and throughout the country, concerning COVID-19 policies and teaching about race in schools (Lopez et al., 2021). While talking about parent backlash, Riley described a private Facebook group that was created by two parents in the district. She read a part of their belief statement concerning teaching race that had been shared with her:

> We believe that modern antiracism efforts which are rooted in critical theory and intersectionality, though well-intended, will cause more harm than good as standards in education are lowered to achieve equity and students are separated and labeled according to their immutable characteristics.

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[3] Teacher interviews concluded in the end of May 2021 and principals concluded in the beginning of June after the school year was over. The study is still ongoing but this dissertation utilizes only data collected during the 2020-2021 school year.

[4] I use quotation marks when describing the anti- "critical race theory" movement to indicate the caricatured catch-all term CRT has become for proponents of banning curriculum and district efforts concerning race, racism, and equity.

This language resonated with teachers who described parent backlash they either experienced or observed concerning conversations and lessons concerning race and the potential termination of advanced learning. Riley explained how the parent organization and pushback they are experiencing at Sandburg and in other places in WSSD is reflective of what is happening across the country:

> There is definitely this like movement across not only the state, I think that the country of people who are saying essentially, or and labeling anything that we do in schools around equity as critical race theory does not frickin true but that's what they're labeling it as, and they're almost saying it's like reverse racism, which is just putrid, but that's when so that's why I think it's going to get worse. Because schools are getting more vocal, and they're, they're saying like, we need to center other voices and we need to show alternate views of history.

Coinciding with the increased parent involvement and pushback was teachers' appeal for the district to communicate their commitments to equity-centered education with the community. This desire was a common sentiment shared across participants. They explained that if the district was to "go on record" with families and the community it could increase transparency, family engagement, and school-level educators' sense of security with related initiatives and practices. Kathy explained why it was essential for the district to communicate with the community about equity work and what CRT is:

> We absolutely have to share it with the community. We have to educate our community. I think we can't keep it a secret because that's when misunderstanding occurs and then if people hear things without an explanation- that's when like, you know, people are out there giving their own definition of critical race theory and their own history behind it. And I think that's an opportunity where we can really engage in conversations with our community...when we don't give an explanation and people create their own, that's when we have the misunderstandings and people get upset or take in the wrong direction and I think it's like when have even more of a responsibility to make sure the community knows what we're doing.

Kathy highlights why there is an increased urgency amongst educators appealing to the district to increase transparency and communication concerning their equity work.

An Impetus or Accelerant for Antiracist and Equity-Centered Work in Schools?

As educators found themselves preparing to start a new school year amidst the increased national attention to race and (anti)racism and still in a global pandemic, we also saw more schools making commitments to antiracist and equity-centered education. Teachers at WSSD described they were at different points in their antiracism journey in 2020 and as they prepared for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Accordingly, the "racial awakening" was an impetus for some, and an accelerant for others.

"It wasn't in my vernacular:" An Impetus for Changes in Approaches to Teaching

Several teacher participants, across all three school sites, described the "events of 2020" as playing a large role in their increased awareness about race and how they approached teaching during the 2020-2021 school year. There was a prominent sense of "everything happening at once" in their responses, referring to the COVID-19 pandemic and the "summer [race-related] events." While one teacher at Sandburg, Courtney, recognized her awareness of equity and antiracism in relation to education, she acknowledged that she had never "taken as big of a step as this year." She joined Sandburg's equity team over that summer. Similarly, a student support team member at Lakeside, Jenna, shared that she "upped my, you know, like learning…when everything was happening…Just watching everything affected me and I was like, I need to learn even more and be more active."

For the teachers who described the increased national attention to race and (anti)racism as an impetus for their awareness, thinking about race and (anti)racism and incorporating this into their teaching were more likely to describe practices associated with an emphasis on culture and difference. They defined antiracist education as getting to know students and their backgrounds; "knowing many students of color have not been afforded opportunities white peers have;"

looking at curricula to assess for biases and racism; and "discussing ways to undo some of those unconscious beliefs our students hold." When teachers talk about "students" there is not always a distinction between all students, white students, or students of color.

Sentiments of Urgency: An Accelerant for Change

It was more common for participants to share a sense of urgency as a result of the increased attention to race. This was true for both teachers and principals, who shared ways that the national dialogue was an accelerant in both the school context and outside of school. As Jackie, a teacher at Lakeside, shared, "everything became more real; [I] knew it before, now [it's] harder to swallow. Leading to more urgency." Educators who described the year's events to be more of an accelerant defined four key characteristics of antiracist education: 1) more learning about discrimination and race; 2) ensures the curriculum is not delivered through a white lens; 3) provides "windows and mirrors" through diverse representation; and 4) tells "our whole history."

However, at the same time, educators expressed difficulty with barriers that interfered with their sense of urgency. There were competing demands due to COVID-19 mitigation policies that paused or halted conversations and initiatives concerning equity and antiracism. A significant challenge was the notion that teachers were teaching online "in homes" and felt more vulnerable to potential disagreement with or pushback from parents with content and conversations concerning race. This shared experience is something I'll discuss further in subsequent chapters.

Lastly, for two teachers the experience was less about the national movement being an impetus or accelerant for them as much as it was a relief or positive encouragement to see their peers and communities taking notice of systemic issues they had previously known about and been working to address. Marsha, an interventionist at Sandburg, explained,

> Certainly the pandemic has highlighted some issues, but they were there before the pandemic so now I think that like there are silver linings to everything and maybe one of the silver linings is that some of the things that were not so obvious are now a bit more obvious…So   that can't hurt.

Similarly, Mary, also at Sandburg, spoke about how people were finally seeing and talking about things she has been working on and thinking about her whole life. Looking for the right words to describe it she shared,

> It felt sort of validating for me, or like validate is not quite the right word…but it's like, *finally* people are going to start paying attention to this and maybe people who haven't, that have been able to choose to ignore all of it and not participate at all are finally going to see why it's so important that we do things differently and we figure out how to educate our kids differently so that we don't recreate the system over and over again, you know…obviously there's been a lot of ugliness and people who aren't willing to look at that, but it's been nice that more people are having their eyes open to it and so I feel like a lot of questions that people are asking now, I get frustrated sometimes because I'm like, seriously, I learned about this literally 26 years ago.

Whether it was the increasing national attention to race and (anti)racism or the dueling pandemics, whether it was "eye-opening" and an impetus for educators or an accelerant for commitments they had already made, the context of this study within the 2020-2021 school year is paramount to consider when interpreting the way the teachers talked about race, antiracist education, and their racial identities. Having lived through the year of "racial awakening" for white Americans, no matter the level of the teachers' individual engagement (e.g., books read, or protests attended), the way participants talk about race may be different than it would have been prior to spring 2020. Along those lines, it is possible they may have engaged in reflection on their racial identity in ways they wouldn't have a year earlier. All these factors are important to keep in mind as they inform and define the context of the study.

Findings

In the following chapters I share the emergent findings about educators' beliefs, practices, and decision-making concerning antiracist education. First, in Chapter 6, I discuss the ways in which educators did, or did not, wrestle with their whiteness. In Chapter 7, I describe how teachers conceptualize antiracist teaching. Next, in Chapter 8, I share teachers' perceptions of antiracist leadership and how they perceive them to influence their own teaching practices. Lastly, in Chapter 9, I discuss other factors that influence and shape educators' adoption of antiracist teaching and leadership.

Chapter 6

"Am I Inherently Racist?": White Educators' Antiracism Journeys

"Leading up to that point, I mean, I have to be honest, and I have to say like, I was one of those educators that probably would have said 'I'm colorblind, like I don't see color. Our kids receive what they need no matter what their skin color is, their religious background, ethnicity…I was one of those teachers that was like, proud to advertise that I don't see color. I think looking back on that, that's also a part of my upbringing, right? Like, we didn't really see color growing up but at the same time, we didn't talk about it." – Justine, teacher at Lakeside

"I'm aware of thoughts that are racist. I'm aware. I mean, I wasn't always, so it's progress." – Marsha, teacher at Sandburg

In this chapter I discuss four components of white educators' engagement, or avoidance, of reflexivity concerning their racial identity. These are elements that surfaced in conversations about their personal identity, understanding of race, educational background, and conversations with colleagues as observed in meetings. In analyzing this reflexivity in conversation with white educators, I focused on educators' 1) critical reflection; 2) antiracism journey; 3) awareness of race; and 4) safe spaces and critical conversations about race. Within these four sections, I elaborate on how educators did, or did not, wrestle with their whiteness as they engage in reflection and conversations concerning race.

Critical Reflection

Educators participating in the study already had some level of race consciousness, as their voluntary participation in conversations about antiracist education communicates a willingness to have conversations about race. The level of educators' awareness of their own racial identity and their ability to discuss issues concerning race varied. Accordingly, it was evident the acknowledgment, or lack thereof, of whiteness influenced the perpetuation of the normalcy of whiteness in practices and policies at their schools. Ten participants explicitly *named whiteness*, in relation to their identity. They mainly did so in the beginning of the first interview when asked

to describe what their upbringing and K-12 experience was like. Among those who omitted this explicit racial self-identification, this omission could have been due to my shared racial identity as a white researcher and resulting insider status. Some educators did recognize their privilege in different contexts but didn't necessarily name *white* privilege. More frequently, educators' explicit acknowledgment of their awareness of their racial identity was mentioned when considering a previous situation involving students of color; discussing the cultural capital and power of white parents; considering what antiracist education means for white students; and discussing the role of white privilege and supremacy in education. For instance, a few educators described themselves as "white educators" in various conversations and reflections, but most left their white racial identity unnamed whether in the context of other white people or people of color. Justine, an interventionist at Lakeside, highlighted the importance of reflecting on one's racial identity as she shared reflective questions she must ask herself:

> Continuing to think about knowing my racial identity, like, how is that going to then help me with my practices in the classroom? How is that going to help me build relationships with my kids of color? How is that going to help me build relationships with the families that I also serve?

Next, educators must work to answer these questions Justine posed. Throughout the chapter, I will highlight where educators did, or did not, explicitly name their whiteness.

Educators' level of critical race consciousness was evident in their reflective self-questioning (e.g., concerning stereotypes and racial narratives); identification and reframing of racist ideologies; and contemplation on their upbringing. I elaborate on these three areas below.

Racial Identity: "Am I Inherently a Racist?"

While grappling with their racial identity and identity as white educators, a few educators also wrestled with the idea of being identified as a racist or not. The notion of this binary for white people came up for both Jackie and Krista (a PreK teacher) when sharing previous

interactions with parents of color at their respective schools. These reflections highlight varying levels of racial consciousness.

To start the 2020-2021 school year, while teaching virtually, Jackie sent a letter to parents and a video of herself "talking about [her] goals as an antiracist educator" while also giving families an opportunity to "opt-out" of related lessons because "it was a heavy topic." Reading the picture book *Something Happened in Our Town*[5] was one of these virtual lessons. The children's book follows the conversations of two families, one Black family, and one white family, concerning the police shooting of a Black man in their town. The book poses an opportunity for children to learn about such traumatic events and injustices as well as identify and counter racial injustices in their own communities and lives. When the lesson was poorly received by a white parent, they called Jackie a racist in front of her class. Immediately, she was concerned about the five or six students of color who were present when the parent made this comment. Jackie explained that the parent found the book's content to be "damaging" and that elementary schools shouldn't be talking about race. As Jackie put it, the white parent has "the colorblind kind of philosophy." She shared that "the audacity" of the parent to call her a racist was "jarring" because "the worst thing you can call a person, a white person, is a racist…[it's] like a knife in the back." While Jackie describes herself to be an antiracist-driven educator, here we see a strong emotional response from a white individual being called a racist and defensive response to what could be a conversation.

In another educator's reflection, we see her grapple with the idea of being inherently racist and how her perspective of race shapes that answer. Krista shared a time when she was

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[5] *Something Happened in Our Town* was written by Ann Hazzard, Marianne Celano, and Marietta Collins.

working with a Black caregiver, and she processed the ways in which her biases and potential

racism might influence their interactions with one another:

> I had this like, 'oh my gosh, how do I- how do I deal with this, you know, sort of thing?'...I suddenly became aware that my experiences were not the same as their experiences, not only just because of life situations but also because of skin color. And I feel like I don't know how to be sensitive to it, I don't know like, can I just be myself? Or am I not- or am I just inherently racist? So that's why it's important to sort of like delve into it and think about it, but it also makes me very confused, just how to handle it in a day-to-day way.

Krista did not have the same emotional response at the potential of being "inherently racist," but

instead engaged in self-questioning and reflecting on relationships and interactions as a first step.

Few educators explicitly *named their whiteness* or the role their racial identity played

while reflecting on ways they were working to challenge white racial ideologies. However, for

many their acknowledgment of whiteness was highlighted when describing their upbringing in

predominantly white spaces.

"The Blanket of Racism of a Rural Small Town": Reflections on Upbringings

When asked to describe their childhood, educators shared descriptions of "mostly white"

small towns and suburbs (mainly in the Midwest), "bubbles" with little diversity where the

"whiteness lens [was] presented." Looking back at their upbringing and their own K-12

experience, the educators shared when they had first thought about race as well as the stereotypes

and biases that they held and reinforced. As described earlier in the methods chapter, with the

exception of one, all educators grew up in central Midwestern states. For over half of the

educators, WSSD is in their home state and the majority are from rural areas or small towns. The

educators describe these areas as "not be racially diverse," and "very safe, secure." They explain

that even if their school was diverse, they noticed segregation and that their "sphere" looked like

them.

The educators spoke about how their predominantly white upbringing, whether rural or suburban, influenced their antiracism journey and conceptualizations of race. However, few explicitly named the rural or suburban area as predominantly white or spoke directly to the role that played. Of the 13 educators who grew up in small towns or rural areas that were overwhelmingly white, only two describe them as such in explicit terms (i.e., naming whiteness). Instead, many of the educators from small towns or rural areas described these areas as "safe" or "stable and secure." They were more likely to name the "lack of" or "minimal" diversity whereas educators who grew up in suburban areas more often described the areas as predominantly white. Jackie compared her small Midwest town experience to that of *Gilmore Girls*[6] "where everybody knows everybody, that's very safe and also not very diverse." This coded language highlights an association between safety and white spaces. Moreover, those that described their hometowns as safe did not specifically name these predominantly white populations as such. This was observed in the educators described earlier, who had grown up in rural areas or small towns and described them as having little diversity but didn't name the majority white population.

Blair, a classroom teacher at Lakeside, was one of eight educators who grew up in a suburban area; however, her suburb was near the largest city of those named among study participants, and Blair had the most unique experience. She described the difference between the neighborhood she lived in and the school she attended:

> I lived in a very wealthy neighborhood, but I went to schools that were pretty diverse, especially in high school…My K-6 school had some diversity, but most of the people in my neighborhood,so who I was friends with, were also white…in middle school and junior hight it got way more diverse because it pulled from multiple schools, but that's when classes started to become more segregated by race and so then through high school, though my school was not majority white, all my classes were.

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[6] *Gilmore Girls* is a television show that originally aired in 2000 and was set in a storybook town in Connecticut.

Blair was the only educator who shared that there was any racial diversity in her K-12 schooling. Other educators described socioeconomic diversity or religious diversity. For example, Jocelyn described her graduating class in a small Midwest town as having "little diversity in the way of race, [but] I would say you definitely had socioeconomic diversity throughout."

Other educators named the role the racial makeup in their upbringing played in their racial framing. Blair described her experience as being "culturally conditioned" to the white lens, which influences her "making judgments and assumptions." Similarly, Brooke explained that her upbringing in a rural area outside WSSD influenced what and who she noticed throughout her K-16 experience. As evidenced by Blair's identification of the white racial frame, the educators are able to start to deframe what they have previously known. Blair did this as she thought about her role as a white teacher to question when practices are coming from "the white perspective" or when "we're centering ourselves too much."

Jocelyn shared her reflections of past actions and beliefs concerning race throughout her K-16 experience. Prior to being an interventionist at Lakeside she taught for just over 10 years in elementary schools in small towns and suburbs in the Midwest. As a part of her journey and deframing she started to move away from white people's popularized belief of colorblindness and thinking about why she wants to "see color":

> There are moments, like definitely that I can see in my mind, whether it was growing up in my neighborhood, or on college campus…where I found myself like holding on to my purse a little bit tighter or walking across the street and after the fact thinking to myself, 'oh my gosh, like those, those actions that I just did, like, are showing my racism. Like they're showing like I'm having these insecurities, and for, for what reason?'... I'm not proud to admit it... it always comes down to like, why? Why would I have those feelings like deep inside of me that created that fear?...I'm becoming more self-aware of some of the things that I've done in the past that would be considered kind of racist acts, which I would never have made before. Like, I would have never been, I would have even 10 years ago, I would have said 'I'm not racist'...and 'I don't see color' and I mean all of those things and now through all of our studies and equity journeys...of course we see color,

like that, of course we do. And that's what we want. We want to see color because we want to acknowledge that, and learn from that.

Jocelyn highlights educators' internal processing concerning their self-awareness of why we should "see color" and how that connects to racism.

One shared experience among participants was educators' description of others' defense of white privilege or trends of avoiding conversations about race in an effort for everyone to get along. This experience was highlighted in predominantly white areas, especially rural areas and small towns. This is something I'll explore more extensively later in this chapter, in the section on critical conversations.

These examples of educators identifying and "unraveling" the stereotypes and biases they held in their upbringing and have upheld as white individuals and educators over time, indicate some increase in understanding of the racial identity they are engaging in overtime as a part of what they refer to as their antiracism journey.

"Check Myself": Seeing and Unlearning Stereotypes and Biases

A few educators shared a line of thinking that includes self-talk and self-prompting to "check" themselves when they identify a bias, prejudice, or stereotype. Educators described the self-talk they use in situations to "unteach" and "counteract" or "override" their biases (e.g., "recognize that is your bias" and "what's a different thought...different thing I can replace that with?"). They asserted that this type of recognition and self-talk helped with the "unraveling" of biases as well as identifying and owning their roles in upholding racist ideologies and systems. The line of self-talk included: 1) recognizing and acknowledging the observed bias or stereotype; 2) naming it as a racist stereotype, bias, or racial frame; and 3) prompting to reframe (unlearn and override). Educators claimed that more frequent engagement in this line of thinking and self-talk leads to racist biases and stereotypes becoming less ingrained, and an increased ability to

observe new racial framing. Jill described this type of deframing as bringing "my unconscious into my consciousness."

In one of Lakeside's teacher focus groups, several educators grappled with the conceptions of race and racism they have held over time, or that they have "been conditioned to believe," and their own corresponding actions. First, Jill described the practice that you "check yourself when you're noticing these biases, or these stereotypes being reinforced." She believed she had made in concern to noticing biases "sneaking up" that she didn't always notice before and is now able to "check" it faster and hold herself accountable. Jill was the only educator to include an accountability component in this self-talk deframing practice. Jocelyn explained the connection she has made between recognizing "it" and changing her actions:

> I think for a while it's just recognizing it, like that's the first step really, is catching yourself in the moment and recognizing it. Because then I think it makes you act differently, you can recognize this is what I'm feeling. This is because then you can actually change your response.

Jocelyn was the only educator who named this "checking" as "self-talk." She described when this comes up for her in her neighborhood:

> So, we live across the street from a park and so when we're at our house and I'll notice a family, right, like a family coming- and I live in a fairly, predominantly white neighborhood and so you just notice when people in to the dog park across the street. I almost catch myself thinking as I am noticing I'm thinking 'I hope this family doesn't think that I'm like staring at them or that they're unwelcome in this neighborhood' because I'm just noticing…I have taken note…why am I noticing? I want to be friendly, I want to say hello. I want to know like, but it's just, I always wonder how I'm perceived on the other side too.

She explained that over time she has noticed that over some time she has recognized more that she would not have even noticed prior: "Now I notice and then it's like that little bit of self-talk that goes in there…it's that extra step of *'why* am I noticing?'" However, Jocelyn uses vague race-evasive language. She did not name what "it" was that she was recognizing in her self-talk

or what it was about the family she was noticing. Jackie responded, agreeing with Jocelyn, and went further, sharing that she recognizes her similar line of thinking when she makes those types of "noticings." She explained,

> I get that little feeling of guilt, like, 'oh, am I a bad person who is having racist thoughts right now? Yes.' And so that's another step is like, okay, I need to take that guilt away and just change myself but that's kind of where I'm at in my journey is noticing it, calling myself out…I think that's just such a large part of it is overcoming that guilt that you have, you're not a bad person, this is instilled in me but I need to recognize it and move forward.

At this point in the focus group, the educators explored ways they engage in self-talk when noticing bias and racism and ways they started to deframe such thinking. The "recognizing" educators describe can be understood as their *deframing* and the "reversing" as their *reframing*. Becca, a student support team provider at Lakeside, shared times when she notices her own racialized biases and stereotypes and then explained her internal response as an effort of reframing:

> I get mad at myself like yeah…you're better than this…Okay, what's a different thought, like what's a different thing I can replace that with?...I reflect on it and I kind of move on. Because without that reflection, I'll just keep doing it and keep doing it unless I'm continuously working on it.

As teachers recognize places where they are upholding racist ideologies, they can start to deframe those ideologies. As they start to replace them with new thoughts and beliefs, they are reframing or reversing the white frames.

While there were several educators who shared this line of self-talk as a part of their reframing, multiple also shared examples of ways they are reinforcing racialized stereotypes. Kaley described the differences between the student population at her PreK as such:

> For the most part, families in our preschool are affluent…When we do have Black children and brown children, there's a higher probability they are coming from lower income and doing like a scholarship or they have, you know, subsidies from the county. And so with that comes all these other pieces and so it almost perpetuates the stereotypes of like well, anyone who's not white at this preschool is poor…A lot of times it comes up

Here Kaley's awareness of the racialization in the school system is evident, yet she also is reinforcing racialized stereotypes herself with assumptions concerning single parents which perpetuates the narrative she opened with.

While Kaley also shared her goals of creating opportunities for students to have "windows and mirrors" in her classroom and her efforts to have more "challenging conversations" with family and colleagues, there is also evidence of a need to further understand her white racial frame and understand problems that are associated with racism. This example points to the way taking up antiracist-centered teaching is a journey for educators and requires time to break down stereotypes and reframe their white racial frames.

In a teacher focus group with educators from Lakeside, Justine shared an example of noticing herself engaging in this type of self-talk, trying to deframe previously held biases and beliefs through her white racial frame. This was similar to when she reflected on an experience in a park:

> I think, again, kind of like that self talk of recognizing it and identifying what it is that I'm doing, and this is how I need to stop it…take the park scenario. We live close to a park and I find myself, like, I don't know why, but like if we're at the park and there's a family, a Black family playing, like a family playing, I find myself wanting to gravitate towards the Black family and like almost, this isn't going to come out right, like almost like overcompensate, like conversation with them like to prove, I'm not racist. Like I'm going to embrace and engage in this conversation. Almost like in a way to like, I don't know why I do that sometimes and then I'll check myself like, why, why am I anxious over this like now they think I'm creepy or something…like, what am I trying to overcompensate for or like what am I trying to prove?

Jocelyn described this after Joanna explained her thinking about guilt and being a bad person if she had racist thoughts but also reminded herself that she was on a journey that entailed noticing,

calling herself out, and working to reverse those thoughts. Meredith also related her growth to

recognizing her biases as a component of her journey. She explained that

> When [the bias or stereotype] comes to mind, just recognizing my thoughts and
> kind of being able to like override them and be like 'nope' cuz I know I'm gonna have
> those thoughts but the idea that like bias is bias and I have it no matter how far along I am
> in my antiracist journey. I'm going to have them but recognizing them and being like
> 'nope, we're going to stop that.'

It is evident these white educators were engaging in a line of self-talk that supported their

recognition of deframing and reframing their white racial frame.

White Emotionality

Emotions of guilt, fear, worry, and nervousness were all held by white educators at some

point in their antiracism journey. We saw this earlier with Jackie's response to the white parent

calling her a racist. These emotions were shared explicitly when talking about conversations

about race, teaching about race, and one's racial identity. While sharing about a difficult

conversation in a team meeting, Justine described her experience sharing the story with me:

> I actually kind of feel it physically, like I'm sweating right not because it's like, I want to
> apologize for my white privilege. But at the same time, I know that's not what this is
> about…I almost feel guilty. It's like you almost feel guilty saying it out loud, that I know
> that like I have white privilege but great up in- but didn't know how to name it and I
> never named it until I started this work in the district.

Educators describe fears concerning "doing something wrong," worry over how people

would react or what they would think, and nervousness concerning confrontation. A few even

described emotions they experience concerning their own racial identity. These included being

uncomfortable about or feeling guilty for their whiteness. White emotionality will also come up

in other sections and chapters such as those concerning leading classroom conversations about

race.

Guilt was shared in reference not only to educators' white privilege but also in reference to their lack of knowledge of race and racism. Meredith is an early-grade classroom teacher at Sandburg. She grew up in a "very small rural town" only 15 miles from Sandburg. Meredith explained that throughout her learning about racial inequities she started to feel guilty that she had lived so much of her life having a false understanding of race in our country:

> When you become aware of it, because we're not trained, but we're, you' know, taught to think like well segregation is over so racism is done. And so once you're starting to be open minded to that and you start realizing that this was a thing where this was happening, you know, I mean it's when you start to feel guilty to where like, how did I not know this? Why am I just learning about this at 30 years old?...I didn't feel like I was aware of it for a lot of my life. Makes me feel a little bit guilty too.

Many educators described their antiracism journey as starting later in life, driven by their motivations as professors in college or more recently with the increased national attention to race and (anti)racism. Earlier in Chapter 5, I described educators such as Courtney and Jenna who identified this racism pandemic as an impetus for their journey.

Several educators described their fear of being wrong or their fear of others' reactions. They also observed that others had similar fears. While this anxiety surfaced within the context of educators' implementation of antiracist-centered practices, the same concerns arose when faced with conversations about race outside of school. In the focus group with Lakeside's teachers, the educators discussed the white privilege of "safe spaces." Teachers went back and forth about the types of conversations about race they do or do not engage in and the factors that impact that decision. Joanna, an instructional leader at Lakeside, gave an example of witnessing a family member saying something racist as a relatable occurrence. She said she could imagine someone wanting to "call him out on it" but not being entirely sure how to because "they're kind of worried about how it's going to be received…it's like they've identified it, they're getting ready to say something but then they bite their tongue." Joanna suggested that what commonly happens

is that the individual ends up having a conversation to process the experience with a "safe

person" instead of having the difficult conversation with the family member. Joanna explained

that

> When it comes down to it, I think it's an excuse, like I want to get it right. I don't want to be wrong, like that's an excuse and, you want people to- you don't know how people are going to react, and that's an excuse, like it sometimes it's valid and sometimes it's not…I don't think that calling everyone out on everything all the time is necessarily the best way to go about it.

Riley acknowledged this emotional component but also shared what she did with the emotions

she experienced:

> There are times where I might not say it right, or I might not know something and that's okay. It's a lot about our emotional intelligence and being like 'I had to go through, my first feelings were shame…and then I was angry.' I was tryin to say that we're all works in progress and I think if we use that like sort of fear, or like, I'm not good enough, or I'm not far enough, that just keeps us from engaging in the conversation at all.

She made a connection between processing the emotions and needing to engage in "the

conversation." Fear of being wrong, worry of upsetting someone, or anticipation of another's

reactions influence educators' white emotionality and have consequences for the ways in which

they do or do not take up antiracist and equity-centered practices.

The equity team at Sandburg experienced a strong emotional response to a whole-school

data conversation. In the winter of the 2020-2021 school year, the team shared data that

highlighted the discrepancies in achievement between white students and students of color,

specifically their Black students. They shared the faces of the students in an effort to personalize

the story the data was telling. Mary described the staff's reaction:

> It hit our staff in such a different way and it was really ugly for a while. People were super mad that we did that. We had woven in, we put slides in between- one of our guiding principles is 'all staff are responsible for the prevention of student failure.'...We're not trying to blame any one particular individual, but as an entire school system we're all responsible for this, for these kids we see on the screen…there's no reason why we aren't able to teach them to read. And there was a lot of fallout from that, a lot of big pushback and really big feelings from our staff. I mean white fragility.

The team sent a survey to staff to gain feedback and insight on what teachers' takeaways were. Recognizing the emotional response, they took the responses and organized them in a document in three categories: "anger and frustration," "blamed," and "sad." Emphasizing the school's focus on collaboration, the last category was "next steps, how do we continue to collaborate?" Opening this conversation to the entire school allowed the equity team to see such white emotionality outside of their own personal experience.

"Be Willing to Start Somewhere": Antiracism Journey

In the discussion of educators' aims and efforts to take up antiracist and equity-centered teaching, educators shared about what they described as their "antiracism journey" both within and outside of the school context. There were four main themes in educators' discussion of their journeys: 1) characterization of the journey as constant and ongoing; 2) inclusion of a reflection on their growth; 3) connection between their personal journey and striving to be an antiracist educator; and 4) the impact of individuals and events on their journey.

A Constant and Ongoing Journey

Educators described their antiracism journeys as a spectrum reflecting both progress or growth made and more yet to be accomplished. Describing themselves and others as at different places along their journeys and learning and unlearning in different ways and at varying paces, educators alluded to a spectrum of learning concerning race and antiracism. There was a significant sentiment that part of learning is learning how much you don't know: "when I learn

something, I am less confident" or the "more exposed to, [something, I] want to learn more." As discussed earlier, some educators openly identified the widespread increase in attention and focus on racial disparities in the summer of 2020 as the "spark" for their journey while others described it as increasing their urgency.

While contemplating how to foster an antiracist and equity-centered school culture and identity, Mary explained the importance of the range of teachers' antiracism journeys and the necessity for everyone to engage:

> You can be anywhere on this journey, but you need to be on the journey. You can't just be here and be staying here and not making any movement or progress...we're gonna head farther down this path with our kids because we know it's the right thing to do and so, if you're not willing to even start along that journey, then this isn't maybe the place for you anymore.

There was a consensus that we are "constantly learning and reflecting" and "never stop learning or growing" as "learning is never done;" we continually learn how much we don't know. Some even named their status as "in a learning phase," suggesting other phases to follow. Educators shared a variety of ways they engage in this ongoing learning, including following Instagram accounts of Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) educators and activists, having more "courageous conversations" with peers, and "gobb[ling] up a bunch of books" such as *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram Kendi or *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson.

Jenna shared a story about a time she discussed Me and White Supremacy[7] with a friend after they had both read the book. She described their conversation:

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[7] *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor* is a book to help white people unpack biases and privilege and take action written by Layla F. Saad.

> I don't know if the timing of that book maybe wasn't right for him and so he didn't like it. He felt like he was the bad guy, and so he kind of like expressed that, and we just went kind of back and forth and had a lot of discussion about like where we are on our journeys.... We're not all going to be in the same place, we might have different ways of how we get there… Maybe in a couple of years [he] might see that book [as] really beneficial, or maybe not.

While Jenna described how she and her friend were at different places on their journeys, they were both able to learn from each other through their conversation about a shared reading. This is in contrast to other educators' examples of perceiving some interlocutors as being more fixed in their mindsets or beliefs and not engaging in a journey the same way the educators were. Some educators shared experiences of conversing with others who were further along in their antiracism journeys: several educators at Sandburg referred to Mary as someone from whom they learned a lot and someone who was a leader and model for the school. Courtney described Mary as someone who had influenced her journey:

> [Mary] is like the person behind the curtains that's like helping make everything run. Like she's always the one researching…she knows so much about things that are going on with current events and in history and she's just a treasure box full of information. So she will help create things behind the sense for us all to kind of present as an equity team.

Riley explained that she still feels she has "room for growth" when it comes to having difficult conversations concerning race but that she looks to Mary as someone who models that with students and families in their school's community.

Simultaneously, Joanna described the "polarity" of individuals being in different places on their journey. She explained that while individually we might consider our own journeys to be ongoing and linear, there is a continued pressure of being right or wrong even if you are making attempts:

> This space of like all or nothing… and we know that there's all that room in between…there's also…the polarity of everyone's on a journey and we respect that journey, but not always right, like, 'you got that wrong, you said that wrong.'

While Joanna emphasizes the importance of individuals engaging on what she describes as this antiracism journey, her reflection also speaks to the "good and bad white" binary.

Using the metaphor of a journey was a common means for educators to describe the (un)learning they were engaging in. Many educators argued that they'd "never be there" or that there "is no end" to this antiracism journey. While describing her growth and learning, Jenna explained that "she's not there yet" and argued that she doesn't "know if you even get to an end." Accordingly, educators largely reflect on the fluidity of their journey.

Reflection on One's Journey

Given the notion that one's antiracism journey is constant and ongoing, nevertheless a journey must begin somewhere. In an equity team meeting, one teacher remembered her journey beginning:

> I lived in a box and then my box got to open a little. Like, you think about each space in your life and your box opens more and you're like, 'oh my god. That's not the only way to do it'. I had no idea that's not the only way you could live your life.

This metaphor exemplifies the way many educators reflected on their upbringings from this new vantage point, having done more (un)learning. After sharing some reflections concerning ways in which she upholds white supremacy (e.g., in her interactions with students), Jenna described where she is on her journey now:

> So, I am starting to be comfortable being uncomfortable reading. So, that's now where I know that I go a step further. I can continue to read now. I need to do more like, go another step, right, because I'm starting to be comfortable with that. And so, that next piece is hard…[it's] where I'm a little bit stuck, like I want to do better. I want to do more then read or listen to podcasts.

The concept of "getting comfortable being uncomfortable" is referenced throughout educators' conversations. For Jenna, it was evident she was less comfortable moving her learning forward. For others, they were able to name what is next for them but also acknowledged that they had yet

to take action on that next step. Jamie, a special education teacher at Lakeside, described actions she had taken, such as ordering books with more diverse representation and identifying some specific next steps. For her, the next step was "having like actually a deep conversation with a student and like what does that mean…I find it hard, and I don't know what to do with it and maybe that's also like the uncomfortable thing." Some shared growth in having conversations about race. Meredith felt more confident having conversations "especially with people [who are] not like-minded." Similarly, Krista described that she "would have shied away" from such conversations in the past. I discuss teachers' readiness for conversations with students further in Chapter 7.

At the same time, there was an acknowledgment that as white people, and as white educators, reflecting on and engaging in an "antiracism journey" is inadequate and cannot stand alone. Reflecting on this action and forward movement, educators shared they have to "do more reading" and try "having the conversations." More often than not, these reflections were coupled with "still have a long way to go" or "haven't done enough." Many of the educators who described themselves as "in the learning phase" also shared that they didn't know "what's next" for them in their journey. This was the case for Jenna, who felt stuck not knowing exactly what was next for her personal journey. An acknowledgment that remaining stagnant in a "learning phase" prevents action and maintains the status quo was less common. More educators spoke to their antiracism journey as an educator than their personal learning and growth, or they were quick to do so unprompted in other conversations (e.g., different interview or focus group questions, conversations in meetings, journal entries).

Participation in the Study

Four teachers between all three sites reflected on the influence that participating in the study had on their learning and thinking about race. These shared reflections surfaced unprompted and largely when asked at the end of an interview "if there was anything else [they] thought would be helpful or important for me to know." Educators explained that participating in the study invoked reflection they otherwise didn't engage in and three educators explicitly likened the interviews to therapy sessions. Marsha explained the experience as follows:

> I appreciate[d] the opportunity to be reflective with you because it helps me grow. I mean, every single time, right, and I guess my reflection would be that there should be more conversation with some prompts, similar to the things that you've asked. It'd be good to make space for more of that.

This unprompted comment was shared at the end of our second interview when asked if she had anything additional to share. Similarly, Justine shared appreciation for this time and space. She spoke to the "safe space" that permitted her sharing and reflection: "I do appreciate because you have like created this safe space…I truly felt like you were listening to my words." Moreover, she explained that

> Opportunities like this are so valuable and just having some time like processing out loud…to process out loud helps…it helps get me out of my comfort zone…. I'm going to step out of my security box and be open and vulnerable to these conversations.

The creation of what Justine described as a safe space allowed her to be present in her sharing and reflection. Kaley made a connection to teacher learning as she commented that her participation was a "good exercise" that got her thinking and reflected that she still had "a lot of work that has to be done and that's an ongoing conversation for me for a while." Kathy explained the conversations to be structured by a "constructivist approach":

> Instead of having a back and forth conversation, I mean you do ask follow-up questions, but like you're completely silent, there's little body language like as far as you're not leading me and it's almost like a therapy session (giggle)....I value reflection but I think you got me to think about things in a different way…which is leading me to grow in a different way.

These educators expressed a desire for more opportunities to have reflective conversations within their profession. None of these four educators were new to the field. They had been teaching for over 20 years and had participated in equity and antiracist-centered PD. However, they described their appreciation for participation in the study as a time and space for more personal reflection and learning, different from that which they'd gain from their experiences in more formal PD.

Jamie had a different kind of reflection to share when asked the same open-ended question at the end of her second interview. She described some of the processing she did throughout the conversation and her culminating feelings:

> That was uncomfortable and I hope I said all the right things, but like…I think talking to you has made me realize like I have more to do and maybe my mind is in the right spot, but maybe I haven't done enough…I still have things that need to change. I don't know. You know, need to change or need to learn.

When I asked Jamie what made these conversations uncomfortable, she explained her feelings of uncertainty about the way she was answering the questions. Earlier, in our first interview, Jamie stopped at one point to ask if she was sharing what I "was looking for" because she thought that "usually in an interview they're looking for something."

Journey as an Antiracist Educator

Some educators occasionally referred to their "antiracism journeys" in reference to a personal reflection, others did so concerning their teaching, and for some their antiracism journey was solely related to teaching. When reflecting on their journey concerning teaching, teachers shared new ways they'd grown in their thinking concerning whiteness in curriculum and

how they may uphold racist practices and systems. In her journal, one teacher acknowledged that

she treated white students differently than students of color:

> I know that I have treated white students differently than students of color. My assumptions and bias have caused me to do harm. I hope that my learning about my own identity and bias have lessened these negative situations.

In Chapter 7, I discuss how educators see their antiracism journey as influencing their adoption

of antiracist-centered teaching practices.

Role of Individuals and Events

Another recurring topic was the individuals and/or events that have influenced educators'

antiracism journeys. Colleagues, significant others, family members, and college professors were

all individuals described as influential in educators' ongoing journeys. These relationships helped

provide opportunities to "push each other" and "call each other out." Meredith shared the

relationship she had with her father, whom she described as "socially justice minded." He was

her go-to person to talk about "social justice and race and culture." She said they would call each

other up and share relevant events in the news. This relationship and their conversations were

different from those with other family members and her partner, all of whom she said were not

"as like-minded" or that social justice was not something they were passionate about. Ultimately,

Meredith said her dad shaped her mindset and perspective.

In her first interview, Kathy described "critical friends" with whom she has reflective

conversations in which they can present ideas, share constructive feedback, and practice

courageous conversations. However, after participating in multiple interviews and a focus group,

Kathy shared that because of her participation in the study, she was thinking about those

conversations differently and wondered whether she could really consider them "critical"

because of the ways in which they talk about race. Her friends talked *about* race but they didn't

have conversations that prompted critical reflection or pushed each other's thinking. Kathy described them as like-minded peers and as such their conversations were more likely to echo each other's beliefs and ideas without being intentionally more critical and reflective. In her third interview, she described her participation in the study:

> just by participating in the study, I think I've grown…having these sessions is actually strengthening as well because like your prompts are really great at getting me to think about like, what is it that I'm doing when it comes to race. I think I've grown in my own identity, story of self, and then how I'm communicating and leading others to see that.

Kathy described the sessions as being more reflective – "like a therapy session" – not leading her to think in one way or another, as opposed to conversations she had previously referenced to be a back and forth in which the conversants essentially repeated one another or shared information. Kathy highlights the interpersonal and collaborative nature educators describe as a contributing element in their antiracism journeys. I share more about educators' reflections on their participation in the study later in this chapter.

Jackie and Brooke have both been in the classroom for under five years and are both classroom teachers at Lakeside. They discussed the role college professors played in starting their journeys and in their understanding of equity-centered education by providing one of the first conversations they'd ever had about race and equity in education. Similarly, Jill described a partnership that existed between her previous school and the local university. A group of teachers formed a "coalition" that met regularly with a professor to learn about unconscious biases, microaggressions, and other components that influence systemic racism, all of which shaped Jill's personal reflections and journey.

"Getting Comfortable Being Uncomfortable"

A recurring concept for educators' antiracism journeys was "getting comfortable being uncomfortable." This idea was most commonly made in reference to educators having

challenging or "uncomfortable" conversations with those who were described as "not like-minded" or not sharing the same beliefs. Most educators said they were more likely to have conversations with individuals they were "more comfortable with," but several also acknowledged the importance of "getting comfortable being uncomfortable," or getting outside their comfort zone. Educators reference this notion when discussing journaling about race and racial identity, talking to individuals who have differing opinions, and teaching about race.

Acknowledging discomfort and getting comfortable being uncomfortable was also described as a component of self-reflection and general engagement in racial identity work. Jenna shared about her experience journaling while reading *Me and White Supremacy*. The book, by Layla F. Saad, prompts white readers to examine their racial identity and racist thoughts. The book has a guided journal. Jenna described her experience engaging in the journal:

> Reading a book about race, like Me and My [sic] White Supremacy, like there were a lot of uncomfortable things that came up that I had to journal about and like say outloud and things that I have done that has- or things that I have thought and how that contributes to racism and or stereotypes or discrimination- all of those things. So, I am starting to be comfortable being uncomfortable reading. So that's where I know that I can go a step further. I can continue to read, now I need to do more with it because I'm starting to be comfortable with that. And so that next piece is hard.

Jenna demonstrates one-way educators attempt to engage in opportunities to increase their comfort. However, she also hints at the barrier of progressing to "do more" and "go a step further."

Awareness of Race

Educators' awareness of race is evident through their identification of problems associated with racism and racist ideologies as well as their usage of race evasive language. Biases, stereotypes, and racist ideologies were explicitly revealed in conversations. At multiple

points throughout the study, there was evidence of educators using race evasive language, which points to their varying levels of awareness of race.

Identifying Problems Associated with Racism and Racist Ideologies

While educators described stereotypes that they have identified over time, again both in the context of school and outside that context, we see evidence of them deframing their white racial frame. Many educators shared their process for identifying stereotypes, ways of "working and fighting against these stereotypes," and the practices and policies that reinforce them. The first step was identifying and increasing awareness of the stereotypes and/or biases they held. As Marsha described, "I'm aware of thoughts that are racist…I think I wasn't always, so that's progress." Some racist ideologies shared included stereotypes of Black caregivers, specifically Black mothers; assumptions about parent involvement at school; hiring practices for increasing diversity; fear of Black men; and concerning expectations for behavior in school. In the previous school year, in response to her own identification of a bias she held, Meredith made a goal for herself to reflect on her bias towards Black mothers. She shared this bias both individually in an interview and in a focus group. Meredith described her goals to break down her biases around Black women being "loud and confrontational" and to reach out to parents proactively:

> [A] bias that I revealed of myself that we at the beginning of this year this is this, this fear like confrontation with my, mothers of Black mothers of mine, there was this idea of bias that I had mine that were going to be confrontational and they were going to yell.

She made it a goal to reframe these biases, and to reach out and build more relationships with families to work against those stereotypes she had built up in her mind over time. In the focus group, Meredith shared her experience of ongoing struggles with a white mother, whom Meredith described as "confrontational" and who caused many issues for Meredith. Comparing the communication methods, Mary compared the stereotypes and biases surrounding Black mothers being loud and confrontational to this white mother who caused difficulties via "email,

which is like our socially acceptable way to like scold somebody as opposed to like getting in their face." As Mary and Meredith went back and forth breaking down the way the school was reinforcing racialized norms, they ultimately identified the way schools reinforced these norms by giving white parents what they demanded.

As educators shared these layers of self-questioning and deframing their white racial frame, they explored ways they uphold white privilege and contribute to racist ideologies. Blair described this as "cultural conditioning" that was part of her upbringing, and what she now needed to unpack and learn to reframe. She didn't remember being explicitly taught racist ideologies but explained the implicit messages she learned:

> I noticed my cultural conditioning…it doesn't come from one time, or like I can't remember ever being taught, but like I feel like I was raised that like, I guess specifically like Black and Latinx Americans were generally poor and like weren't working, didn't work hard…and so I have to unteach myself every day trying to respond in ways that aren't, that don't use those as the basis for anything.

As described earlier, Blair also shared the type of self-talk she engages in to "check herself" and deframe these types of racist ideologies.

Race Evasive Language

Even while engaging in conversations about race, both within and outside of education, there was still evidence of race evasive language. This language was noticeable in what was said and unsaid by educators. As educators shared their reflections concerning their antiracism journeys, there was further evidence of color-evasiveness in the way educators talked about their racial identities and their conceptualizations of race in education. As shared earlier, only about a third of educators explicitly refer to their own whiteness. This color-evasiveness was also observed when educators shared stories and experiences from both inside and outside the context of school. Frequently when educators talked about their upbringing or other school settings, they

used language such as "no diversity," which they later explained, when asked, was specifically in regard to race.

In respect to race-evasiveness, educators also offered up that they previously believed in the validity of colorblindness. Jamie, Justine, Jocelyn, Joanna, and Kaley all referenced times earlier in their teaching careers when they would have described themselves as "colorblind." Justine, who has been teaching for over 20 years, explained her previous identification with being colorblind and the role her upbringing played:

> I have to be honest and I have to say, I was one of those educators that probably would have said like, 'I'm colorblind. I don't see color, like our kids receive what they need no matter what their skin color is, their religious background, ethnicity. I was one of those teachers that was like proud to advertise that I don't see color and I think looking back on that, that's also part of my upbringing, right? Like, we didn't really see color growing up but at the same time, we didn't really talk about it.

Similarly, Kasey remembers answering an interview question about race and equity:

> I gave the colorblind response not because I don't believe in color but because my early childhood background. It felt like a trick question, right?...So I gave the response of like 'well, I don't see color. I just see people where they are.' The response I got was point blank like 'you're just not culturally sensitive or aware enough for our school.

Kasey and Justine both demonstrate an evolution of thought for white educators concerning their colorblind perspectives. Jamie, who did not relate to ever having identified with colorblindness, shared a difficult conversation with her mother-in-law, whom she described as having "the mentality of colorblind." While describing this conversation she included that she wasn't "saying I've never had that, you know…but now I'm learning more."

"Safe Spaces" and Critical Conversations About Race

Comfort, safety, and familiarity were all themes for white educators when it came to talking about race. At the same time, so was getting *un*comfortable and "calling out" others. In

this section I discuss who educators talk to about race (i.e., their networks), the conditions of those conversations ("safe spaces"), and the different types of conversations that occur.

Educators' Networks: Family and Friends

When asked directly who they talk to about race, educators largely named immediate and extended family (most commonly partners), current or previous colleagues, and friends. Educators described talking about race to individuals who agree with them, but the frequency of the conversations and ways in which they were initiated were less clear. Many teachers described sharing resources (e.g., podcasts and teaching materials) with other colleagues and talking about race (e.g., about current events) with their children. Kaley, a teacher at the PreK site, highlights the ambiguity behind *when* they are talking about race and *what prompts* the conversation: "it's not something that we openly discuss unless something's occurred or something really tangible has happened recently."

While educators answered this question, few voluntarily provided the racial identities of who they talk to about race. Blair listed her husband, friends, family, and co-workers and acknowledged that they are "pretty much all white" and that she has "very little interaction with people of color who are my own age or older." This topic also came up during a teacher focus group during which the group was discussing "white guilt" and Justine made the connection that

> It kind of goes back to that white guilt, like because of my upbringing and, I don't really have, like to this day, I don't have a lot of friends who are of color. I don't…people of color are not in my social circle.

The more challenging or "difficult" conversations educators described were with family members that still lived in small or more rural towns. Marsha described this experience:

> I talk to some people in my family who are less concerned about equity than I am. They think I'm way too far left [giggles]. I would talk to anyone about it. I feel like I'm gaining confidence and taking more risks with people that might not agree with me.

Many instances included stories of educators talking with family or friends from their hometowns that were described as conservative with little diversity.

"Critical Friends" and "Courageous Conversations"

Educators described having "courageous" or "critical" conversations and the role of "critical friends" who influenced the formation and growth of their critical race consciousness. Critical or courageous conversations were largely described as being times to reflect, provide constructive feedback, challenge conflicting opinions, or to "call-in" or "call-out" peers or colleagues. There were two types of conversations described: those with peers or colleagues who were like-minded and with whom the educators had trusted relationships; and those that were considered more challenging as individuals were being "called out" or "called in." Calling someone in refers to inviting someone into a conversation, potentially a critical conversation, usually to explore more understanding and learning. Calling an individual out calls attention to what that individual has said or done. This type of interruption is used to inform someone that their actions or words are unacceptable and must be interrupted to prevent further harm.

Safe Spaces

Educators not only spoke about *who* they were talking to about race (e.g., their "critical friends"), but also *where*: "safe spaces." Most educators described having conversations about race with people with whom they had existing trusted relationships and shared similar views. This first type of conversation was described as being in a "safe space" with "no judgment." Justine described safe spaces as a priority. She argued they necessitate "giving people time to just listen and observe…I like to observe, I like to process, I like to reflect individually. And not all the time with somebody else, especially if I am not if I haven't established a close relationship with that person." Ultimately, she explained that

> It boils down to relationships with the people that you're talking with. It also boils down to like sometimes when you put ideas on the table, I'm not looking for a response or I'm not looking for a solution. Some of it is just being able to safely put ideas on the table and that's where they stay.

Justine emphasizes the importance she places on relationships, observations, and sharing of ideas. There is less of an emphasis on dialogue or learning.

Educators expressed higher levels of confidence, comfort, and being "more open and willing" to engage when describing conversations within their "established relationships.". Marsha explained that she feels more comfortable in these types of conversations about race because there is an "openness to stumble" and to "not always be successful" in every attempt. Jill related this idea to creating "safe spaces" where people can feel they can grow and have "those uncomfortable conversations." This reasoning is different from Justine's, as Jill posits that these types of spaces present opportunities to engage in dialogue and learning.

Justine prefaced the disclosure that she used to say she "doesn't see color" with her interpretation of the focus group itself as a safe place. As she continued to share what she learned about implicit biases and microaggressions in the schools where she'd worked previously, she explained that didn't feel equipped to talk about it at the time but now is gaining that knowledge base. After Justine shared something she now knows not to be true in a space she deemed safe, Jocelyn shared that she also used to say "I don't see color, like we're all equal." Justine and Jocelyn highlight how teachers used "safe spaces" with trusted peers to share unlearning of previously held beliefs. Furthermore, Joanna goes on to say,

> There are people that I wouldn't feel comfortable having this conversation with or giving some examples or, like showing my vulnerability of a white teacher who's on her journey of antiracism and antiracist education…The more I have these conversations, the more I hold these conversations, the more equipped I feel.

Like Kathy, Joanna highlights the value educators place on conversation as a means of growth on their antiracism journey. Both identified the focus group itself as a safe space and Joanna shared that "it's sometimes hard to find that safe space."

One concept that was prevalent between the white principals and teachers across schools was the idea of "working on your bubble." This idea came from a district-level leader who explained that when you focus on having conversations about race with people who are "in your bubble" it is with those you already have a trusting or at least a working relationship with, and bringing new ideas or challenging others' existing beliefs or biases can have a ripple effect as they also work on their bubbles. Kaley explains that,

> You just work on your bubble, and if you can make a change in your bubble, then you can do these other bubbles and like it eventually all expands. And you're doing good work, right, if you focus on that. And I think, to hear them all say like 'here are one or two things' that I know I can do right now with like, job done.

Joanna described her "go-tos" for talking about learning and teaching concerning race: "Talking with my team, my instructional coaching team...I think we feel safe, if we're feeling safer to like question each other or call each other, you know, out or in on different things." A close working relationship can make it easier to provide different kinds of feedback and conversation and also address the need to "call each other out." In her reflection on her growth and learning throughout her participation in the study, Kathy shared a resulting reflection on who she described as her critical friends: "I think I've grown because, like having, I thought that I had critical friends" but shares that while she talks to them about race, she hasn't grown by having those conversations. The conversations with these friends resembled echo chambers more than generative experiences. Earlier she had described critical friends as "someone who you can have a really reflective conversation with, who you can present ideas and get feedback" from. These "friends" are

The ones that help us think through it critically, with a critical lens, and ask the questions like 'why would we do this? What are the implications?' So, I think like that's the biggest way to support is just like thinking through everything together.

The shared sense of nervousness that comes with approaching others about issues and topics concerning race was prevalent.

Two teachers also mentioned creating "safe spaces" for students in their definitions of antiracist teaching. Jackie coupled "safe instruction" with equitable instruction with the example of "microaggressions or other types of interactions that I might be unaware of." Courtney spoke to the importance of relationships with her inclusion of giving "students the opportunity to share their perspectives in a safe environment."

"Courageous Conversations"

Educators also shared fears of initiating or engaging in a critical – or "brave" or "courageous" – conversation with an individual whose beliefs didn't align with their own. They explained being fearful of the conversation sparking conflict or creating uncomfortable emotions. Riley shared that in her experience, some teachers are "afraid they're going to offend somebody or they're going to say the wrong thing, or that one of these parents is going to get pissed." Marissa related these fears or tensions to the notion of "getting comfortable being uncomfortable" discussed earlier.

Having direct conversations with others about race may require some to "lean into discomfort." Meredith shared her reflection on having conversations with "family and friends who don't view race the same way" that she does:

> [I am] trying to have that voice…it's been kind of an interesting evolution with all the stuff that's happened in the world…just [have] like that like mindset and be able to have a conversation without it turning into something where you're not arguing, but having, you know, conflict within the conversation because they don't believe the same things you do.

Meredith shared this as a helpful strategy to get beyond being uncomfortable with and fearful of conflict.

Courtney shared the example of conversations she has with her mother back home in their small town. She explained how she tries to get her mom to agree with her and "find a common ground." There is a sense with Courtney and other educators that they are engaging in such conversations about race to change others' minds and help them understand issues concerning race in a different light. Courtney explained her perspective on such conversations:

> Whenever I'm having a conversation with [my mom]… they're very uncomfortable because it's walking a line of trying to help her agree with me, but also try not to make her upset…I just feel like if I don't have these conversations with her, who is going to?

When talking about a similar situation, Meredith explained,

> The students are too important for me to be quiet…even though I'm going to feel nervous, I'm still gonna stand up…I'm going to call out things that I see in the hope, not in the hopes of starting these confrontations, but in the hopes that it will get somebody's mind thinking 'oh, I didn't think about that.'

Rather than trying to change someone's mind through direct dialogue (e.g., "calling out"), Jenna said she prefers to share resources with others. She explained,

> You know, 'I hear what you're saying, and I recently read this article or this like blog or whatever, and it had a different perspective how seeing our students for who they are, their race or ethnicity, their culture is really important to see the whole child' and then give them the recommendation, send them an email with the article…Sometimes that's how I tried to call people and I don't always love that I do that, because I would prefer to, I don't know, I feel like that's just a nice way of calling someone in. It doesn't really hold them accountable…but if I'm going to be realistic, I bet that's what I would do.

When Jenna explained this in the teacher focus group, Joanna responded, sharing that the tone of how something is said influences her response. These stories all indicate there are multiple factors that influence how educators decide to engage, or not, in conversations about race.

The third type of conversation discussed was the conversation that was never had – the omissions and "bystanding." Educators shared memories of instances they knew they should have spoken up or started a conversation, and their regrets for not having done so. This

experience was a common answer when educators were asked to share a time that they were not proud of the way they talked about or engaged in a conversation about race. Kathy acknowledged the impact of not engaging in a conversation: "by not saying something I'm endorsing it or giving permission for it to happen. And so even though I don't agree with it if I don't say something, I'm still participating in it." I explore this further in the next section.

Lastly, along with a shared notion of fear of conflict was a concern for what others think. Many educators said that this consideration impacts both whether they have a conversation about race and what the conversation entails. Both Kathy and Anna, as principals, reflected on how they have valued what others think to varying degrees throughout their careers as leaders. They explained that it can influence their decision-making concerning which conversations to take up. Kathy shared,

> Historically I've been a quiet person and I might see something or realize it's bad, but not have the courage to speak up because of fear of retaliation, or you know, don't want to get hurt or something like that…I don't know that it's like active retaliation, I think it's like, you know, everybody wants to get along with everyone, right, no one enjoys conflict…I probably valued too much what other people thought.

In many ways, educators' reflections on critical conversations were similar to how they thought about their antiracism journeys. Both contexts shared an acknowledgment of growth that either has been made or is necessary, an understanding that they will not perfect such conversations, and an appreciation for the learning and practice these conversations entail.

Talking About Race: Engagement or Omission

Educators were asked to share a time they were proud of the way they engaged in a conversation about race and a time they were less than proud.[8] When asked to share a time when she was proud, Riley paused and referred to the therapeutic nature of this question because

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[8] Not all participants were asked these questions for different reasons (e.g., not all participants were interviewed twice). Fourteen participants were asked these questions.

"when do I feel proud of myself?" Ultimately, she shared instances of engaging in conversations with and about the students and families in her school's community. Similarly, Anna paused before sharing that she doesn't know if she's ever felt proud of how she's handled a conversation about race:

> Number one, that's a hard question, Sarah. (pause) I don't know if I've ever felt like proud of it because I feel like I'm just learning so much that I'm still questioning, sometimes what I say and what I do and like I'm always, I'm so cautious sometimes yet of like the words I use because I know staff are really listening to me meeting my guidance and support.

When asked if she had a time that she was proud outside of the school context, she was able to share a specific instance.

Answers concerning when educators were *less* than proud about how they engaged in a conversation about race were either examples of omission or engagement: educators either described instances when they did not speak or engage in the conversation, or when they did engage but, upon reflection, wish they'd approached the situation differently.

Of the educators who were asked this question, six explained instances or generalizations of omission. These examples were situations when educators wish they had spoken up, when they doubted their capacity to do so, and when they felt it would be easier to avoid the conversation altogether. Karen described an instance when she observed a colleague using racially insensitive language:

> I was less proud of myself because I didn't like address that- that term being used and then I'm even more or less proud of myself because my excuse in my head, I kept walking, like I was exciting a conversation…I have my own little response in my head, I almost like rehearse it and practicing it so like the next time I can just pull it out.

While she also shared a situation when she avoided conversations concerning race, it was for a different reason. Kaley explained that she doesn't talk to her extended family about race because it's easier not to. Similarly, Kathy describes how she used to want "to avoid the conflict and so

things might not happen, or people might make a comment and I wouldn't say anything. I would just be like 'oh, that's really bad' and not say anything." However, as mentioned earlier, Kathy has grown in her confidence through various experiences and said she is now speaking up more.

The other eight educators shared conversations or situations concerning race when they were not proud of the way they'd responded. Two teachers shared memories of either clutching their purses tighter or crossing the street when in the presence of people of color. Blair described how she thinks that

> Some of it is like just what I was taught as a kid and so it's like the snap reaction that I have to catch every time. Like I know that I'm making judgements and assumptions and then doing things. A lot of it comes from like anxiety and corrupt people like, regardless of race, so sometimes I can't separate those feelings. I'm just, just like you speak, furious- I'm so aware, I just notice my cultural conditioning all the time and race is just so much a part of that.

It was more common for educators to share conversations they specifically remembered. Those were with either peers (both those who are teachers and not) or with family members of their students. When sharing these conversations, educators also reflected on what they would do differently if presented with the opportunity to have the conversation again. Like Kathy, Justine described the growth she sees herself making. Justine shared memories and reflections that she "personally would have considered myself acting racist," such as holding her purse tighter. While she said that, she didn't provide the rest of the context for when she would do this and who she was around. Justine goes on to describe the growth she feels she is making:

> The more conversations that I'm having about this topic, the more I'm navigating it myself, like the more I'm becoming self aware of some of the things that I've done in the past that would be considered kind of racist acts.

As the white educators talked about engaging in conversations about race, we see how they identified times they supported either racist comments or actions, thus perpetuating white supremacy and the normalcy of whiteness, by not responding or not acting.

Chapter 7
Teachers' Conceptualization of Antiracist Education

"Our goal is to raise our next generation of leaders and adults in the world. If we want things to change, we have to do something different when they're little and we're in charge of that, we're responsible...people that are not moving in this direction, yet are like doing damage, not only to our students of color but to all our white students who aren't getting this level of education that they need and deserve in all transparency." - Mary, Sandburg Student Support Team Leader

"I get caught up in that too, like 'just give me some strategies, give me some practices,' but it's really about checking myself and reminding myself. It's really about knowing myself, knowing my learners, and how am I think about these things...How can I reflect on what I have been doing to see that I'm not, you know, centering my own whiteness in everything I do. So, I know it's not just like 'oh, grab a tool off the shelf. Off I go!'" - Joanna, Instructional Leader at Lakeside

When talking about antiracist education and teaching, it became evident there were two notions of antiracist education: (1) teaching that explicitly concerns race, antiracism, and inequities and (2) a notion of *being* or identifying as a (striving) antiracist educator. First, I will share how teachers defined antiracist education to provide context on how they conceptualized both their practices and their self-described identities. Then I will elaborate on the practices teachers describe as antiracist teaching and the decision-making that involves. I use the language of "teachers" to be inclusive of all participants who work directly with students. This inclusion consists of classroom teachers (both general and special education), counselors, psychologists, and content interventionists.

Defining Antiracist Teaching

On the initial questionnaire at the onset of their participation, teachers were asked, "how do you define antiracist teaching?" To create their definitions, teachers identified components of antiracist teaching: 1) personal reflection as practitioners (e.g., "identity work"); 2) reviewing and evaluating curriculum; 3) instructional practices (e.g., direct instruction); and 4) and broader concepts pertaining to systemic racism and whiteness in education (e.g., policies) (see Appendix A). While these are distinct factors, there are places where they overlap. The inclusion of

instructional practices and references to issues concerning systemic racism was the most prevalent of the four main components in participants' definitions. Other elements of antiracist teaching concern acceptance, policies, and references to whiteness. The white teachers' understandings of antiracist education were further elaborated during interviews, meeting observations, focus groups, and documents analyzed throughout the course of the study.

Teachers who indicated antiracist teaching is at "the core of everything they do" or had a strong commitment to it were more likely to include elements concerning systemic racism and white supremacy and all emphasized direct instruction for students concerning race. Conversely, teachers who indicated they "are committed" to antiracist education covered more territory with a wider dispersion of the four components delineated in this section. A table of all teachers' definitions can be found in Appendix O alongside their commitment levels, which were both collected in the initial questionnaires.

Educators' Personal Reflection

A significant component identified as a part of antiracist teaching was one's reflection on their identity and their awareness of racism and systemic racism as they pertain to education. This reflection includes an examination of the role one's racial identity plays in teaching, and how one's own stereotypes and biases may influence their teaching. At the commencement of their participation, teachers were asked to write their definition of antiracist teaching. The definitions below are all from teachers' questionnaires.

Jackie is a classroom teacher at Lakeside and is on their equity team. She defined antiracist teaching as the following:

> To me, antiracist teaching is first and foremost understanding my own biases that might be standing in the way of providing equitable and safe instruction to my students [such as] microaggressions or other types of interactions that I might be unaware of etc.

Her definition includes all four components of antiracist teaching and highlights the common argument for "identity work" to be the first, or central, component of engaging in antiracist-centered teaching, especially when the educators are white (Brooks, 2018; Kose, 2007; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Theoharis, 2018; Young & Laible, 2000). As such, when teachers included reflexive work in their definition, it was listed first.

It is important to note that only a few of the teachers made specific references to the role whiteness plays or acknowledged their own whiteness as they defined antiracist teaching. Jill was one teacher who did name her racial identity in her definition of antiracist education while referencing her antiracism journey as a white educator. She framed her definition by writing "as an educator who identifies as white" and said that striving to be an antiracist teacher is a "never-ending journey" one must engage in "minute by minute each day." A part of that journey she describes in her definition is "continuously reject[ing] and fight[ing] against their own unconscious biases, systemic racism, and barriers within their school, classroom, and district." This is unsurprising because, as mentioned in the previous chapter, only ten educators explicitly name their whiteness as a component of their racial identity.

Review and Evaluation of Curriculum

The second component of white teachers' conceptualization of antiracist teaching pertained to the curricula they teach. In their definitions, teachers described the need for educators to look at their existing curriculum and reflect on the messages it communicates to students concerning race. This practice included "analyzing curriculums [sic] to make sure we are not teaching biased or racist material." Another teacher included "taking the time to explore other curriculums [sic] and ways to teach in order to make sure every student is heard and

understood for the person they are." Moreover, Courtney explained the critical role of curricular

planning:

> Anti-racist teaching includes being proactive in planning…creat[ing] lessons and units based on the students in front of them. The concepts, materials, and assessments must be fitting to the needs of students. Teachers must have a lens for assessing how material will be interpreted.

Courtney's argument concerning curricular planning highlights antiracist teaching as pedagogy

as opposed to a singular, stand-alone lesson on race or antiracism within the curriculum.

However, it is less clear what she means by the lessons and units being "based on the students in

front" of teachers. As Courtney did have a racially diverse class at the time, it is likely she is

referencing the need to have lessons and units that are representative of the diverse population of

her class. It is important to ensure that planning for students "in front" of teachers does not

perpetuate the normalcy of whiteness in predominantly white spaces. Conversely, more teachers

asked what it means to be proactive in planning antiracist-centered teaching for classes in which

the majority are white.

One component of reviewing an existing curriculum is considering the implementation of

lessons. Courtney shared how, after years of teaching *Because of Winn Dixie*,[9] she began to look

at this mentor text differently:

> I realized everyone in the book is white, except for the woman that they call the witch who has brown skin and lives by herself…every year we read the book and I've just let it go like, that's just what we read, that's what we do. But like, antiracist teaching would really be like 'what do you notice about the characters in this book or this story?'...I'm wanting them to notice things that are inequitable and like the books we read because I didn't even realize it myself after reading it four or five times…I hope that I can be asking kids more questions so that they in turn point things out that they notice that they think seem wrong or inequitable.

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[9] *Because of Winn Dixie* is a children's fiction book written by Kate DiCamillo.

Courtney stressed the importance of asking prompting questions for students to make observations about representation and inequities in addition to her as the teacher pointing them out. Moreover, she emphasized the element of incorporating critical thinking skills.

The consideration of implementation was evident at Lakeside and Sandburg's equity team meetings as they reviewed the curriculum and prepared materials for teachers to talk to students about the verdict for the Derek Chauvin trial. The district's student support services team sent every school a set of materials from which the schools could adapt but which were required to implement by a given date. While reviewing and adapting the lesson materials, the teams reflected on three components of the curricular materials: the political nature of the lesson, their white perspective, and the age appropriateness.

"Remaining Neutral?"

The district administrative office sent out a communication to all staff (PreK-12) on the afternoon the public learned the verdict would be read. One part of this messaging centered on "remaining neutral." The email to staff read,

> Depending on the outcome of the trial, some of our students and staff may want to participate in civil unrest, such as protests, over the next few days. We are a District that has long supported student voice and choice, but we must also work to ensure safety, ensure the continuation of our educational program, and maintain political neutrality while supporting the right to expression.

One of the five guidelines provided in the communication was to "stay politically neutral." Jackie expressed frustration with the district's neutral messaging and referenced a conversation in a book club with Lakeside teachers where they had discussed that "teaching is a political act." As Blair would explain later, it's not possible to remain neutral or apolitical:

> I don't think it's possible. So, like, a choice is a choice. I mean everything you do is a choice…if you're choosing to not talk about things or not include things, then it's not neutral. Sorry, I just feel like it's unreasonable expectations put upon schools…I just don't think it's possible to not remain neutral or apolitical…it's people's lives…people are affected by this in their lives and people are dying, and people's lives are like adversely affected. So you can't be neutral about that.

The district's messaging prompted a conversation in Lakeside's equity team meeting as they planned the lesson materials.

As teachers debated the district's messaging concerning staying politically neutral and whether neutrality is possible, they evaluated the content of materials to ensure they included "hard facts" and that messaging to students remained non-partisan. Jill struggled with how the team would develop the language on the slides and communicate the trial decision to students as "that's like the hard thing…there's clearly a right and a wrong."

The team was meeting on the afternoon of April 20th when it was announced that the trial verdict would be read. The guilty verdict was read in the middle of their planning meeting. As the plans were in mid-creation and the verdict freshly announced, we see how the team framed the decision for students.

The White Perspective: "Are We Whitewashing This Lesson?"

As discussed earlier, one element of teachers' adoption of antiracist-centered teaching was reflection on how curriculum and teaching can be centered in whiteness. While finalizing the slides that would be shared with teachers, Jill stopped to ask about the language being used,

> Okay, tell me if this is whitewashing…like desensitizing this…I don't want to take away important things, but at the trial, jurors, judges and lawyers tried to prove? To decide if Derek Chauvin meant to hurt George Floyd?

The team continued to share ways to articulate this part of the trial without whitewashing the language. They shared examples such as "[Derek Chauvin's] actions caused George Floyd to die" or "accused of causing the death." As they continued to grapple with this, another teacher,

Brooke, expressed concern that if they used language that discusses "whether or not his actions caused death" they may be "beating around the bush," but at the same time she worried that she "could list all the students in [her] room right now, who, like would be very uncomfortable, and like we should be uncomfortable but…" This spoke to the educators' hesitation in response to potentially uncomfortable conversations or pushback from specific individuals, whether it be students or family members. Brooke is referencing students who would be uncomfortable hearing about the *murder* of someone when similarly we have heard a resounding sense of hesitation and fear concerning white parents who may also be uncomfortable about similar topics. Ultimately, students would see the following text on slides:

> Derek Chauvin was accused with the crime of causing the death of George Floyd…at the end of the trial, the jurors reached the verdict that Derek Chauvin was *guilty.* That means that they decided *he did* cause the death of George Floyd.

A salient part of these curricular conversations was the concern of age appropriateness of material and conversation for a murder trial.

"What is Age Appropriate?"

Questions of age appropriateness surfaced in conversations around language and content. Such questions included what grade materials could include the word "murder," if any, or "die" and what parts of a trial to include. The concern of whether some material "might go over kids' heads" came up while looking at the slides outlining the protests that followed George Floyd's murder. Blair suggested they include that "police brutality isn't just this one thing, like that it's a pattern." She wanted to be able to explain to students that the murder and verdict were not an isolated event. In the end, only the protests in 2020 were included in the lesson materials. While discussing the existing material, the team determined that two sets of lesson materials were necessary to differentiate what lower elementary students needed from what upper elementary

students needed. This determination was made at both Lakeside and Sandburg and as such, both teams created two sets of lesson materials. The main differences between the two sets of grade-level materials for Lakeside students were a simplification of language and the exclusion of reference to racism. The K-1 slide stated that Derek Chauvin went to trial because George Floyd died and that the guilty verdict meant that "Derek Chauvin broke the law and caused George's death." In contrast, the second- through fourth-grade lesson slides stated that Chauvin went to trial because he was "accused of the crime of killing George Floyd" and the verdict then meant "Derek Chauvin did cause the death of George Floyd."

Varying Notions of Antiracist Pedagogy

A significant element of white teachers' conceptualization of antiracist teaching concerned what their role looked like in the classroom. These definitions were divided between teachers' notions of providing direct instruction concerning race, (anti)racism, and the history of race in our country or focusing on developing students' critical thinking skills.

Sandburg had its own definition of how they "do antiracist work with our students and families." It included four parts: "Identity, identity, identity; using books as windows and mirrors; really getting to know our students and families; teaching social justice vocabulary and topics like identity, race, racism, diversity, inclusion, justice, and activism." This definition was articulated on slides shared at staff meetings and PD sessions. The last component, teaching vocabulary and topics concerning race and equity, aligns with teachers' argument for direct instruction.

A focus on explicit instruction meant including in the curriculum direct instruction related to stereotypes and biases, race and racism, what the white teachers described as a more

accurate depiction of history, discussion of how to work against discrimination and racism, and "on how to counteract long-standing racist structures and beliefs."

Jenna described the first aspect as a component of her definition of antiracist teaching: "teaching our students about race, ethnicity, microaggressions, biases, stereotypes, discrimination, and accepting everyone for who they are." Other means of more direct instruction concerning race included teaching about what is currently taking place in society. This was accomplished with topical read alouds and current event articles.

Courtney shared how her definition of antiracist teaching has changed over time, emphasizing the shift in her perspective:

> I thought I was like checking a box with being an antiracist teacher if I covered certain civil rights events in history. We'd bring them up and we'd talk about how that was terrible back then, good thing we're living here now. We just kind of leave it at that.

It is evident teachers are striving to focus on creating spaces for critical thinking and discussion and moving away from a "check-list" type of teaching for equity.

Critical Thinking

The second description of antiracist teaching encompassed providing learning environments and time for conversations to generate critical thinking. Teachers are able to foster students' critical thinking by providing opportunities for students to make and discuss their own observations. The examples given came largely from language arts and social studies classes. Teachers described this as another layer of antiracist teaching. Courtney explained that "teachers must help students learn to use a critical lens in what they read, see, and hear." She shared an example of how she does this in her classroom by providing multiple perspectives, asking students what observations they were making or what feelings they were experiencing, providing

opportunities for agreeing and disagreeing, and letting the classroom be more inquiry-driven.

Anna emphasized this when she identified two goals for antiracist teaching:

> At the end of the day, we have to gauge- yes, we need for kids to understand there are systems of oppression and racism that is embedded inside of all of us. Right, and if I can't get exactly that right into that child…what I can do is support that kid's critical thinking and nobody is getting to question that. So sometimes it's making sure we're giving sure we're giving kids the tools to think through.

Anna illustrated how educators also focused on critical thinking to have a more dynamic influence on students from which to see their world through a different lens.

White Supremacy and Racism in Teaching

Lastly, as a part of teachers taking up antiracist-centered teaching, teachers reflected on the decentering of whiteness in education. This element involves intentionality about representation, awareness about who and what is valued in the classroom (e.g., white norms), and knowledge of where white supremacy shows up in education.

Reflections and awareness on how whiteness is centered and reinforced in the classroom included asking questions concerning power and value. Jenna explained that such planning and instruction includes "not seeing people who are white and their traditions as superior to people of color. Not learning about our world (history, norms, etc.) through a white frame of reference." Joanna shared how she reflects on which of her practices may center her whiteness. She also spoke to how the superiority and normalcy of whiteness can be reinforced in classrooms:

> How can I reflect on what I've been doing to see that if I'm, you know, centering my own whiteness in everything that I do…so it's not just like 'oh, grab a tool off the shelf, off I go'...I think as like mainly like female white teachers, right, in the elementary level, like we want to connect. We want to help our students make connections and a lot of the times we use stories and examples, right? Well like I have my stories and my examples and I have the books that I like. So, it's like 'wait a minute, is there a video I can use instead or a different book that I can use that doesn't have a white woman in it?' How can I help them be seen and also see others…we need to reach all of our learners, not just the learners that represent the norm.

Similarly, Blair highlighted this at Lakeside, where her definition of antiracist teaching included "trying to de-center myself as a white person in my teaching." Blair looked at places where there was evidence of whitewashing and "either centering whiteness…or just putting value on that perspective over others" in the existing curriculum. Some of the language shared with students in the lesson concerning the verdict of Derek Chauvin's trial exemplified this. I'll discuss the lesson later in this chapter.

Motivating Factors: Commitments to Antiracist Education

Beyond white teachers' definitions of antiracist teaching, it is critical to understand *why* they are committed and striving to be antiracist educators, and what that entails for them. To gain insight on teachers' perspectives, they were asked to identify their commitment to antiracist education and their familiarity with antiracist teaching in the questionnaire.

Figure 4

Teachers' Commitment to Antiracist Teaching
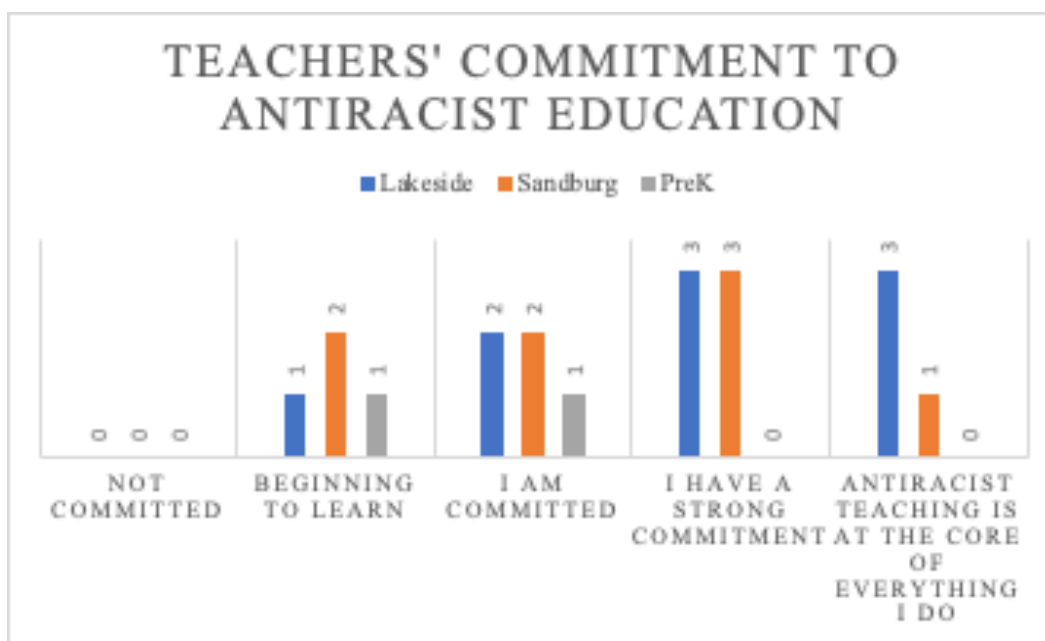
Largely, white teachers described three motivating factors: they consider it a part of their identity as a teacher, they believe social justice to be a human rights issue, and they believe in the importance of instilling antiracist values specifically for white students.

"The Core of Everything I Do": Component of Teachers' Identities

Many teachers identified their commitment to antiracist education as a part of their identity as a teacher and closely related to their "antiracism journey." The teachers who indicated they have a strong commitment to antiracist education or that antiracist education is "at the core of everything they do" – 10 teachers in total – were more likely to have described the increased attention to race and (anti)racism in 2020 as an accelerant for their motivation and commitments as opposed to an impetus. Jill is one of the teachers who described the events of 2020 in this way. As she explained that this commitment is a core part of her identity as a teacher, she shared how she tries to keep it at the "forefront" of her mind. This is true for everything she does, beyond specific initiatives, lessons, or meetings. She gave examples of when she believes issues of equity come up every day whether it relates to how teachers look at student behavior, methods of grouping students, or instructional models.

Even while educators expressed their growing commitments to antiracist education, a few shared their struggles with what it looks like to be an antiracist educator daily. Several teachers in Lakeside's teacher focus group grappled with this.

> Blair: I guess, I don't know what antiracist- I don't have a good idea of what antiracist education is, or what an antiracist teacher looks like. I don't think our school does. I just feel like we have to have some sort of- I'm still searching for this idea of like…having some sort of vision. Someone needs to like [give an] interactive model to me of what I should do. I still feel pretty lost.

> Joanna: I wonder too about, is it-where does it begin, and maybe it begins in different places for different people. Is it like this mindset and way of being first and then, I don't know, then it turns into actionable things that we do?

Jenna: And it's like, does anybody really know?...I don't know if I could define antiracist teaching, I don't know if I could define antiracist educator. And I don't know, is there anybody out there who really knows what that looks like that could interact a model, a full day of antiracist teaching? We are all just like figuring it out and trying to be culturally relevant in the moment and like what is working and what is not and trying to be reflective and doing that identity work continuously…I don't know if there's like, 'okay, checkmark, antiracist future.' That's antiracist education. And so like, I feel like we need [to] celebrate the good things and then continue to just be reflective on everything we're doing.

Joanna: There's no rubric yet.

Jill: …The whole system of education is a white supremacist system and like truly to make it an antiracist education system, we need to like dismantle it all and rebuild it and like these four people on the screen can't do that. But to me, it's more like what can we do, even if I can't say with full certainty that I am 100% an antiracist teacher. What are antiracist teaching practices that I do engage in every day, you know, or try to engage in every day or like what's one antiracist teaching practice that I engaged in today? Which [Blair], you 100% do, I give you that validation.

This conversation highlights educators' debate on what constitutes antiracist practices versus what it means to be an antiracist educator.

A Matter of Human Rights or to Provide "Exposure and Acceptance?"

While talking about motivations and essentials for antiracist teaching, there were conflicting ideas of whether teachers' purpose and role in taking up antiracist education in schools is 1) to provide students with more exposure, awareness, and acceptance or 2) to ground antiracist education in human rights. Educators who lean towards the latter purpose describe antiracist education as a human rights issue.

"Different is Good:" Provide Exposure and Encourage Acceptance.

Many teachers talked about helping students be more inclusive and accepting of differences when describing the goals of practices concerning antiracist and equity-centered education. These goals and examples of conversations with students included language such as "it's okay we're different" and "different is good." Marissa reflected this emphasis on recognition

and acceptance in her initial definition of antiracist teaching as she emphasized getting to know students and acknowledged the requirement for teachers to understand privileges. Marissa wrote,

> Antiracist teaching is taking the time to recognize and get to know students, their cultures, backgrounds, prior experiences, hopes and dreams. It's also knowing many students of color have not been afforded the opportunities their white peers have. Antiracist teaching is also taking the time to explore other curriculums and ways to teach in order to make sure every student is heard and understood for the person they are.

This sentiment acknowledging students' cultures was often coupled with examples of exposing students to various cultures and holidays. At Lakeside, the equity team focused on highlighting diverse holidays throughout the year. This initiative was one of their main efforts as an inaugural team. It was carried out consistently throughout the year. Members of the equity team described the purpose as being three-fold: sharing the history and origin of the holiday, providing exposure to each set of traditions and celebrations; and de-centering Christian holidays. Kaley defined the goal to be teaching "white students that their holidays aren't the 'normal/majority holidays' and allow[ing] students who do not celebrate the Christian/American centered holidays to feel represented in the classroom."

The equity team did discuss whether to acknowledge other non-religious holidays such as Earth Day and Day of Silence. They planned to incorporate them into their share out to the whole school, similar to the way they shared information about the other holidays. Blair suggested including content about recycling and saving the earth. As the team moved forward developing these plans, there was no discussion about asking Anna for permission. In the same March meeting, Becca put forth the idea of organizing something school-wide for Day of Silence. She explained that "for a day of silence I went rogue because my heart told me to. I put together a morning meeting for that. I still have a huge stack of books to read aloud." Becca's proposal for Day of Silence was met with questions concerning how the team would facilitate a school-wide

conversation about the reasons behind it: would students think it was "just like a fun spirit day like pajama day?" In order to move forward with highlighting this specific day, unlike Earth Day, the team would need to get approval from Anna. In the meeting, Becca anticipated the need for permission from Anna, and likely from the district as well, and shared that "I hate these hoops, y'all." Jill agreed: "I hate it too. Let us do the good, important work." The need to ask for permission was clearly seen as a barrier. More than once members of the equity team described what they were doing as "going rogue," implying they saw their efforts as being against the grain but moving in the desired direction. This sentiment surrounding permissions and "hoops" was also shared earlier in the year when the team proposed a school-wide Black Lives Matter Week of Action[10] (BLMWOA) in February. I will discuss this further in Chapter 8.

An Argument for Human Rights.

More prevalent was a conversation around the urgency and importance of centering antiracism and issues of equity as addressing human rights issues. This urgency was palpable in the equity team meetings at both Lakeside and Sandburg as they wrestled with their goals for their respective schools and challenges such as the restrictions of time and competing demands, especially in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. At Sandburg, many teachers described their commitments to antiracist teaching to be grounded in a larger call for human rights. This was reflected in the school's rationale, or their "why," for embedding antiracism in the curriculum. This "why" statement was included in staff meeting agendas, slides, and PD materials. The statement includes that they believe

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[10] Black Lives Matter Week of Action is a national coalition organizing for racial justice in education recognized the first week of February each year. www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com

Anti-racist work is the work of being a better human to other humans and should be our primary lens through which we filter our educational objectives. We also believe that at this moment in our world, cultivating positive identity formation, encouraging students to confront racial and ethnic injustice, and preparing them to live and work together in a diverse world should be our primary focus.

At the beginning of the year, the equity team at Lakeside brainstormed why their work was important as they started to develop their mission statement and goals for the year. Much of these beliefs centered around antiracist education as an issue of humanity:

> our team's work is important because… BECAUSE IT IS. JUST CAUSE. It's good for the community. It's good for the soul. It allows every kid to feel valued, understood, seen, heard. It's uncomfortable but IMPORTANT. We are lifelong learners. This is preparing students for ANTI-RACIST LIFESTYLES, citizenship, humans, etc. It will teach them to be GOOD HUMANS.

While the urgency is unmistakable through the text, the message is less clear. It is evident the team felt their work was "important" and felt strongly about every student feel valued and seen and teaching "them to be 'good humans.'" This draft "mission statement" from the equity team's notes was developed in the commencement of the 2020-2021 school year and the beginning of Lakeside's first year. The team did not return to solidify this statement.

The notion of needing to help or support white students to be "good humans" was brought up repeatedly as a motivator for antiracist-centered education. This focus was prevalent throughout conversations in team meetings, focus groups, and interviews. In a focus group with teachers at Lakeside, they discussed why teaching about race has become so controversial. Jill brought it back to why and when they teach about race:

> It's just like teaching kids to be good humans, like don't treat people badly because they're different than you. Don't treat people badly. Don't make assumptions about other people…why is that such a bad thing? I just think about like how I feel like I just really started this journey of like learning about race, like truly learning about it and what it means, like within the past five years, and like, where would I be if I started learning about it when I was five? Like where would these five year olds be?

Joanna responded, acknowledging the impact this would have for all students. She said they would be "farther than us…[with] a really strong foundation of everything. It's like a shift in power." Next, I continue to share how teachers talked about antiracist-centered teaching specifically aimed at white students.

Antiracism for White Students

There was a shared notion amongst teachers that even while the school district at large is predominantly white, or even if they were at a school with an entirely white student population, educators should have conversations with students about race. No teachers proposed that white students did not need antiracist-centered teaching. However, there were varying rationales for *why* white students needed antiracist-centered teaching. These reasons included for white students to learn about race, to engage in "identity work," for the benefits of students of color, and to "showcase" differences. Jackie highlights these appeals in her reflective questioning. She expresses her desire to know

> How to talk about antiracism in a way that affects kids so that they get it. I think that's the big question. How can I help my students who are not, do not identify as students of color? How can I help them understand and feel that empathy and feel that inequity?

There was an appeal for antiracist teaching to include specific opportunities for white students to learn about race and racism and generally "be better." Teachers discussed wanting white students to "know inequities," understand their white privilege, engage in "identity work," and learn accurate racial history. At Sandburg, some of these objectives would be met with the inclusion of "privilege" and "inequity" in their school-wide equity word of the daily lessons and visuals. The conversation at Sandburg around specifically teaching white students was less prevalent than it was amongst teachers at Lakeside.

Many teachers felt strongly about finding ways to reach white students specifically. While talking about planning lessons for the whole school, Jill described her sense of urgency for her students, emphasizing her goals specifically for white students:

> I need to make our students of color feel safe. I need to make our students of color like feel welcome and like that they belong. And I need our white students to learn how to not harm our students of color, how to not grow up to be racist and how to like check their own like white supremacy, unconscious biases.

Here Jill describes a distinction between what her white students need to *learn* and *do* in contrast to her goal for students of color to *feel* safe and a sense of belonging. She highlighted the desire to help white students to be "good humans," as discussed earlier. While there is a common notion of teaching white students to be "good humans," there is less clarity around what that entails. While she also communicated a sense of urgency, Blair was concerned about how the white population would receive such initiatives and conversations:

> I don't know like what the best, where the work needs to be done, of like antiracism and dismantling our current system, and like I know so much of that has to get done with white students and other students who have a lot of economic privilege which is like what the student body is here, but sometimes it feels like it's not the place where, like, people genuinely care about it because it's not in their face all the time.

This points to why "privilege" would be an equity word at Sandburg and why teachers shared they want to best establish how to navigate conversations of race and equity. The Lakeside teacher focus group discussed the importance of antiracist education for white students.

> Jill: I feel like it's arguably more important than talking to students of color about race. There's the money and power. They're going to be the ones who grow up and do the harm as white people…In [teacher's] kindergarten room, they wanted to teach about racism to kindergartners, and at their level, but because they'll be able to make the most impact starting at kindergarten.

> Joanna: White people have to understand what whiteness is and how it has historical impacts, current impacts, impacts into the future. I think we need to unravel this myth of meritocracy and hard work…I don't think you can do that without talking about race. Since kids are racialized from the time they are born.

Jenna: …Why is talking about race so taboo? I just don't understand why- I mean, I do understand the history and like all of that stuff…Why can't we have these conversations? You put your race on every single sheet you have, why can't we talk about what it means to be white, what it means to be Black…I don't know why that's so controversial at times.

Jill: Especially at the elementary level a lot of it is just teaching kids to be good humans. Don't treat people badly because they're different than you. Don't treat people badly. Don't make assumptions about other people…

Lastly, there is an emphasis on the need for white students to see and embrace differences. This was a recurring topic in some educators' conceptualization of antiracist education. We saw this when Marissa explained why educators should have conversations about race:

Even if we teach in a 100% white school district, that if we only teach what is white, then we are ignoring so much more of the world and we're doing students and ourselves a disservice to showcase the amazing talents and traditions of differences. If we choose to not teach about white supremacy and racism and culture we're doing students a disservice. We're not exposing them to what our world is.

Similarly, as a PreK teacher Kaley described, that part of antiracist teaching is about both helping children both find themselves as individuals and helping them understand themselves as a part of a larger collective:

You really are celebrating each child and showing them where their strengths and their specialities are and what makes them who they are…if I make these children feel empowered and confident in who they are as people, as humans, it'll make them want to be part of these bigger collective groups of humans and also, value and recognize other people who aren't like themselves because we've celebrated all of those things and they can see that those differences are there and that doesn't make them bad.

Both Marissa and Kaley reiterate the narrative of "differences are not bad," reinforcing the normalcy of whiteness.

While processing the harm that can be done if teachers do not talk about race in their classrooms or take up antiracist practices, Jill shared a story from a third-grade classroom at Lakeside. The students were working on their own identity maps and describing their physical components (e.g., "how do you look?"). Jill explained what took place in the classroom:

> [A] white girl wrote, I look normal and said it out loud, and she was like 'I look normal.' The Black boy sitting next to her said, 'I don't look normal.' [Blair, the co-teacher] immediately was like 'yes, you do. What do you mean by that?' And he said 'I am Black and being Black in [TOWN/DISTRICT] is not normal'...'all of my friends are white and I'm the only Black one so that makes me not normal.' And to me, right there, he's eight years old in third grade and he has already internalized that he is different, that he is wrong. The girl has already internalized that she is the norm.

While Marissa and Kaley emphasized celebrating differences, Jill explained how she has observed firsthand the problem with students learning the normalcy of whiteness at a young age and the consequences for both white children and children of color, specifically Black children in this instance.

Teachers' Decision-Making Concerning Instruction

As a component of their conceptualization of what antiracist teaching is, teachers described different factors that shape how they take up antiracist and equity-centered teaching practices. There are five main areas of influence: 1) feelings of readiness and confidence, 2) determining "age appropriateness," 3) evaluation of curricular materials, 4) reflections on previous teaching, and 5) perception of support from leadership.

Questions of Readiness and Confidence

When teachers expressed concern about not being "ready" to take on antiracist teaching or aspects of it, or that they were not wanting to "make a mistake," they created a barrier that could ultimately lead to inaction. Teachers' hesitation and staying in what may be their comfort zone perpetuated old practices and delays engaging in what teachers have described as antiracist teaching. In a teacher focus group, Justine highlighted the shared sentiments of unease that some teachers experience concerning their preparedness or confidence with the "vocabulary and background knowledge" to talk about race in classrooms. Jackie described this nonlinear growth and level of readiness:

For so long, and still I'm fumbling through like, how to say things in a way that like even I know how, how to say things so that my students understand my message and that it's clear at their level and it's impacting them…I think the more I do these talks, these book studies, these PD days, just immersing myself in the work, the more I have the language, and I have the answers when kids answer these questions, which helps me.

As a teacher and as a parent, Caroline exemplifies the influence educators' confidence and sense of readiness can have on their engagement and implementation of antiracist-centered teaching. She shared that she was glad her child's teacher facilitates conversations about race with the class. While Caroline placed value on the necessity of these conversations and wanted to be confident, it still made her "a little uneasy." Caroline is a support staff teacher and shared that

Frankly… I'm glad I'm not a classroom teacher, not because I don't think it's important, but because I don't know how to do that, I don't have the skills do that. Like, I don't have the skills to talk about that. I think it's really helpful the [equity team] makes the lesson plans and gives the supports like that. I think our teachers are very brave and it's the type of thing that like, of course we should be doing this, it's the right thing to do. But when it comes down to it, I don't have the confidence in myself to do it.

Others shared their hesitation and worry around having a conversation about race or reading a book that addresses issues of race and racism. These hesitations were around not knowing how to answer students' or parents' questions. Meredith described how teachers may be uncomfortable with responding to students' questions:

They can read a book, they can follow a lesson plan, they can ask kids questions throughout the book, that part isn't hard. It's what if I read this book about race, a student asks me a question, I don't know how to respond, I respond the wrong way and then all of a sudden, they don't want to tell their parents and then the parent is upset with me.

This expressed concern about answering student and parent questions comes at a time of increased parent feedback communicated at the school and district level. Teachers' worry can lead to hesitation and ultimately inaction. Mary acknowledged such fears of readiness as she argued that for white individuals to be antiracist educators they must

Be really vulnerable and get over the fear of not getting things right or not doing it perfect or not feeling like you have all the answers or wanting to wait until you know

everything or have it all perfectly planned, because I don't think we're going to get there. But, just be willing to start somewhere…just being willing to be vulnerable and say 'I don't, I might not be doing everything right but we can kind of learn together and just start conversations.

Determining Age Appropriateness

One of the first factors in teachers' decision-making processes for implementing antiracist teaching practices was determining what educators deem to be age appropriate.

Teachers of all grade levels in the study, PreK through fourth grade, shared that they struggle with identifying what is "age appropriate" for talking about race in their classrooms. At the kindergarten level, it may be easy to say something is "too big to show to kindergartners," as one teacher explained. While at the same time, a kindergarten teacher describes her incorporation of equity read alouds, guiding questions, and her intentional use of language as building an antiracist curriculum and classroom that is age-appropriate for her students.

Meredith is a proponent of read alouds for all grade levels as a venue for providing content pertaining to race and space for conversations. She explained how she teaches students about multiple perspectives and how to respect opinions in her early elementary classroom. She shared her experience of reading *Freedom Summer* with her class.[11] The read aloud led to conversations about students' feelings of (un)fairness, (in)justices, and questions about what students would do if they observed similar situations. As Meredith shared the conversations she'd had with her young students, she was reminded of a quote that "really hit home with [her] and is something that [she] shares a lot in meetings [which] is 'if our Black and Brown students can feel racism, our white students can talk about it.'"

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[11] *Freedom Summer* is a children's book set in Mississippi during the summer of 1964 about two boys, a white boy and Black boy, and the aftermath of the passage of the Civil Rights Act written by Deborah Wiles.

The debate over determining the "what" and "how" of age appropriateness was central to two specific equity team discussions at both Lakeside and Sandburg: *what* content could be shared at specific ages and *how* it could be presented and discussed. Determining what is "age-appropriate" for talking about race and inequity in classrooms is a significant component of teachers' decision-making concerning antiracist-centered practices. This influencing factor was evident throughout teachers' participation in interviews, focus groups, equity, and school leadership team observations, and in materials shared (e.g., different "K-2" and "3-4" grade-level versions of curricular material). While this could lead to some debate, hesitation, and potentially inaction for teachers, determining what is "age appropriate" largely led to continued reflection on antiracist-centered practices across grade levels.

Other challenges concerning teaching about race included helping to make distinctions about singular events, helping students understand that broad concepts such as racism are not a thing of the past, and that events such as police brutality are part of a long history. Blair shared how this difficulty came to fruition in her class discussion of the verdict for the Derek Chauvin trial:

> I had students who would be like 'he looks really scary' and then it's like, the same students would be like 'this is so wrong and racism affects me and my family and I don't want it to affect me in this way.' And then at the same time, like there was also this anti-blackness sentiment that was coming out. And so that was like a certain like- very hard to navigate and know what to say and what to do. It was hard to get across that like it's a pattern of a very long history and like to separate a moment or one thing that happened out of this long history so kids can understand that like this thing happened, but connect it with everything that's happened and things that will happen.

By addressing this current event, Blair was able to open her classroom to conversations about racism, police brutality, protests, and stereotypes and further normalize such conversations.

Teachers expressed concern about receiving feedback or pushback from white parents about race-related material or conversations not being "age-appropriate." However, Jill posited

this may be a misunderstanding as they were not having conversations about white supremacy or

racially-driven politics in kindergarten. Jill shared,

> I think that's kind of like the misconception of like being an antiracist teacher or teaching these lessons. It's like, it's being political or you're like jamming these things down their throats and it's like no, like [the teacher] gave them the books and like let them make their own opinions.

The inquiries and pushback from white parents varied from concern about specific books being

read in classrooms to more vague inquiries asking to "know when race was being taught." Again,

the context is paramount as this came at a time when parent feedback was increasing at the

school and district level and there was an increased politicization of teaching about race. I

discuss the politicization of teaching about race further in Chapter 9.

Evaluation of Curricular Materials

Another salient component of decision-making concerning the implementation of

practices is practitioners' evaluation of curricular materials. This reflection includes assessing for

diverse representation. Having diverse representation is a significant theme in teachers'

conceptualization of antiracist-centered teaching and in their reflections about the materials they

use. While teachers commonly refer to having diverse representation in the text as providing

"windows and mirrors," they also share ways they incorporate text and conversation surrounding

current events that pertain to race and inequities. Windows are described as ways to see out into

the world, as opposed to mirrors, which are ways to see a reflection of oneself. Blair shared her

reflection on her planning with representation and perspectives in mind:

> I'm always thinking about who I am talking about, what I'm talking about, how I'm talking about it, what images I'm using, how I'm presenting everything, what language I'm using, like the perspective [and] points of views with all the kids in the class, and like historically for our country...I'm making sure that it's being told from multiple perspectives, or at least I'm trying not to center the white voice.

Moreover, diverse representation in the curriculum is more than just the images and perspectives presented.

One of the initiatives at Sandburg during the 2020-2021 school year was the "Equity Read Alouds."[12] While this was a school-wide initiative starting the fall of 2020, there were teachers and entire grade levels implementing "diverse read alouds" the year prior. For the whole school initiative, the equity team identified books (e.g., *Baseball Saved Us*,[13] and *When We Were Alone*[14]) that corresponded with specific topics (e.g., "social justice taking action standards" and current event themes) and created lesson guides to share with teachers. The titles and themes were organized by grade level to prevent repetition. The read aloud guides included vocabulary, prior knowledge to access, the purpose for reading, and questions for during and after reading. The equity reading initiative was a part of the school's effort to embed their antiracism goals throughout the school including all grade levels.

At Sandburg, Mark described another approach to providing a diverse perspective in his classroom and curriculum. To incorporate current events, he included articles about how the pandemic has disproportionately impacted their students of color compared to white students. Similarly, several of Sandburg's read alouds were related to current conversations around police shootings and protests (e.g., *Something Happened in Our Town*). Later, I discuss the pushback teachers received from white parents in response to reading some of these social justice children's books, the article concerning the disproportionality of the pandemic's effects, and ways in which several teachers described the influence of this pushback from white parents on their decision-making and teaching.

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[12] The name "Equity Read Alouds" was modified for anonymity purposes.

[13] *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki is a children's book about Japanese internment camps during World War II.

[14] *When We Were Alone* by David Robertson is a children's book about the legacy of Native American boarding schools.

Centering Whiteness: Reflecting on Teaching Practices and Curriculum

As white teachers take up antiracist teaching, they discuss their reflections on previous teaching practices and the existing curriculum in use. This reflection includes asking what practices are currently in place that reinforces white supremacy and how teachers can apply a different lens or approach to curricular planning. Teachers' description of this practice demonstrates that this practice is ongoing and requires their own personal reflexive work.

There was evidence of educators reviewing and assessing how they may center their own whiteness in their teaching practices and looking for places where the white voice may be centered in the existing curriculum. At Lakeside, Blair shared how she tried to be conscious about the images and perspectives presented in her social studies curriculum and which learning styles are valued. She described the ongoing reflection she engages in:

> It's sort of like behind the scenes stuff that's always on my mind. It's harder for the curriculum that we're more just handed, so I'm always thinking about language and perception and just kind of like making sure that it's being told from multiple perspectives or at least I'm not trying to center the white voices, but I don't always know what that means and I know I don't always catch it.

As Blair highlighted, teachers' reflections about teaching were not always about the content of materials, but also concerned practices. In an equity team meeting at Sandburg, the team discussed materials that were going to be shared with the whole school. A teacher posed a question about what often occurs in the classroom: "how do we make it so that some students don't feel unincluded from the conversation because their skin might not be white?" Such reflective and proactive questions concern practice and are required beyond curricular planning (e.g., book choices).

Teachers shared their reflections concerning behavioral expectations and corresponding interactions with students. While few explicitly named it, some teachers were starting to unpack

how behavioral expectations in their schools reinforced white supremacy. Marissa shared some

of her reflections on how her conceptualization of behavioral expectations has changed over

time:

> My first few years of teaching I had students of color who would be overly excited, who would be loud…like things that I thought of, at the time, was not school…now I've learned, what I'm learning and working through, [is] how to implement that and teach to my students that people grow up with different cultures and different expectations. So knowing that the student who's like really excited and shouting out, I can let them answer and find a quiet moment to be like 'hey, next time, could you try to do Z, Y, Z.' Or in my brain, I'm thinking, 'Okay, this one student really likes to share and is just boisterous 'and maybe that's just like, even a couple of times I say 'okay, now shout out your answers' versus like 'okay, raise your hand.' So trying to incorporate students' strengths while not shutting them down.

She acknowledged she has a concept of what "school" is and shared that she was working

through reframing what participation and engagement in school can look like. Teachers'

reframing of behavioral expectations also included asking, "why a student who is Black is seven

times more likely to be getting written up than a student who was white…[and] why are so many

Black boys in our special education program?" Some of these questions motivated action. At

Sandburg, there was a focus on moving away from more exclusionary punitive practices and

shifting towards a focus on inclusion and the connection between curriculum and behavior. Mary

explained this change in culture and her work with teachers "on curriculum to think about what's

going to be most engaging for our students of color… [and for them] to see themselves, as

students of color, reflected in the curriculum and reflected in learning about their own cultural

history." While she doesn't explicitly name race, Anna speaks to an "ethical duty" educators

have:

> Educators have a responsibility and ethical duty to see and to understand and to know what systems and policies have supported or upheld the doors being open…we are responsible to see the systems for what they are and who they're created by and who is benefitting from them.

This shift in thinking we see with Anna, Blair, and Marissa points to us to look away from the students and toward the structures, policies, and practices within the school; this demonstrates a way of deframing previously held white-centered beliefs.

Perception of Support from Leadership

Teachers differed with respect to the support they perceived from school-level leaders (e.g., principals and instructional coaches) in comparison to the support from district-level leaders (e.g., directors of instruction and superintendents). Teachers described how their perceptions of the lack of support from the district-level administration played a significant role in their implementation of antiracist teaching. This influence was expressed in teachers' individual experiences with parent feedback and opposition, and in their observation of colleagues' experiences. The increased rhetoric around CRT being taught, or not, in K-12 schools and the associated parent opposition heightened teachers' worry about whether the district would support them. Amidst local and national attention on parent involvement at school boards and anti-"CRT" legislation going into effect, teachers also expressed concerns about losing their job or being on the news. Again, the timing and context of the study, as discussed in Chapter 5, is critical to how teachers are talking about and taking up race and (anti)racism in their teaching.

Alongside this caution, teachers also shared how more concrete support from the district could influence their practices. Throughout the school year, teachers made appeals for the district to "be bold" and "go on record" with families and the community with their commitment to antiracist and equity-centered education. This desire for the district to "go on record" was a common recurring theme across educators. Increasing school-level educators' sense of security with related initiatives and practices was one motivator behind this appeal. Joanna, an instructional coach, predicted that if this was to take place, teachers "would take more risks,"

maybe "have conversations that maybe they've been afraid to have or start to plan for things…I

don't know, I don't think they feel safe right now." The risks ranged from reading more social

justice books to hanging BLM flags, sharing more about current events, and teaching more

explicit lessons about race. The principals also discussed this theme in their focus group and

what district support would mean for them as school-level leaders. Riley shared,

> I think a lot of people who go into education are perfectionist- there's a bunch, but there's definitely like a mold, they fit the rule followers, they like to check boxes, they like to have everything wrapped up with a bow and this is messy work. So I can see why a lot of people are scared to engage in it and in a bolder way...We feel, and I think the same thing, that it just feels like '*are* we all supported in this work by the whole system?' You know, all the people that surround us. Are we all linking arms and saying this is our mission to dismantle this?

In a district PD session several educators were highlighted to share their experiences and

thoughts concerning the district's history of race and equity. At the end of the video, educators

from across the district made similar appeals for the district to "be bold." One teacher in the

video said,

> I would like to see us be bold. I would like us to take more stances to call human rights issues what they are. I think back to what's happened this past year with the pandemic and the racial divide in our country. As you know, a lot of people, for the first time, really started struggling with the idea that we don't live in a post racial society and to think that doesn't permeate into our classrooms is a bit ridiculous to think. For us to pretend that something like Black Lives Matters or LGBTQ rights or acknowledging genders that people identify with, those things as political as a mistake, I would be worried as a district we don't continue to take stronger stances on things that are clearly human rights issues. We need to shut down the conversation about some things being political long before we waste time and cause harm trying to appease people who won't be appeased by anything other than us, dismissing these notions.

In the principal focus group, the leaders shared their responses to this quote,

Kathy: At this moment we're like, 'let's be bold' and at the time I would have agreed with that. At this moment, I disagree, not with a sentiment that we as a district have work to do and that this is all about human rights, it's not political, I totally agree with that. But I think, I worry that if we say, 'let's just be bold,' I worry that by being bold, are we alienating people who could be allies in this work…Maybe it's more, I'm just thinking out loud here, about being strategic but maybe defining what being bold really is.

Riley: .. Yes, it's human rights but teaching is a political act in many ways…We're not just teaching reading and writing, we're teaching critical thinking…I don't think being bold means being an asshole but I also think it's like, I continue to think about what voices have a space at the table, and are the spaces like 'hey, come on in.'"

Anna: And I would say, actually, [Riley], like one example you just shared though is an example in my head of being bold. Like you were bold with that family by saying 'no, like this is what we're going to do.' Whereas, I know I've had situations in the past where I've said 'Okay.'…And I think most recently I said okay because I just wasn't sure what the support was gonna feel like in the background for me to say no.. And that's not a hit on anybody else, it's just navigating these waters right now.

The principals grappled with the idea of what "being bold" meant but also what a statement could mean for their leadership. Kathy shared a different opinion. She questioned the potential downfalls of making such a statement and argued a statement alone was inadequate- the district would need to be strategic in their efforts.

Conceptualization of Antiracist Teaching in Practice: How Teachers See Themselves

A significant divergence in teachers' conceptualization of antiracist teaching is whether it centers on explicitly *teaching* about race and antiracism or if it means *being* an antiracist teacher embedding such beliefs in all practices. Riley grappled with this idea and explained how she sees this concept play out for teachers:

I think people are like, 'I'm gonna do this read aloud and then I did my equity thing and [Riley] will get off my ass. Versus…to me, it's about building this inner like fire for this work…I don't think it happens in a one workshop deal. It's like this continual like peeling of the onion and this awareness.

Between these two ideologies, there are 5 facets teachers delineate for antiracist pedagogy: 1) identity work, 2) explicitly teaching about race, 3) social studies curriculum, 4) emphasis on read alouds, and 5) valuing differences.

"Identity Work" for Teachers and Students

A common thread in professional development, educators' antiracism journeys, and antiracist teaching is "identity work." Both teachers who described antiracist teaching as more explicit instruction and those who described more of an antiracist pedagogy included examples of racial identity work for students as components of their teaching. Similar to practitioners' belief that before engaging in antiracism work, or an antiracism "journey," students must also start with their own identity work. There was a concern amongst educators that teachers who might not be as far along on their journey, those who might be newer to antiracist-centered teaching, might just say "give me a lesson and tell me how to be an antiracist teacher." However, as Courtney explained, "you can't just be an antiracist teacher unless you're looking within yourself…I can't just give you a lesson if you haven't done your own work."

A focus for Sandburg's antiracism and equity work for the last several years has been "identity work" for both educators and students. In the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year staff at Sandburg participated in an identity circle activity. The identity reflection asked educators to identify three circles:

1) Inner circle: identities that you relate to most significantly at this point of time in your life. Identities that you think have the most impact on your life.

2) Second circle: Identities that are important to you at this time in your life but not as important as the inner circle.

3) Outer circle: identities that are important to you at this time in your life but not as important as the second circle.

Both students and teachers engaged in the same identity journal during the 2020-2021 school year across several, if not all, grade levels. This journal contained scaffolded prompts for students to first identify physical traits as a part of their identity and then their racial identity. The journal asks students to reflect on the following questions:

- How does your race and/or ethnicity help to make you who you are?

- Is anyone else in class the same group as you? How does that make you feel?

- When was the first time you noticed that you are the race or ethnicity that you are? What did you notice? How does that make you feel?

- Can other people see your race? How do you feel about this?

- When was the first time you noticed that people can be of different races? What did you notice?

- Do you feel more comfortable around people who look like you or does it not matter?

- Do you think what you look like affects the way people treat you? How?

Several teachers explained that doing the identity journals with students while teaching online during the pandemic did prove to be more challenging and looked forward to the opportunity to have similar conversations in person.

At Sandburg, students' engagement in their identity journals was intentionally paired with read alouds related to identity. The equity team, along with other teacher leaders, compiled a list of specific read alouds to pair with students' work on their identity journals by grade level bands

between K-4. These books included titles such as *Skin Like Mine*,[15] *All the Ways to be Smart*,[16] *Why Am I Me?*,[17] and *My People*[18] and were distributed to teachers directly throughout the school.

Identity work was not as much of a central focus or something students engaged in at Lakeside or the PreK site. There was one read aloud included at Lakeside for K-2 that was included under an identity standard. Justine shared that part of her goal for taking up antiracist teaching is for her students to "really start thinking about who they are and seeing themselves as more of a bigger picture than not just themselves." Teachers at all sites did share their own reflexive work on their racial identity as discussed previously.

Explicit Teaching Concerning Race

An overwhelmingly significant understanding of antiracist teaching is to explicitly teach race, (anti)racism, and inequities. Teachers that place an emphasis on direct instruction on race and inequities tend to describe the summer of 2020's "racial awakening" as an impetus for them taking up antiracist-centered teaching rather than an accelerant for this commitment. Similarly, they largely included explicit direction as a component of antiracist teaching in their initial questionnaire. Nine teachers included direct instruction in their definitions of antiracist teaching. Kaley's definition simply stated antiracist teaching is "explicit instruction on how to counteract long-standing racist structures/beliefs." Others included "teaching our students about race,

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[15] *Skin Like Mine* is a children's book by LaTashia M. Perry that addresses and celebrates diversity for young children.

[16] *All the Ways to be Smart* is a children's book by Davina Bell that celebrates all the ways for kids to be smart such as being inquisitive, athletic, artistic, and empathetic.

[17] *Why Am I Me?* is a children's book presented through a poetic exchange of two characters who don't realize they're asking the same questions about themselves. The book, by By Paige Britt, celebrates humanity and diversity.

[18] *My People* is a poem by Langston Hughes, interpreted by sepia photographs by Charles R. Smith Jr., that captures the soul of being a Black American today.

ethnicity, microaggressions, biases, stereotypes, discrimination, and accepting everyone for who they are" and "helping students understand that we live in an unjust world."

Teaching about race and racism, assumptions, stereotypes, and inequities in the community are three areas teachers highlighted to take up in antiracist teaching. Sandburg's equity world wall and "word of the day" are examples of teaching about race, diversity, and antiracism (e.g., justice, privilege, racism). When *privilege* was the word of the day, the team shared resources with teachers to help students think beyond material and monetary privilege. Using a "toolbox" as a visual representation, teachers helped model for students how, for example, being white, cisgender, and able-bodied are privileges. The word of the day was first shared on the morning announcements before being incorporated into each classroom's curriculum.

Social Studies: A Common Home for Teaching about Race and Antiracism

Explicit lessons concerning race and social justice are most frequently embedded in social studies classes at Lakeside and Sandburg. Teachers at both schools shared how they incorporated Learning for Justice[19] standards and materials into their existing curricula. This curricular resource was the most popular resource referenced. The standards were explicitly stated as school-wide guides for their efforts to adopt antiracist curricula. In a PD session at Sandburg at the beginning of the school year, Riley and the equity team outlined four reasons why they would implement the Learning for Justice standards: the anchor standards and domains (identity, diversity, justice, and action) are age-appropriate, the standards provide a

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[19] Learning for Justice is a website that provides "educational resources (articles, guides, lessons, films, webinars, frameworks and more) to help foster shared learning and reflection for educators, young people, caregivers and all community members" https://www.learningforjustice.org/

common language, they provide a scope and sequence for K-12, and they provide examples for

what the lessons may look like when implemented.

During this school year, Blair had the autonomy to build out the social studies curriculum

for her grade level at Lakeside. This freedom provided a blank slate from which to design and

create at a time when others were modifying existing curricula to achieve their goals concerning

antiracist-centered teaching. Blair largely used the standards from Learning for Justice and either

built out lesson materials independently or used those from the Learning for Justice site. At the

end of the year, she designed a unit for students to do a choice research project. She described

her thinking through the planning process:

> I basically plan every lesson every day so I am always thinking about who I am talking
> about, what I am talking about, how I'm talking about it, what images I'm using, how I'm
> presenting everything, what language I'm using…so just like that sort of the behind the
> scenes stuff that's always on my mind.

While much of the teachers' more explicit teaching and incorporation of explicit instruction

concerning race took place in social studies classrooms, there were important examples of how

antiracist teaching showed up across other subjects and areas of the schools such as reading.

Emphasis on Read Alouds as an Instructional Tool

Teachers describe three components of implementing read alouds for antiracist teaching:

providing diverse representation, ensuring time and space for students to ask questions and

engage in dialogue around race, and developing a way to embed antiracist teaching across the

school. Read alouds were a practice implemented across grade levels at both elementary sites.

The equity read aloud initiative highlights Sandburg's effort to embed its antiracism

vision and goals throughout the building. The equity team designed a read aloud curriculum that

included monthly children's books (e.g., *Separate Is Never Equal*,[20] *When We Were Alone*,[21] and *Mama's Nightingale*[22]). Teachers were provided plans for each book with pre-prepared focus areas, vocabulary, and guiding questions. Meredith shared the role the read alouds play in her classroom:

> I think the read alouds are huge because they give a base, they give a starting point. Everybody can read a book, everybody can get on board with a book and then you can take the conversation as far as you want it to go. I think the talking points are huge because it's already laid out there.

A common phrase used around read alouds is to provide "windows and mirrors" for students. While many teachers explained that books should be mirrors for students, others remind that students should have access to *both* windows and mirrors. The idea that all books should be mirrors for students is contradictory to the idea of providing diverse representation in school libraries unless teachers are specifically speaking to every student having access to a "mirror." While Lakeside didn't have a similar type of school-wide initiative, teachers also talked about evaluating their existing libraries and how read alouds could provide opportunities to talk about race. When asked to share a time she was proud about how she engaged in a conversation about race, Jamie shared about an instance she advocated for just this type of effort. At a professional learning community (PLC) meeting, the teachers were planning a unit and all of the books' characters were animals. Jamie proposed to the group that it "could be a chance that we actually expand our library and use like characters of different races or cultures."

An essential component of read alouds is providing time and space for students to ask questions and dialogue around race. Marissa explained that this is the guaranteed time in her day

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[20] *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation*, by Duncan Tonatiuh, is a biography about the struggles that a Latinx family has to fight for the end of segregated education in California.
[21] *When We Were Alone*, by David Alexander Robertson, is about American Indians and residential schools.
[22] *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation*, by Edwidge Danticat, is about a child and their mother's relationship while at an immigration detention center.

when she has time and space to talk to students about topics and issues concerning race. Such

dialogue or questions may include introducing or clarifying vocabulary, sharing feelings, or

making connections. Meredith shared that during read alouds in her early-age classroom she uses

a lot of language such as,

> 'this oughta give you a big feeling inside'…we talked a lot about these definitions which really like, you're just saying 'what is justice?'…I often will just pause and say 'I just want to read that again because that gives me a really big feeling' and then that sparks a really good conversation about the humanity, you know…just the like the humanity of it. Kids really connect to the feeling.

Teachers expressed concern for *all* teachers' confidence and capacity to hold dialogue and

answer students' questions. For instance, there was concern that if a teacher did not agree with

the chosen book or did not feel comfortable opening the class to the discussion, the

implementation would be more limiting than that of a teacher who posed questions to students

and opened the class up for questions. Meredith shared her enthusiasm for read alouds as an

entry point for conversations about race in early grade levels. She also shared her observations of

teachers' hesitations and worries:

> I think the part that teachers are really uncomfortable with is how to respond. They can read a book, they can follow a lesson plan, they can ask kids questions throughout the book, that part isn't hard. It's 'what if I read this book about race, a student asks me a question, I don't know how to respond, I respond the wrong way, and then all of a sudden, they don't want to tell their parents and then the parent is upset with me.'

Meredith shows why implementing the equity read alouds requires certain beliefs, or "buy-in,"

and skill-sets of teachers. This worry was amplified by the desire and argument that the

initiatives should be school-wide and fully embedded to have their full impact. A few teachers

shared they themselves did not feel fully prepared or sure they could confidently answer

students' or parents' questions. Teachers' described level of preparedness or confidence impacted

whether, or how, they utilized antiracist and equity-based read alouds.

While read alouds were a significant component of both Lakeside and Sandburg's antiracist-centered efforts, there was a concern amongst teachers that this practice could fall in the category of a "check-list" approach to teaching. While talking about how she embeds such practices into her language arts class, Courtney described such concerns:

> We just want it to be something that everyone embraces and feels like it's important…because if people don't want to teach certain things, they don't have that own like intrinsic motivation…it's not going to go well. Like, if there's a teacher that has a book that they're supposed to read, they're just going to read it and check that box. They're not going to have important conversations with it or give kids background…It's not going to make as much of an impact.

This concern was a conversation at an equity team meeting at Lakeside. The team struggled with the ongoing debate of whether to create and hand-deliver materials to teachers (such as lesson plans for read alouds) or to increase the number of development opportunities for teachers. At the time, the team was providing lesson materials for diverse holidays and equity "nuggets" to all staff. This concern highlights the challenge teachers face with a sense of urgency between implementation in the classroom and development and learning for teachers: "is the focus right now on the staff side of it or providing things for staff to use with students? …staff learning *to teach* or is it us giving? Like, 'here it is - social studies lesson.'?"

Varying levels of teacher commitment and implementation can influence students' experience and takeaways. This was an additional concern discussed at equity team meetings and shared by individual teachers. Without opportunities for teacher learning, the implementation of read alouds would vary, as would the student takeaways. This was a time when the binary of teachers being "on board" or not could lead to assumptions about teachers' beliefs and teaching such as those discussed earlier.

Implementing read alouds proved to be more challenging while teaching virtually. Mark explained that while teachers were trying, a "face to face discussion" is so much easier,

especially concerning race and equity. This was a time when students were quieter and sometimes more reluctant to share than they had experienced when reading and discussing in person.

Emphasis on Valuing Differences

The idea of exposing students to differences and teaching students to be accepting of differences was identified as a component of antiracist teaching practices across all three school sites. Teachers' descriptions included language such as the "value of differences" and teaching students that "differences aren't bad." This was commonly done in the context of talking about identity and opportunities afforded because of the color of one's skin. Kaley and Marissa described similar sentiments of wanting students to understand differences aren't bad. Marissa explained that when talking about students' identity she wanted them to understand that "their identity is different from other people's and that's not bad." Also placing an emphasis on differences, Kaley said part of antiracist teaching is to teach students to "value and recognize other people who aren't like themselves because we've celebrated all those things, and they can only see those differences are there, that doesn't make them bad." This emphasis reinforced her belief that her job is to "enlighten and open up the world" for students. While Blair struggled with the "surface level" work being done at her school, she stressed her belief that the "ultimate goal is to raise a generation of students that are much more accepting and knowledgeable of one another and our world." The belief surrounding acceptance and difference runs contradictory to the goals of antiracist education to acknowledge race and injustices and can furthermore promote racist ideologies and the normalcy of whiteness.

The argument for providing exposure to and acknowledging differences was most notably present amongst the PreK and lower elementary teachers. Kaley explained that her role

as a teacher is "not to indoctrinate, [her] job is to enlighten and open up the world." As she spoke about the goals she holds for her classroom, she stressed her belief in accepting and valuing differences in teaching: "I feel like one of my jobs is to expose students to different cultures so that they're able to learn, embrace, accept, understand their peers. And, you know, people who might not look like them." Moreover, her goal is for students to "value and recognize other people who aren't like themselves because we've celebrated all those things they can see those differences are there, that doesn't make them bad." Both of these explanations place emphasis on othering and differences.

One of the significant initiatives for the equity team at Lakeside was their sharing of "inclusive holidays" throughout the year schoolwide. As reviewed earlier, the team sent out materials to all grade levels throughout the year in an effort to celebrate a diverse range of holidays for every month. For example, their May and June holidays included May Day, Memorial Day, Cinco de Mayo, Ed al-Fitr, Orthodox Easter, and Juneteenth. This focus was softened and watered down in contrast to how the teachers at Lakeside describe antiracist education and the goals they have for Lakeside. When defining antiracist teaching, the majority of teachers on their equity team included acknowledging systemic racism and white supremacy in their definition. Becca, a member of the equity team, referenced Dr. Betina Love for her definition. Becca wrote,

> I pull my definition from Betina Love and abolitionist teaching. Abolitionist teaching is built on the creativity, imagination, boldness, ingenuity, and rebellious spirit and methods of abolitionists to demand and fight for an educational system where all students are thriving, not simply surviving.

There is a disconnect between this definition and the team's focus on diverse holidays; highlighting the holidays as the team's central focus communicates a superficial celebration of difference. I discuss this gap between commitments and action further in the discussion section.

Chapter 8

Antiracist Leadership From the Perspectives and Experiences of Teachers

[Riley] is willing to say the reason this decision has been made is to provide an equitable education for all kids…She is not afraid to say 'this is who we are…these are our beliefs.' She doesn't really waver on it. It's not easy." - Marsha, Teacher at Sandburg

While an individual can directly influence and shape another person, the amount of time needed to have an influence is not easily measured. In this case, when inquiring about teachers' perspectives concerning the influence their principal may have, it is important to note the number of years they have worked together but also recognize that this length of time is not directly correlated to influence. As Lakeside was in its first year, it was also the first year for all the teachers to work at Lakeside with Anna. One teacher specifically noted that it was challenging for her to speak in detail about the way Anna might influence her attitudes and practices concerning antiracist education because she didn't know Anna or about Anna's journey well enough yet. At the same time, the teacher did not have any negative associations with Anna concerning her leadership for equity or antiracism. This anecdote is important to note: she didn't have ill connotations but rather had remaining questions about Anna's leadership given the short timeline. While teachers are asked specifically about their current principal, they may also be referencing comparisons they have made to their previous principals or experiential knowledge they have gained about principals' influence concerning their antiracist attitudes and practices. Even in Riley's fifth year as principal at Sandburg, there is some variance in how long teachers have worked with her. There were only three teachers that had been at the school longer than the five years Riley had been principal.

In their second interviews, I asked Anna, Riley, and Kathy to each write out their personal definitions of antiracist leadership. The principals' definitions are below (see Table 8) to

provide additional context for the findings concerning teachers' perspectives on principals' leadership.

Table 8

Principals' Definitions of Antiracist Leadership

Principal	Definition
Anna	Who we are and we as humanity, educators, have a responsibility and ethical duty to see and to understand and to know what systems and policies have supported or upheld the doors being open just because of how we appear, who we are, whether it's race, gender, different ways we can identify. We are responsible to see the systems for what they are and who they are created by and who is benefitting from them. We are responsible to create spaces that question the white supremacy cultural norms that we have in place. We are responsible for creating spaces that open up conversations and invite dialogue for all. We need to see here, we value children, their assets, their stories, and all that they have and who they are, and what they bring to us…Also have to think about college, career, community ready and how are we actually creating the opportunities as educators for our students for college for careers and for communities.
Riley	From a leadership perspective, it's one where people are doing the work, that we're highlighting those practices and we are sharing with each other in a school so it's not just putting in one or two classrooms but it's happening in multiple. And for me, the vision of an antiracist school leadership is that it's part of our mission, vision, collective commitments, our professional development plan, like it's weaved and embedded into the fabric of who we are, like formally and informally…It's my responsibility to kind of honor where people are on their journey and to provide adequate support for them at the pace they need to make…providing scaffolding or support or even like differentiation like I would do for kids.
Kathy	My personal goal is that all students belong and thrive. I use the word thrive instead of achieve because I think it's more than academics, it's also about growing people and so it's the academic piece of our students but also their social-emotional, their identity, and everything. So, to me that's thriving. So, as a leader, I, first of all, have to engage in this work on my own so I have to do my own reflection acting on my own identity in order to understand the identity of others. I feel like my role isn't necessarily teaching

others but guiding them through the process because I think when it comes to antiracist or social justice work it's about reflection and less about telling people what to do. It's different than teaching you how to do an instructional approach or how to administer an assessment. It's really about identities and so I can't tell people what their identities are, and I can't tell them what other people's identities are but I can guide people through the process…remove bias in our language, our policies, and our systems of schools and I think in order to do that we have to know our history more accurately not just from one perspective.

In this chapter, I share four ways that teachers perceive their principals shape and influence their adoption of antiracist-centered teaching: 1) principals' sharing of their own antiracism journey, 2) principals articulating goals and efforts to fully embed priorities for antiracism, 3) utilization of shared leadership, and 4) building organizational identity and "unwavering support." In Chapter 9, I will share other factors outside of their principals' influence that also shape teachers' adoption of antiracist teaching.

Sharing One's Antiracism Journey: Practicing Vulnerability

Principals' demonstration of vulnerability and honesty were highlighted as influencing teachers' learning and teaching concerning antiracism. Teachers identified "speaking first" and being their "real self" as indications of principals' vulnerability and honesty. When principals showed a vulnerable side of themselves, it helped create an environment in which the teachers felt more comfortable engaging in conversations about race. Jamie explained that this level of comfort was achieved by Anna "being vulnerable herself and speaking either first or being real herself and then kind of allows the rest of us to follow suit if we feel like it." Like Jamie, Justine described the work Anna did to build relationships and how her vulnerability came through:

> Again, showing her vulnerability, showing that like we literally are all learning as we go, and really asking us for advice or input on certain situations…also staff recognitions and shout outs. Just like kids, teachers want to feel that too, and they want to feel appreciated, and those shoutouts that we have each week go a long way…creating a sense of community within [Lakeside], and she did that from the start where now…I feel so comfortable.

Justine highlighted the way Anna built community and trust amongst the staff by demonstrating appreciation, asking for input, and showing that she was learning alongside teachers. Justine went on to stress the importance of the foundation Anna built through "relationships, relationships, relationships…a huge leadership move that she made from the start." This vulnerability and relationship building led to the creation of spaces where teachers said they felt comfortable to be "open and vulnerable in this work of being an antiracist educator." It was not explicitly stated whether the spaces were physical spaces (i.e., a room) or not but teachers frequently mentioned teams such as the equity team meeting as spaces where they felt comfortable.

Practicing vulnerability and modeling reflection often was demonstrated by principals' sharing of their personal antiracism journey with their staff. Justine explained that when Anna shares her stories and journey, it could be "empowering" for teachers and help encourage them to feel "safe" to share their own journeys. Joanna also described the "artful way" Anna "embed[s] her past experience and what she's learned…what she's fearful or scared of." Ultimately, she believed that when she saw "my leader being vulnerable or emotional or questioning decisions that maybe she's made in the past, it makes me feel safer to do those same things, right, to not have all the answers and to be a learner."

Similarly, teachers at Sandburg described Riley's recurring practice of sharing not only her journey as a leader, along with specific stories, but also sharing her *why* (i.e., motivations and goals) to shape their commitments and practices. Riley described that sharing her antiracism

journey was something she did intentionally. She aimed to be vulnerable, have "real conversations," and make sure everything she did was "organic."

The influence of sharing their antiracism journey and demonstrating vulnerability was described to be more meaningful as both Anna and Riley prioritized building and maintaining relationships in their respective buildings. Multiple teachers at Lakeside shared how Anna was all about "relationships, relationships, relationships!" and that it showed up in her efforts to center antiracist commitments at Lakeside. One of the attributes shared about Anna was how she "opens" or "holds space" for conversations. This space was described by Joanna as a time for teachers to "speak their truth more or ask questions…it also positions us as learners." Jenna explained what this practice looked like at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year:

> She does a great job at putting school on hold and opening space for people…the beginning of school is a very hectic time and there's so much to get done obviously…there are bigger things happening and things that are affecting the people around us, like us and other people around us, and I appreciate her openness [to] creating a space in the conversation for us to process through it together and like 'how is this going to affect our kids? How do we need to support our kids and our families right now?'

Many teachers from Sandburg spoke about how they saw Riley's background in student support services shape her antiracist-centered leadership. Riley focused on engaging families, working with teachers asking questions about student engagement, considering how students of color were reflected in the curriculum and learning, and assessing how students were learning about their own racial and cultural identities. Caroline spoke to the "safe and positive" staff and student culture Riley fostered while "also putting this type of content at the forefront and consistently these are the things we talk about at staff meetings." While these components of leadership were identified as influential for teachers, they were not elements that Anna spoke about explicitly concerning her leadership. These were soft skills and interpersonal practices (e.g., building trust

and relationships) that proved influential. Teachers identified how principals' more concrete leadership strategies and practices shaped their own practices as well.

Goals and Efforts to Fully Embed Antiracist Priorities

Principals' efforts to embed beliefs and goals concerning antiracist education throughout the school was an essential practice that teachers perceived as shaping their own practice. Principals achieving clarity around their goals and practices and providing ongoing reminders about their respective schools' *why* for antiracist education proved to be influential and shaped teachers' commitments and practices for antiracist education. Principals accomplished this in three ways: by establishing transparent priorities concerning antiracist teaching, intentionally including all stakeholders, and by implementing transparency in decision-making. Teachers were able to see principals making their commitments to antiracist education an explicit priority through clarity of established mission and vision, resource allocation (e.g., hiring, PD, and supplementary programming), and family engagement. Expressing she wanted to see more done at Lakeside, Justine clarified that she didn't know "if it is because we're a new school, I don't know if it's because it's COVID and this whole hot mess of every single time that is shifting and changing." Teachers at Lakeside recognized the importance of these three elements of leadership but also, they found that the conditions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and it being Lakeside's first year to be barriers for these elements to come to fruition during the 2020-2021 school year.

Clarity of Mission and Vision

Principals' creation, communication, and maintenance of a mission and vision that centered on or contained commitments to antiracist and equity-centered education influenced teachers' perspectives on their own teaching practices. While Anna initially included equity and

antiracism in her hiring process, communicating this as a priority for the school, teachers also shared varying levels of frustration concerning the lack of an explicit mission or goals. When asked about Lakeside's mission or vision, Jackie referenced the district's goals that were specific to Black and Latinx students. Jocelyn spoke about how the school was unofficially following along "in that same pathway" as that was their "focus right now." Jackie explained:

> So we did have a district goal of supporting our students who identify as Black or Latinx. Like that's part of our literacy goal is closing the achievement gap… in terms of [Lakeside] as a school, since it's so new, I think our big goal this year with antiracism work was establishing what our identity is going to be as a school.

Jackie went on to describe her disappointment and frustration with how establishing that school identity never came to fruition. I go into that frustration in further detail later in the chapter.

While Lakeside may not have had a clear mission or vision statement teachers could point to, there was a "primary focus" that Anna and the leadership team had written as a component of the school's School Goal Plan.[23] Lakeside's primary focus for its inaugural year was "to create a climate and culture where all students, staff, and families feel welcomed and supported; a school environment where all students' needs are met and they are successful." The creation of Lakeside's equity team was detailed on the plan document as an action strategy to work towards "student engagement and well-being."

At the same time that there was uncertainty around Lakeside's mission or vision concerning equity or antiracist-centered education, teachers in the focus group also shared uncertainty about what antiracist education is or what antiracist teaching entails. Blair shared,

> I don't have a good idea of what antiracist education is or what an antiracist teacher looks like. I don't think our school does. I just feel like we have to have some sort of, I don't know, I'm just like searching for this like idea of like, it goes back to being right and wrong but just kind of like having some sort of vision.

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[23]School Goal Plan is a pseudonym used to preserve the anonymity of the school district.

Blair even argued that Lakeside might not fully understand what antiracist education or teaching entails. In this focus group conversation, Joanna responded that she too wonders about this and questions "where does it begin and maybe it begins in different places for different people but like, is it like this mindset and way of being first, and then, I don't know, like and then it turns into actionable things?" Moving away from the notion of a vision for Lakeside, the focus group brought up the question of whether there is a model for antiracist education or teaching as they are, as Joanna put it, "just like figuring it out and trying to be culturally relevant at the moment and what is working and what is not and trying to be reflective and doing that identity work."

Teachers at Sandburg described how Riley's efforts to include the school's commitment to antiracist education in the mission and vision of the school reinforced it as a clear priority for the school community. They explained that Riley reminds staff throughout the year about the *why* behind their school commitment to antiracist education, thus reinforcing the strong philosophy and vision. This commitment was frequently visible as one of the first slides for the beginning of year PD, staff meeting, and other staff sessions. The slide included three belief statements:

1) We believe anti-racist work is the work of being a better human to other humans and should be our primary lens through which we filter our educational objectives.

2) We also believe that at this moment in our world, cultivating positive identity formation, encouraging students to confront racial and ethnic injustice, and preparing them to live and work together in a diverse world should be our primary focus.

3) We believe this work should be done in conjunction with education for our entire school community, including staff and parents.

Valuing transparency and consistency, Courtney described how Riley would give many personal examples in connection to her antiracism journey: she "shares how much she cares about it and why she's so passionate about it…to help people understand." As described earlier, Riley wanted to be vulnerable and share her story with staff. This was a part of her beliefs and practices concerning antiracist-centered leadership. Accordingly, Courtney described her perspective of this influence:

> [Riley] shares how much she cares about it and why she's passionate about it. I feel like she's given me personal examples throughout the years to help people understand. She explained sometimes like what her kids are doing in [city] sometimes like as another example of work that's being done.

Sandburg's equity read alouds and other instructional practice "non-negotiables" communicated Riley's commitment to and the school's focus on antiracist-centered education across all grades and classrooms. The equity read alouds developed over the last two school years became "non-negotiables" during the 2020-2021 school year. This decision and expectation from Riley further solidified teachers' trust and commitment to the school's identity and Riley's support. Meredith described how this communicated that antiracist-centered teaching was a priority at Sandburg and one that *every* classroom was to take on:

> We want every classroom, and every student to be in this, not just these pockets of teachers who feel really passionate about equity and so they're doing equity in their class-like this kid is not getting it and this student is getting it. It's more like 'no, this is, you know, what we're doing.'

Meredith explained that Riley's efforts also included fostering relationships and engagement with parents and the community.

The effort to fully embed goals and priorities for antiracist education is important for teachers' efforts to take up such practices. Teachers shared that such effort from the principal increased the sense of community and solidified the commitment across the school to strengthen

confidence for implementing antiracist-centered teaching. Concerning Anna's efforts at Lakeside, Justine described how Anna was intentional and made sure that

> It's not just something that we're going to touch upon in our [leadership] team meeting once a month. It's not something that we're going to like 'oop! Here is a slideshow presentation.' We're going to really try to figure out how we can cultivate that and make this a part of our mission."

During the 2020-2021 school year, WSSD scheduled one day a week for PD for teachers and asynchronous learning for students. Teachers at Sandburg shared that equity and antiracism were a topic at every one of these meeting times in one capacity or another and in spite of competing demands. This was evident on meeting agendas and slides. At Sandburg, Riley was emphatic that she centered equity in everything and was transparent with decision-making. Again, this demonstrated principals' commitment to antiracist education and effort to include those goals and practices throughout the school.

While many teachers repeatedly state that equity and antiracist education is "always the focus of our work" or "is the center" of "everything we do,', the specificity and clarity of what that entailed for their principals were less resounding. Some teachers *did* elaborate on ways in which their respective principal worked to embed antiracist commitments and initiatives throughout the school as described throughout this section.

Resource Allocation

Teachers at both Sandburg and Lakeside described ways they saw their respective principals making antiracism and equity a priority in their schools' funding and resource allocation. At Sandburg, teachers elaborated on how Riley prioritized the school's commitments to antiracism and equity through her resource allocation by funding auxiliary programs (e.g., a summer access program for books), sponsoring additional PD opportunities for teachers, and creating new staffing positions. Caroline, a student support teacher also at Sandburg, shared the

example of a summer reading program that was implemented across the district. Frustrated about how far the money could stretch, Riley was able to match the dollar amount the district allotted. Caroline described the impact this and other actions had: "she sees the value of those types of programs, and we're working toward equity, and I think also in the like advocating for staffing…those are all like resources that could go to something else." Outside of the district's PD (both required and optional), teachers shared the value they gained from PD their principals funded (e.g., through private organizations, local universities, or state education organizations). At Sandburg, Meredith described a PD she attended that was influential in her learning and development. She perceived Riley to be creative with her school budget to support such requests that were beyond the district's offerings. Riley conveyed that putting these commitments and priorities "front and center" in actionable ways was a critical component of her leadership. As Riley dedicated funds, resources, and staffing positions, this communicated and reinforced her priorities and commitments to antiracist and equity-centered education.

Principals' ability to hire teachers reflective of their antiracist commitments and practices was perceived by teachers to influence their own practices. Teachers shared how they saw their respective principals utilize this power to prioritize either the hiring of new staff or the creation of new positions. Related to hiring is the ability to remove teachers who do not share the same commitments (not firing for cause). Similarly, some teachers elect to leave after conversations with the principal that illuminated the misalignment between the teacher's commitments and practices and those of the school's. This ability of principals' to "coach out" teachers was a conversation amongst educators at Sandburg concerning both Riley's leadership and the debate of how to get all educators "on board" with the school's antiracist and equity-centered mission.

As it was Lakeside's opening year, Anna had the unique opportunity to hire nearly all the teachers for the 2020-2021 school year. Anna included questions concerning equity and race in the teacher interviews, thus communicating priorities for the new school. Jackie remembered questions specifically concerning Black and Latino students and how she would address the "achievement gap" in her classroom, and what her experience was with antiracist education. As an established school, teachers at Sandburg shared ways in which Riley advocated for the creation of new positions that specifically supported the school's goals for equity and antiracist-centered education. This advocacy and prioritization were things Caroline described earlier concerning resource allocation.

Family Engagement

Riley's prioritization of family engagement communicated to teachers that she was fully embedding antiracist and equity-centered beliefs throughout different facets of the school community beyond just the classrooms. A significant component of this was Riley's strong beliefs surrounding family engagement and her prioritization of bringing families into the conversation. Teachers described Riley's involvement with the creation of a second parent action group[24] in addition to the pre-existing traditional parent-teacher organization (PTO). The new group had a specific "equity lens" and was designed to recruit and serve families of color. Meredith described the existing PTO as one that

> Doesn't always have an equity lens as well, or it's just very disproportionate, you know, there's not very many parents of color…and so we created a whole other parent [group]...where we personally invite people of color or different people from different communities so that it's not just, you know, this one neighborhood of women who have access and are able to spend a lot of time on it…we have this whole other lens and community that is having their voice be heard in our school as well.

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[24] The name of the parent group is omitted to preserve confidentiality.

Riley explains some of her thinking and planning behind her goals for engaging families:

> Who are we centering? I think we totally have to have more authentic, organic ways that we are connecting with our families of color…It's more about the people and whose voices- what systems of communications do we have set up to make sure all voices are heard…There are voices who are like 'I don't want to come to your table.' So how do we find a way that like lets them feel safe enough to share what they're thinking, feeling? It takes a lot of time, I think, to build that kind of trust.

The circumstances at Lakeside were different and teachers there spoke to that as they expressed frustration that engaging their families in their antiracist and equity-centered goals was not taking place. The combined circumstances of Lakeside being in its first year and experiencing the pandemic were frequently mentioned as challenges for the school. Anna described the infancy of the school's relationship with parents and the community and her related worry that sometimes parents don't trust them or "aren't ready" for "this work." She expressed this frustration:

> We have a school community that doesn't know us yet. They've never been in our school. They've never been in our classrooms, right. We've never been around any of our families like in person for us to really establish that trusting relationship to which I think is really important in this work.

Teachers at Lakeside witnessed the difficulties Anna described while she made attempts to establish a new antiracist and equity-centered school. In anticipation of the upcoming school year, Joanna shared that she "hope[s] that our families can become more engaged and then our students can become more engaged in the work."

Shared Leadership: Identifying and Developing Teacher Leaders

Leading for antiracist education cannot be a solo endeavor. It was evident at both Lakeside and Sandburg that teachers valued the efforts made by both Anna and Riley to incorporate a shared leadership model, empower teachers, and build trust amongst staff and these influenced their own commitments and practices. Teachers described how their respective

principals built trust and empowered teachers by intentionally creating spaces for teacher leadership such as roles on the leadership team or teacher-led equity teams, giving "freedom with follow-up," and drawing from teachers' assets.

The means of incorporating shared leadership was accomplished both through formal structures and informal practices. Justine described how Anna did this:

> She empowers you. I think she tapped into everybody's asset that we have here at school…she notices where the pockets of excellence are and what people what all of us bring to the table and she taps into that. So, through those actions like you feel empowered and you feel like you belong, you feel involved.

Anna described this as wanting to "invite others to the table." The models and strategies teachers described varied slightly between the two elementary schools. The equity teams at Lakeside and Sandburg were both facilitated or led by a member of the schools' student support teams (i.e.., social workers or psychologists). At Sandburg, Riley was a participating member of the equity team but did not have an appointed leadership role. Courtney described her role as supporting the team and being there to give them the "go ahead" for certain things. Along these lines, Riley explained that she didn't think the school's work concerning antiracism and equity should be "driven solely by me."

Multiple members of the equity team at Lakeside said they believed Anna supported the team and "let us take the reins," allowing it to be a teacher-led team. Unlike Riley, Anna did not attend the equity team meetings at Lakeside. In the spring, the equity team organized podcast, book, and documentary clubs to offer additional learning opportunities for the staff. The clubs were centered on the book *We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the*

Pursuit of Educational Freedom by Bettina L. Love,[25] the podcast *Nice White Parents*[26] by the New York Times, and the documentary *13th* by Ava DuVernay.[27] Two teachers from the equity team facilitated each club. The teachers attributed their empowerment to create such learning spaces to the culture and climate Anna had created at Lakeside. Anna did not lead this effort but instead joined the book club. She explained that this was one way she intentionally tried to live out her goals as an antiracist-centered leader in an effort to share leadership and learn alongside her team. Moreover, both principals identified teacher leaders, modeling that "we all have a role to play," as Anna said.

Teachers described an increased sense of trust and empowerment when they saw or experienced their principals put their skills and expertise to use. In addition to having the structures and models for shared leadership opportunities, the intentional selection and prompting shapes teachers' commitments and practices. As one teacher described, the way Anna "taps into assets" makes them feel seen, valued, and empowered to continue "the work." Other teachers who were not on the equity teams at Lakeside or Sandburg validated this level of teacher leadership when discussing the influence of principal leadership. They saw the members of the equity team as leaders for the school's antiracist and equity-centered initiatives either entirely or in addition to Anna. Justine, who was not on Lakeside's equity team, described their influence:

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[25] *We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* By Bettina L. Love is about educational justice inspired by the rebellious spirit and methods of abolitionists. It draws from personal stories, research, and historical events.

[26] *Nice White Parents* is a five-part series podcast about building a better school system and what gets in the way. It is by Serial Productions and the *New York Times*, reported by Chana Joffe-Walt and produced by Julie Snyder.

[27] *13th* is a documentary by filmmaker Ava DuVernay that explores the history of racial inequality in the United States centering on the disproportionality of the nation's prisons.

> Our [equity team] has done a wonderful job of putting together…you've probably seen those nurturing nuggets and things that you could do within the classroom to focus on different areas of like being an antiracist education…it's a nice place to go for resources…especially when you're not like as, as a teacher you're not comfortable perhaps raising some of those questions and having those conversations.

Anna explained that aligning educators who have "the commitment and the ability [and can]...be inviting to others at the table" is a part of her job. In a leadership team near the end of the school year, she openly told her team she would be looking to them to be "facilitators" and "motivators" in the upcoming year. As she stated repeatedly, this isn't the "[Anna] show!"

While district-level personnel (e.g., the superintendent, director of instruction) were working on a District Improvement Plan,[28] Anna shared the drafts with her leadership team to review and gather their feedback prior to her district-wide principal meeting concerning the plan. This exemplifies how Anna found opportunities to gather teachers' feedback and insight, and as a result, as Justine shared earlier, built the trust and confidence of her teachers.

Teachers at both schools explained the level of creativity they were allotted while developing and implementing antiracist and equity-centered teaching initiatives and practices. This was done while also balancing communication around "must-do's" and follow-up with principals. Anna explained that she wanted to let the staff be creative even while there are "must-dos." For example, she shared lessons the kindergarten team made about empathy and kindness in relation to race and identity. While Anna was working to build antiracist-centered goals and priorities, there was not any curriculum (e.g., read alouds) or standards that were communicated as "must-do's" beyond those from the district. In an upper-grade class at Sandburg, for a social studies unit, a teacher took what had historically been a project for research clubs on animals and turned it into a choice group project on periods and significant events in history. Students choose

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[28] District Improvement Plan is a pseudonym used to preserve the anonymity of the school district.

their topic (e.g., World War One, Black Lives Matter Movement) and presented main ideas to

the whole class. With such trust and flexibility, teachers feel they "have permission" and do not

need to ask to implement what they describe as antiracist teaching practices. For example,

around Martin Luther King Jr. day, Meredith read the book *More Than a Dream*[29] with her class.

She explains her decision around choosing this book:

> [I wanted to] just to get beyond, you know, the whole like…what's your dream and it's a picture of a cloud?...I wanted to get to a next step. I don't ask permission, but my principal [Riley]'s aware of it…[Riley] is usually so supportive of this stuff that I don't ask permission.

Riley spoke about wanting teachers to feel they not only have permission but can feel

empowered to implement such initiatives and practices. She explained how she wanted to get out

of teachers' way: "I think the biggest thing is to get out of people's way. Let them do the work.

Be right there next to them, and then make the space for that to be the work of our whole

building." This belief also speaks to Riley's efforts to utilize shared leadership practices.

Teachers mainly described freedom for creativity and flexibility concerning lessons and

content as it pertained to race and antiracism. Teachers did not share any resistance about the

"non-negotiables" or "must-do's" Anna or Riley communicated to them. While school-wide

curricular initiatives were more prevalent at Sandburg, this was familiar to teachers at both sites.

A lack of described resistance is unsurprising as the majority of the teachers were voluntarily on

either school's equity team and all had volunteered to participate in the study, thus indicating a

minimum level of curiosity about, commitment to and/or interest in antiracist teaching.

Lakeside's holiday lessons and Sandburg's equity read alouds were created and developed

entirely by the teacher-led equity teams and were shared across the school. Supporting this

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[29] *Martin Luther King Jr. More Than a Dream* is by LaNesha Tabb and Naomi O'Brien. It is a children's digital educational resource book for grades K-3.

endeavor helped generate trust between the principals and teachers. While teachers were largely the creators of the read alouds at Sandburg, Riley reinforced the *why* behind the initiative and supported the communication to the whole school concerning implementation and resources. Together these efforts worked to reinforce Sandburg's priorities and goals as a school.

While Anna and Riley supported teachers' creativity at the school level, they also had to balance communicating "non-negotiables" or "must-do's" that either they established for the individual school or that came from the district. One such example from the district came in mid-April when both teams were given lesson materials from the district following the verdict of the Derek Chauvin trial for the murder of George Floyd. As discussed earlier in Chapter 7, the teams were charged with adapting or modifying the material to fit the needs of the school and creating material to support teachers' implementation. It was communicated as a "must-do" from the district level. Teachers were provided lessons that they could "choose" and were "to be delivered by" a given date. Anna "had some concerns," as Becca described, and wanted to consult with individuals at the district. When the equity team had created the materials in their meeting the day of the verdict decision, there was a sentiment of needing Anna's approval before sharing the lessons more widely. Anna had a similar response when the team proposed a Black Lives Matter Week of Action (BLMWOA) earlier in February. Here we see how the team at Lakeside balanced autonomy to create material but also needed Anna's approval before distributing it to the entire staff.

Organizational Identity & "Unwavering Support"

The development of an organizational identity and maintenance of unquestionable support were two critical elements teachers perceived to influence *if* and how they took up antiracist-centered practices. It is evident Lakeside and Sandburg were in different places

concerning their organizational identities. Teachers at Lakeside felt the ways in which competing

demands influenced Anna's decision-making and caused distractions from the school's stated

mission and goals concerning antiracist education. Knowing their principals had their backs and

supported their efforts were also essential elements for teachers' adoption of antiracist practices.

Organizational Identity: "This is Who We Are"

Principals' cultivation and commitment to a school-level identity also influenced teachers'

adoption of antiracist-centered teaching. Having an organizational identity can shape and

influence teachers' beliefs and attitudes (Evans, 2007). Riley communicated just that in her

explanation of how she tried to embed Sandburg's goals and beliefs concerning antiracism

throughout the school:

> Whether it's PLCs or staff meetings or newsletters that it's like 'here's our goals, or here's
> our mission, vision, this is who we are, this is our identity' and continuing to come back
> to that because when you do that, when you have your identity, then your behaviors
> follow.

Keeping the mission and commitment statements central to all aspects of the school is one

example of influencing teachers' ability to take up antiracist teaching instead of remaining

hesitant or quiet. It was evident this experience was not the same for teachers at Lakeside and

Sandburg.

Riley had been principal at Sandburg for five years. Throughout that time, she worked to

model and reinforce the school's commitment to antiracist education by efforts to embed it in

everything the school did. This was noticeable in teachers' descriptions of how the goals and

beliefs concerning equity and antiracist-centered education were prioritized at Sandburg. Riley,

alongside a team of teachers, created Sandburg's "Equity Belief Statements."[30] This was a list of

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[30] Equity Belief Statements is a pseudonym used to preserve the confidentiality of the school and school district.

belief statements that was initially developed in the district leading up to the 2019-2020 school year, then tailored to Sandburg specifically. It included beliefs such as "changing the system to eliminate inequities begins with ourselves" and "curriculum and instruction are rigorous, identity relevant teaching and learning (IRTL) for all learners." The Equity Belief Statements were not a list of belief statements created in addition to a more general list but rather they were *the* belief list for Sandburg. It was essential to Riley that everyone know that Sandburg's commitment and beliefs concerning antiracist education were "who we are as a building…the fabric of who we are" and as such, they would know where she stands. The intentional and ongoing reference and utilization of documents such as the mission statement and Equity Belief Statements helped reinforce this identity. Moreover, principals can model and reinforce the school's commitment to antiracist education by embedding it in everything the school does, building it into "the fiber of our every being," as Riley said. She described the effect of this modeling: "If I have a really strong philosophy and vision, it seeps into everything. Like…I hate the word power, but I forget how much power I hold and influence."

Teachers at Sandburg described the connection between Riley "having [their] backs" and ultimately protecting teachers and maintaining the school's commitment and school-level identity. In the fall of 2020, Riley leaned on this school commitment and school identity when there was a call from white parents to remove the Black Lives Matter (BLM) signs in front of the school. Marsha shared Riley's response referencing and reinforcing the school's commitment:

> She is not afraid to say, 'this is who we are…. these are our beliefs.' She doesn't really waver on it. It's not easy, they're some of the most assertive voices. Frequently assertive voices complain, and I don't feel like, I feel like we all know that we don't need to back down.

When teachers knew Riley wasn't wavering on the school's stance and identity on equity and antiracist-centered education they felt they were "able to do things instead of being quiet." This

confidence in Riley's stance and teachers' comfort in having her support enhanced their confidence, including "not backing down" and not "being quiet" when it came to teaching about race. Riley explained that an essential component of her leadership was making sure teachers knew she had their backs and furthermore, in the current context, that she would protect them. This relationship between the school-level identity and teachers' feelings of support is essential in teachers' adoption of antiracist practices with the increased politicization of the teaching race in schools locally and nationally.

Teachers at Lakeside did not share the same confidence in Anna's development of a solidified school identity. This was highlighted in February when teachers on the equity team tried to implement a Black Lives Matter Week of Action (BLMWOA). Pulling from the Learning for Justice resources, the team created materials and proposed sharing them with the school across all grade levels. The initial student-facing materials were focused on "restorative justice, empathy, loving engagement, and what is race." Teachers shared that when the proposed plans were shared with Anna, she first consulted with district administrators before giving the team an answer. The district ultimately advised Lakeside not to proceed with a BLMWOA. Instead, they did a "[School Mascot] Week of Action," which included similar student-facing materials: "diversity, restorative justice, loving engagement, and empathy." Again, there was a shared sentiment that because Anna was new to the district and position, she was either in a more difficult position to establish a school-level identity or was more cautious about doing so. As Becca explained, "[Anna] like validated that, of course, like this is the important work that we need to do but like the district's not ready and we need the district's backing before we can push [Lakeside] forward." The conversations surrounding this decision led some teachers to feel less

confident about the predictability and level of Anna's support specifically in regard to navigating communication from the district and weighing parent influence.

"Unwavering Support" In the Face of Growing Parent Pushback

Teachers received pushback from parents concerning lessons and classroom conversations concerning race increasingly throughout the year. They shared that this sometimes caused them to pause or created a sense of hesitancy around such practices. Marsha described the role Riley's support played in her and her colleagues' adoption of antiracist practices. She shared Riley's responses to white parents' concerns over BLM signs in the school's yard and the termination of accelerated math programming:

> She is willing to say the reason this decision has been made is to provide an equitable education for all our kids…. she is not afraid to say, this is who we are. I'm sorry that you're disappointed…she'll just say, this is, this is who we are, this is, these are our beliefs, she doesn't really waver on it. It's not easy. They're some of the most assertive voices...frequently assertive voices complain, and I don't feel like we, I feel like we all know that we don't need to back down.

Knowing principals "have their back" increases teachers' empowerment and confidence to continue with their instructional goals and plans. Earlier I described the parent pushback teachers experienced and how some educators explained that could influence their decision-making concerning antiracist-centered teaching. Teachers' levels of empowerment and confidence could be influenced by their principals' actions, which could then shape how they responded to such feedback or pushback.

Teachers' sense of support was strengthened as a consequence of Riley's transparent and continuous communication with families. While teachers shared that they feel Riley would "have their back" and support them in the face of resistance, they also shared ways she proactively communicated and engaged the community concerning the school's antiracist and equity-centered mission and goals. Mark described,

> She's willing to go to bat for things and she's willing like tic some parents off if it's the right thing to do. She's willing to put things out and her videos and newsletters and our curriculum and what we're doing. Putting those thoughts at the forefront…[this] makes you feel supported, makes you feel like you're able to do things that you wouldn't be able to do otherwise. Instead of just being quiet and not talking about things, she's made you feel more enabled that way to discuss things… it's a more comfortable work environment I think for the kids and everybody else.

This type of support is critical as we also have teachers who are hesitant to take "risks" (such as reading certain books) in the current social-political climate. According to Meredith, one can have lots of ideas of ways to implement antiracist teaching, but without a principal's support, teachers may not try. Meredith's, Mark's, and Marsha's perspectives demonstrate the weight that direct, explicit principal support carries. Even when teachers said their school might not "be there" yet in terms of their goals for antiracist education, they credited their principal for making an environment where they felt they could try.

Started Strong: Competing Demands

Teachers at Lakeside highlighted the passion, momentum, and clarity for antiracism and equity that Anna had displayed at the start of the school year but also their observations of her struggle to balance that priority and the competing demands of the unprecedented school year. Justine described a sense of urgency to create a mission and vision but that Anna didn't want to write that for the teachers, she wanted to develop them together. Several teachers, both those on and not on the school's equity team, described the influence the waning prioritization had on their mindsets and practices. Jackie outlined that Anna

> Started out very strong, in from my point of view, supporting this work and it being very important to her, and I do think that's true… it's just the conversation has slowed immensely since October because the conversations have been taken over with 'how are we transitioning back into school? How are we transitioning into hybrid? How are we dealing with angry parents?' You know, the school is new. We need to figure out procedures, things like that become a priority.

Trying to view this situation from a leadership perspective, Jocelyn saw the balancing Anna had to maintain while decision-making. Jocelyn explained that while Anna was listening to teachers and responding to their expressed needs (e.g., needing more time), she also saw that there was " a definite trade-off" between responding to teachers' immediate needs and maintaining urgency and the commitments made. Jocelyn described the balance that must be made between avoiding teacher burnout and providing meaningful opportunities for learning:

> [Anna] is building a new school. She's building a new culture…She's listening to what teachers say and when they say what they need. And the biggest thing people say they need is time and she's really done an awesome job of making sure that that time is built in. So, that has, I think, made a huge difference here at [Lakeside]. People are still excited, they're overwhelmed, a little bit, but they're not burnt out.

Brooke, like many teachers at Lakeside, acknowledged that Anna's status as new to the district may have played a role. She acknowledged that Anna may experience some hesitation as she was "trying to find the balance, right, like coming in strong and saying 'this is something I'm passionate about and this is something that I believe in'" and knowing the district and community. Brooke described that equity and antiracist-centered education was something that as a school and as an equity team was "at the front of [their] conversations. It doesn't always like reflect that way every time…but I know that it's something that [Anna] is really working for."

Teachers shared mixed feelings as they perceived Anna to be spending less time on priorities concerning antiracist and equity-centered teaching. Jackie expressed feelings of frustration and defeat from the equity team having to compete for time with staff; others shared comparisons to other schools that included opportunities for learning and development in all staff meetings or PD days, while those had started to decrease at Lakeside. Ultimately, the reality and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, racism pandemic, and related policies influenced

principals' implementation of antiracist-centered initiatives and practices. Jackie described her

perspective at Lakeside:

> I thought we were going in a direction, and now it feels, it feels put on hold or forgotten, because of COVID, because of the outrage, there have been some big issues that have come up, that have taken over …the disappointment that [loud parents] have with our district with the COVID response. So that's really taken over and equity work unfortunately has been pushed aside.

Blair echoed similar sentiments as she reflected that "nothing that we do feels antiracist" at

Lakeside and "it doesn't feel like it's in that zone yet…it feels like a choice like I choose to do it

because I care about it but it's not like it's not like an expectation that you must fulfill in order to

be a teacher here." This frustration was shared by Blair, who also described the culture at

Lakeside as one in which it was a "choice" to engage in antiracist and equity initiatives. She

explained this dilemma:

> It just feels like a thing that you choose to do, whether you want to or not. Like you get a choice…you get a choice as to whether or not you're going to like care about antiracism, equity, and the environment.

Stemming from her frustration, Blair brought up the question of accountability: how can

educators hold each other accountable to taking up antiracist practices? Moreover, Blair and

Jackie were looking for more consistent and dedicated support in these efforts at Lakeside.

Accordingly, we see the influence that priorities and policies played on teachers' perceptions of

their principals' leadership.

Chapter 9

Additional Factors that Influence Educators' Learning, Unlearning, and Adoption of

Antiracist Practices

"We have a great relationship in terms of being able to like push each other. Like, if one of us says something, we'll push each other to be like – 'is that a racist idea that you're having?' Or like 'is that a biased opinion that you're having about a student?... Is that the way you should have said that?' Because it's just like a safe, I don't know, like a safe relationship where we can like call [each] other out." – Jill, teacher at Lakeside

As made clear in the previous chapters, educators' conceptualizations of antiracist education and adoption of corresponding practices do not occur in a vacuum. These journeys and practices entail many nuances that educators have elaborated on concerning their racial identity, ideas around teaching practices, and teachers' perspectives on principals' leadership. Lastly, there are additional layers of related nuance that influence educators' adoption of antiracist-centered practices. These factors are described as both driving their motivations to move forward in their goals for adopting more equity and antiracist-centered practices and creating hesitation or pause in their efforts. In this chapter I share four additional factors that impact educators in their understanding and adoption of antiracist practices: 1) engagement and reflection on their personal antiracism journey, 2) collaboration, 3) professional learning experiences, and 4) identifiable politics and policy.

Reflection on Their Personal Antiracism Journey

Previously in Chapter 6, I discussed educators' engagement with and reflections on their antiracism journeys. Educators also described how their antiracism journeys influenced their understanding of the operations of educational systems and their own teaching practices. As several educators described antiracist teaching to be "at the core of everything they do" or as always at the "forefront" of their teaching, they shared ways their personal commitment

influences their teaching differently than their collective commitments. Educators described the antiracism journey to be constant and ongoing and also spoke to the learning and development they seek out as current practitioners. This included voluntary PD concerning equity starting in 2012, partnerships with a local university, and several online training series. Such learning and development influenced how teachers looked at their curriculum, including their reflections on what values were communicated in the curriculum and who was represented.

Collaboration and Community

A significant component of educators' learning and adoption of antiracist practices stemmed from interpersonal experiences, whether it was their participation on equity teams or informal conversations with trusted colleagues. These interpersonal experiences shaped their practices by providing a collaborative space to generate ideas for teaching, a sense of community for building a collective commitment, and time to practice "courageous conversations" about race.

Teachers described their experiences on equity teams to be a substantial element in their understanding and implementation of antiracist teaching. Such teams are seen as a collaborative space for educators striving to become antiracist educators. When asked who they talk to about race, educators on their school's equity team nearly all mentioned colleagues on the team. This perspective is highlighted in Brooke's description of the team at Lakeside:

> The majority of our work and doing our [equity team] is helping staff and in helping them to feel comfortable doing the work, and right, like giving them time to ask us questions and invite others to have these conversations with them or to practice having conversations with other teachers before they do it with their kids.

Brooke's description shows the emphasis within the equity team on collaboration and conversations concerning race. These spaces and communities are described to increase

educators' capacity to work with students and have conversations about race with students.

Jackie explained why she will continue to be on Lakeside's equity team:

> So that I don't feel like an island. I can bounce ideas off of people and we can come together and think, 'okay, what would be effective? What would be helpful and then also, hopefully, eventually, give ideas to our colleagues?' or figuring out ways to make our school a safe antiracist school as a whole.

Jackie highlights educators' desire for community and collaboration around building antiracist commitments and practices in schools and that such initiatives be fully embedded throughout the school.

While there was great enthusiasm for the equity teams' potential, there was also hesitation about such teams being the only instrument of change. As an instructional coach, Joanna acknowledged the role the equity team can play to develop lessons and materials to then "push things out to the staff." However, she advocated for the diffusion of the equity team in an effort to build a culture and community around Lakeside's vision for antiracist education:

> In a perfect world, we wouldn't have a committee because it's just the work we're doing and it's threading throughout everything. Right, like it's our way and then it's not a separate thing or a separate team.

She stressed the importance of the school's co-planning team model and prioritizing those spaces for the development and discussion of the school's goals and practices concerning equity and antiracist-centered goals and practices.

Educators shared the ways like-minded peers, namely colleagues, can influence the way they think about their teaching practices. Modeling conversations and providing feedback are two main ways this takes place. Brooke shared her hopes that when teachers returned to in-person teaching they could look for more ways to collaborate: "we'll be able to see what other teachers are doing more…we can give each other feedback and hold each other accountable…and planning with each other, help each other plan." While teaching and working

remotely, educators shared an increased sense of isolation. Brooke speaks to teachers' expressed value for collaboration beyond resource sharing. Furthermore, there is a shared desire for feedback both on instruction and in conversation as a component of educators' learning. Brooke expressed this concerning teaching and earlier it had been mentioned concerning "courageous conversations" and wanting others to disagree or challenge one's thinking.

While educators on the schools' equity teams shared their positive experiences and the important role it played for them, educators *not* on the teams described varying insights on their school's equity teams. At Sandburg, Mark shared that he was not entirely sure what the role was of the school's equity team:

> I know some of the people on the [equity team] and I've seen their teaching practices and we have very different philosophies on things. I'm not on the [equity team] so I don't know what goes on with that…I'm sure they do work, I just see [Riley] as the leader. I see the work that she does, or maybe she's just the mouthpiece for the [equity team], so that's what I see. I do know some of the people in the [equity team] are very into it.

He went on to describe some of the pilot lessons that Riley shared from the equity team to all grade levels. While noting a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty, Mark recognized the productivity of the team and pointed to the perceived role Riley played in leading the group.

The two teachers at Lakeside who were not on the equity team had more positive perceptions of the team. Jamie described the work the team had done with more detail than Mark was able to do at Sandburg. She said,

> they have done so much work…they've done the major holidays and we had a call to action kind of week again about racism and anti-racism…I'm more a person that's like 'How do you do it? How do you know?' But we have this [equity team] and they send out lessons and things.

These two educators not on their schools' equity teams provided varying perspectives on how the work of equity teams may be interpreted by or influence the practices of other educators in the school.

Finally, a few educators made reference to the connections they made between parenting and teaching with an antiracist lens. While talking about facilitating conversations about race in the PreK classroom, Krista shared conversations and experiences she had with her two elementary-aged children and how those prepared her for similar conversations with her students. Both the additional content exposure and additional practice for these conversations helped increase her confidence in the classroom. She explained that it was helpful to be conscious of what kids are exposed to and to have them come to her with their questions. She described the connection to teaching for her:

> It helps me feel more comfortable in the classroom dealing with this topic because I deal with it at home too and so knowing that the things that little kids might ask or say. It's sort of like my home is a trial run…just knowing little kids' curiosity and the way they ask questions. I know being a parent has helped me be a better teacher.

Marissa also made connections between the identity work she was doing with her students in the K-4 setting to the identity work she wanted to "instill" in her own kids. When she talked about this work with her own kids at home, she also brought up the idea of acknowledging differences in addition to racial identity: "I want to instill part of that identity work in my kids but I also want them to understand that their identity is different from other people's and that's not bad."

<div align="center">

Professional Learning Experiences

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Educators largely described two types of PD they participated in concerning antiracism and equity: those within the district (mandatory and optional) and opportunities outside of what the district offered.

Formal Professional Development Within WSSD

Throughout educators' tenure at WSSD, they had opportunities for both mandatory and optional PD at the district level. This development included "identity work," mission and vision development, and other content concerning equity and antiracism (e.g., equity audits, applying

equity research, data and equity, and microaggressions). Some of the facilitators were from within the district as well as the occasional external speaker (e.g., community leaders and national experts). For some educators, the district-provided PD was all the development they had experienced concerning antiracist and equity-centered education. Jocelyn had worked at two school districts prior to WSSD, both of which were smaller and more rural. When talking about the district's race and equity PD opportunities, she said that her "eyes have been opened." Conversely, there was more critical feedback concerning "identity work" from other educators who have been working in the district for longer.

A notable topic for mandatory district PD related to "identity work" or "identity development." As referenced earlier, a component of this racial identity development was journaling in response to prompts. These questions, from a district PD, were very similar to those given to students in their identity journals at Sandburg:

- When did you first realize you were aware of race? What did it mean to you at the time?

- How did race play a role in your childhood and/or adolescence?

- What important events changed your relationship with race? What happened?

- What significant people/relationships shaped the way you experienced being a member of your race?

- How did you understand what it means to be a member of your race at this time in your life?

Following this reflection, teachers met in randomized small groups to share answers and reflect together. Meeting in small focus groups is routine for the district PD sessions. While educators recognized the role of small, randomized groups, several also shared experiences that made them

wish they were able to have those conversations with teachers they knew better and were "more comfortable with."

Educators who had been at the district for several years shared that identity development had been a recurring topic at district-level PD. Sandburg had also spent time on identity development at the school level. The school has been providing this type of PD since 2018 when the staff did an "identity circles" reflective activity. Marissa, who has been at Sandburg for over 10 years, argued that the district has spent too much time on "identity work" with teachers. Blair, who is at Lakeside, also pushed back on what identity work has looked like since she started at WSSD the year prior. She grappled with what she believed identity work should be:

> It is less like asking people to look at who you are and where you've been. [It is] more asking them to be like 'look at what your perspective is and what you've always valued and given credence to' and then picking that apart.

However, in her experience with the identity PD at WSSD, Blair said "I hate it, and I don't want to [do it]." Educators such as Blair and Marissa worried that time that could have been spent advancing the district's goals of antiracist-centered education was wasted by spending it instead on repetitive surface-level identity development PD.

Related Professional Development

Educators also shared high-value experiences and learning gained from formal and informal PD opportunities they attended outside of the district-provided PD. These included programs such as a session by Glenn Singleton[31] on "courageous conversations," book studies centered on *White Fragility* by Dr. Robin DiAngelo[32] and *The White Racial Frame* by Joe R.

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[31] Glenn E. Singleton is known for his book *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools and Beyond.*

[32] *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* is a book by Robin DiAngelo about race relations in the United States.

Feagin,[33] and a PD about Black excellence. Benefits and takeaways ranged from useful "real-life examples" shared, diversified options beyond what was offered at the school and district PD, and conversations with smaller groups.

Teachers saw more opportunities available online during the pandemic, representing individuals and organizations from the local to the national level; teachers signed up to participate including synchronous webinars and asynchronous mini-series.

<div align="center">Identifiable Politics and Policy</div>

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased national attention to (anti)racism and related policies and politics influenced educators' adoption of antiracist practices in three substantial ways: 1) increased vulnerability, 2) competing demands between COVID-19 policies and school-level goals for antiracist teaching, and 3) the politicization of teaching about race in schools.

Increased Visibility and Vulnerability While Teaching Virtually

Teachers provided instruction either entirely online or through a hybrid model in the 2020-2021 school year during a time of increased parent involvement with school districts and presence at school board meetings concerning school policies (e.g., COVID-19 mitigation) and curricula (e.g., how race is being taught). They discussed the influence of this increased visibility in homes on their antiracist practices. Many shared a sense of vulnerability that was related to an increased fear of parent pushback related to conversations about race in schools. As teachers either experienced or witnessed such pushback, they were more hesitant about what they were teaching and especially online. As Jenna explained, "I think people are nervous of how people are going to react to us, especially because we're in the homes of many families…so there's a

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[33] *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* is a book by Joe R. Feagin that explains the white racial frame as a systemic racism framework.

fear there." As teachers had more conversations about race (e.g., the [Mascot] Week of Action lessons) or read more books concerning equity (e.g., Equity Read Alouds), for many they were doing this for the first time online.

Awareness of their presence in students' homes influenced educators' decision-making concerning what to teach, how to teach, and even sometimes *if* they would cover certain topics. Some educators shared how such exposure and vulnerability caused them to hesitate and sometimes even alter their plans.

The COVID-19 Pandemic: Competing Demands

Circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges that teachers described as "competing demands" with their goals to take up antiracist-centered practices. Whether it was the policies or politics, principals were pulled in many directions. We saw this as the 2020-2021 school year was described as a "wonky year" when "everything happened at once." While it wasn't the only school year with unpredictable challenges, teachers shared frustration and disappointment with how the specific nature of the pandemic's demands interfered with the schools' missions and goals for equity and antiracist-centered teaching.

This sentiment was especially salient for teachers at Lakeside. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 8, the demands Anna faced led to the described sense that the goals and initiatives for antiracist teaching were put on hold. As a result, teachers on the equity team felt their reach was limited. For instance, Joanna expressed that while the team's holiday lessons shared by the whole school was a start, she was optimistic about how the team could expand next year. Perhaps it was one step forward.

The Politicization of Teaching About Race in Schools

The increased national attention, rhetoric, and policy development concerning how race is taught was observable in the politics and policy across the country and in WSSD as well. Educators explained their perceptions of the various ways the politicization of teaching about race influenced their practices.

There has been a national conversation about what does or does not belong in public schools. We saw this at WSSD with the messaging to "remain neutral" when approaching the trial verdict for Derek Chauvin, whether a BLM flag could fly in schools in the district, and whether to have BLMWOA at Lakeside. There was a significant consensus among participants that it is not possible to remain neutral. Mary explained that "by choosing what we're going to teach – all of that has been politicized right now – so there's no way to stay away from it being political…there's no being neutral when it comes to someone's human rights being violated." She brought up the argument for human rights as a core component of antiracist education. Blair also emphasizes that making a choice in and of itself prevents it from being neutral:

> It's not possible to remain neutral…A choice is a choice…If you're not choosing to talk about things or not include things, then it's not neutral. Sorry, I just feel like it's an unreasonable expectation to put upon schools…I don't think it's possible to remain neutral or apolitical…People are affected by this in their lives and people are dying. People are adversely affected so you can't be neutral about that.

Mary and Blair so matter of factly argue that what educators choose to teach, or not teach, is in itself a political decision. Furthermore, Blair argues it is unreasonable to expect teachers to be neutral. This expectation had been communicated to teachers in WSSD concerning the lessons about race and the Derek Chauvin trial verdict. Becca elaborated on the difficulty the equity team had creating the materials with their goals in mind but also having received this direction from the district. She explained the team's attempt:

> [We tried] to keep to a lot of the facts, to the concreteness of this really complex and just abstract [event] for these kids' lessons and keeping emotions out of it which is so hard when it comes to racial inequities and the barriers that we see in our system today. It's really hard to stay objective.

The conversation and language the team landed on was shared earlier in Chapter 7. Meredith explained how she doesn't get nervous to talk and teach about race and current events in her early-grade classroom, but she is concerned about the political pressures:

> I don't get as nervous in the classroom when I'm just talking about race and when we're having conversations about kids seeing things that are unjust or making them feel wrong in their belly. I don't get as nervous with that but when you make things politicized, things like Black Lives Matter…even if you say George Floyd…it just becomes so big in the news and there's such big opinions on both sides that I worry that parents are gonna be upset about their [age] year olds talking about that kind of stuff.

Ultimately it was Meredith's personal commitments and beliefs that drove her decision to continue talking about race in her classroom.

Chapter 10

Discussion

An Education *About* Whiteness

Schooling reinforces the superiority and normalcy of whiteness in many ways. Without a recognition and understanding of this, educators are bound to perpetuate these conditions and maintain the status quo. There is a clear need for practicing white educators to engage in racial identity work. Castagno (2014) argues that white educators must engage in this work "so we do not continue to educate *for* whiteness" (emphasis in original, p. 166). To engage in conversations and adopt antiracist practices, white educators must engage in meaningful racial identity work.

Castagno (2014) defines whiteness as the "structural arrangements and ideologies of race dominance. Racial power and inequities are at the core of whiteness, but all forms of power and inequity create and perpetuate whiteness" (p. 5). At the start of this study, I set out to answer whether or not educators were wrestling with their whiteness. Grappling with their racial identity would require that participants knew what whiteness means and how it operates in schools, as Castagno (2014) describes. Largely, the answer is no.

While there were some participants who named their whiteness, reflected on centering whiteness in curricula, and identified reasons why educators need to talk about white supremacy and race, this was not the main narrative that emerged. These types of reflection and learning were evidenced with Brooke's questions of decentering whiteness in her curriculum, and teachers' grappling with their white racial identity through their antiracism journey. Marissa explained

> I think one of the biggest things that I've gained through my identity work is that I ned to, and I don't think I'm there…I need to start using my whiteness to speak up for those who don't have the power in certain situations.

Similarly, some educators identify the context of schools in, what Jill describes as the "systemic white supremacist society." Marsha explained that educators need to talk about white supremacy because

> it's institutionalized, it's part of our culture…it's a huge thing at school…because of our values and the way that we show our values. For instance, how heavily we test students and use that information to make decisions about them…[and] the way our schools are structured.

Next, educators need to be able to make connections between their white racial identity and their practices.

The majority of white participants did not wrestle with their whiteness in this way. When participants did name their whiteness, it was most frequently in the beginning of their first interview, identifying themselves as "a white female teacher" or noting that they were in the majority of a context (e.g., their K-12 experience). These types of identifications were more surface level in the context of these conversations in the way one would complete their demographic information on a form (e.g., the initial questionnaire). When mentioning they are a "white female teacher" it most commonly was highlighting a racial mismatch between themselves and their students and concerning a lack of confidence or comfort engaging in conversations concerning race (e.g., "as a white woman talking about this.") Caroline shared about a time she confronted a colleague concerning their interactions with a student. In reflecting on this conversation, Caroline shared that "it doesn't always come naturally to us like white women who grew up in a small town." When asked to elaborate she goes on to explain the challenges of being "politically correct" thus adverting the focus on race and identity. This void is problematic for white educators who strive for antiracist teaching.

Matias and Mackey (2015) summarize the underlying issue:

If racism is the symptom, then enactments of whiteness that uphold white supremacy is the disease; to cure such a disease we cannot simply apply antiracist approaches without thoroughly understanding the disease itself. (p. 37)

Most of the research about white teachers and antiracist teaching focuses on teacher preparation programs (Matias & Mackey, 2015; Matias & Liou, 2014; McManiman & Casey, 2018; Ohito, 2020) and not the development or learning for *practicing* teachers. Matias and colleagues (2016) argue that "teacher education must first understand how its daily operations of Whiteness reinforce White supremacy" (p. 16). The findings of this study highlight that same demand for critical learning, with which *practicing* white educators must engage in terms of their racial identity, whiteness, and how race and racism operate in society. While it is critical to address the parallel need that exists in teacher education (Matias et al., 2016), the racial identity work of practicing teachers cannot be overlooked. Participants shared frustrations with repetitive PD they had attended on "identity work." They described this PD as "surface level," asking teachers to complete "circles of our identities." Again, this mirrored times when individuals may be asked to include such information in a form. Blair and Marissa even described an aversion to the idea of "identity work" as a result. Racial identity work that engages white teachers about whiteness and goes beyond the "circles" of their identity is critical to their adoption of antiracist practices. "Identity work" PD and learning for white teachers must be reconceptualized to entail racial identity work that is grounded in whiteness.

Until white educators realize they are a part of the system of racism, they cannot work to influence how the system operates. Knowing more about their own racial identities will not dictate practices for teachers or give them a guide to antiracist teaching. It will, however, further develop their views of their schools and students, and render them better informed in their instructional decision-making (Hooks & Miskovic, 2010). This type of learning and development

is paramount to educators' meaningful embodiment of antiracist teaching beyond a surface-level implementation of teaching about race. This is especially true for leaders specifically, who need to learn to see their whiteness before they can lead others in such reflection (Theoharis, 2018). Due to the prevalence of white teachers, white leaders must investigate the ways white educators interrogate their own whiteness and how it is operationalized in their schools. If they do not engage in this type of investigation and interrogation as leaders, educators are at risk of perpetuating the consequences of educating in whiteness.

As my conceptual framework illustrates, critical whiteness must be coupled with antiracism when interrogating the work of white educators as it reinforces everything. Accordingly, white educators cannot engage in antiracism without an understanding of whiteness. In Chapter 3, I outlined the three central elements of antiracism from Young and Laible (2000). These elements are grounded in the role whiteness plays:

> (a) its focus on the system of White racial dominance in our society rather than difference alone…; (b) its emphasis on understanding how White racial dominance works through and on our society, our institutions, and ourselves in reproducing the relations of domination in U.S. society; and, (c) its commitment to preparing individuals to take actions that oppose the existing system of White racism. (p. 390)

Participants largely depicted white emotionality, and use some race evasive language, and do not name their own whiteness, they are not able to engage in these three elements in meaningful ways. The first element of antiracism defined here emphasizes why educators must know and understand white supremacy and how whiteness is woven into our society. They are actors in society and as such are exposed to and pulling from pre-existing constructs that already exist within and outside of school (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Blair explained why she thought educators need to talk about race and white supremacy:

> It's the driver behind so many social things in our country and a part of our history and a part of our present. It's a part of everything, to not talk about it is to decide it's not important…since education is such a white institution I feel like it has to be talked about by the people who have the power to make decisions.

Blair made the connection to the second element that highlights educators' need for a deeper understanding of how whiteness operates and how racism is institutionalized. This learning and understanding are necessary to comprehend both their own racial identities and how they are a part of a larger racialized society in which education functions. Lastly, educators must comprehend the existing system of white racism if they are to prepare others (i.e., students) to oppose it. There was a significant conversation at Lakeside about preparing white students to be "better humans." This sentiment was also evident in the equity team's initial mission statement with the inclusion of the desire to prepare students and teach them "to be good humans." Again, teachers' capacity to prepare others to resist white racism is limited without their own understanding of whiteness and how white racial dominance functions. As Castagno (2014) explains, whiteness is an enemy to equity. Without understanding it, educators cannot work towards equity or engage in antiracist practices. This dynamic was evidenced through educators' white emotionality.

White Emotionality

In their essay on whiteness, Matias and Allen (2013) make an appeal for more attention to and understanding of white emotionality. White emotionality concerns how white people do or do not engage in conversations about race and racism (Matias, 2016). This study builds on such existing literature (Matias, 2016; Matias & Allen, 2013; Picower, 2009). There is some overlap in the ways white emotionality shows up with what was discussed in Matias's (2016) study of pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers' white emotionality showed up as white guilt, anger, dissonance, and avoidance (Matias, 2016). In this study, participants' white emotionality

conjured up evidence of white guilt and dissonance, but more significantly perfectionism and

fear of conflict. For the purpose of this chapter, I focus on these two elements, as they were most

prevalent among participants at all three sites and in all positions (i.e., principals, teachers, and

student support staff). Picower (2009) explains emotional responses to be a tool of whiteness that

permits white people to evade and defend whiteness. Perfectionism, defensiveness, and fear of

conflict all work to preserve conditions where whiteness is comfortable and can persist. White

emotionality must be better understood to prevent it from thwarting antiracist teaching.

Perfectionism

When white educators worry about not having "all the tools" or "not knowing enough,"

they are stalling their adoption of antiracist teaching or leadership. These narratives of

perfectionism maintain white supremacy and the normalcy of whiteness – the status quo.

Such perfectionism was evident in Chapter 6 with participants' descriptions of their

antiracism journeys and reflections on conversations about race. It was also prominent in Chapter

7 amid teachers' discussion about their level of readiness or preparedness to adopt antiracist

teaching. When talking about her antiracism journey and taking up antiracist education, Jenna

described how her perfectionism gets in her way. She said,

> I am a perfectionist in my work and that really intertwines with my work trying to be
> antiracist because I want to say all the right things the best way the first time…So, it's a
> huge struggle for me and having conversations, or standing up, or calling people in, or
> calling myself that, all of that stuff really is hard for me because I want to do it
> perfect…[The conversations] are uncomfortable, or they're hard, and I don't know how to
> start them, or I don't know how to finish them in the way that I want to. So, right now I've
> tried to push myself to have the conversation and keep learning.

Jenna explicitly named her perfectionist tendencies and explained how she saw them hindering

her engagement in conversations about race. Many participants described this notion of "wanting

to get it right" and being "afraid of getting it wrong." Riley named this tendency and the

consequence: "...if we use that sort of fear, 'I'm not good enough or I'm not far enough,' that just keeps us from engaging in the conversation at all." These descriptions are usually in the context of teaching or having conversations about race. Perfectionism thus stalls the adoption of antiracist teaching or leadership.

Fear of Conflict

The theme of educators' fear of conflict was most prevalent in Chapter 6, concerning conversations about race. Instances of omission were shared most frequently as times in which participants were not proud of how they had engaged in conversations concerning race. The fear of conflict can lead to individuals being bystanders – not engaging in conversations inside or out of the classrooms – thereby permitting the perpetuation of racism and white supremacy.

Teachers' fear of conflict with parents hindered their adoption of antiracist teaching. Participants described concern over receiving backlash from parents and not being equipped to handle that conflict. As a result, they were more hesitant to talk about race in their classrooms or didn't do so at all. Riley described what she has observed of teachers: "[They] are afraid they're going to offend somebody, or they're going to say the wrong thing or one of these dipshit parents is going to get pissed and they don't know how to engage or respond to their pushback." White fear of conflict insulates the educators and maintains the status quo. When educators are reluctant to talk about race or avoid it altogether, they are still talking about race. Avoidance of a subject is engaging in it (Pollock, 2004b).

The Journey Metaphor

As explained in Chapter 6, teachers describe themselves to be on an "antiracism journey" that is constant and ongoing. While engaging in components of this journey that are critical for adopting antiracist practices (e.g., racial identity work, conversations about race, learning about

race and history), we must be careful with using the *journey* as the metaphor for this learning and development. Teachers explain that this is an ongoing and never-ending process. However, being on a journey implies having an end or a goal in mind. It is unclear what that goal is especially as teachers explain they'll "never get there." Where is *there?*

Similarly, teachers describe being "stuck in the learning phase." This is contradictory to the journey being constant and ongoing. What stops teachers in the learning phase? Many describe needing to "get comfortable being uncomfortable." A learning phase is a comfortable place- a "safe place" as it does not necessarily require action. This phase also resonated with teachers who expressed uncertainty about their readiness to adopt antiracist practices in their classrooms. There was a sense that they were "staying in the learning phase" until they are *comfortable* implementing various activities. This highlighted the role of perfectionism and fear of making mistakes. A common activity for white teachers to be in the learning phase is participating in book clubs. While there is knowledge to be gained and conversation to engage in, teachers must also assess and be honest about their goal for the book club. How will they turn that information gained into action? Antiracism is only a theory without action. It is not an action; it is an ongoing endeavor. Teachers demonstrated greater emphasis on reflection on attitudes and beliefs. There was a general recognition that systems and structures are harmful but there wasn't a conversation that explicitly made an actionable connection to their work.

Antiracist Education for Whom?

Much of the research on antiracist teaching and leadership investigates either individuals and institutions that serve predominantly students of color or individuals in preparation programs who are preparing to engage with predominantly students of color (Matias & Mackey, 2015; Matias & Liou, 2014). While examining educators' conceptualization of antiracist teaching and

school leadership, teachers most discussed the *white* students. At the K-4 sites, Lakeside and Sandburg, the white student population made up 50-60% of the student population yet the conversation was significantly centered on the objectives of antiracist education in their schools for white students. As conveyed earlier, there was minimal mention of the students of color at either Lakeside or Sandburg. At Lakeside, 40% of the student population is Asian. Yet, there was little to no mention of their Asian student population while discussing antiracist education both in individual interviews and as an equity team. Additionally, it is important to note the context of this study. At the time there were rising anti-Asian American hate crimes and sentiments broadcasted nationally. The school's attention on equity and antiracism appears more generalized and less intentional and specific about their student population. Antiracist and equity-centered teaching must be conscious of and reflective of the school's community and students.

Antiracist education is undoubtedly necessary and critical for white students. At the same time, educators cannot let the dominance of whiteness overshadow the aims for antiracist education. At Lakeside specifically, the hyper focus on "creating better humans" and "better white kids" further centered whiteness and distracted from the goals to have antiracist education for all students in the classroom. At Lakeside, Jill expressed her concern about the message sent to Black students when they removed BLM signage and replaced race-affirming language (i.e., BLMWOA) with race-neutral language. She explained why she felt keeping BLM was important: "It's like for our [Black] students, nobody's telling them Black Lives Matter…they aren't seeing it everywhere they go because they're seeing white students here." White educators have to be cautious and intentional to not center whiteness by retreating to race-neutral language in this way. However, as discussed earlier, the capacity to be intentional in this way requires teachers' understanding of whiteness and continued engagement in racial identity work.

Moving Away from "Check-List" Teaching

Antiracist education, and thus antiracist teaching, is not a tidy concept or pursuit. As a component of this study, I investigated white teachers' conceptualization of antiracist teaching. However, I refer to the argument posited in the previous section, that educators must be able to name and understand their whiteness before engaging in antiracist teaching. Educators' varying capacity to do so influences their understanding and adoption of antiracist teaching. Moreover, how can a white individual strive, or claim, to be an antiracist teacher if they cannot name and understand whiteness, their own racial identity?

The emergent findings indicate that among teachers, there is a range of ideas about what antiracist teaching is. Educators' conceptualizations of antiracist teaching largely fell into two categories: first, that antiracist teaching is explicit instruction about race, racism, antiracism, and related topics; and second, that antiracist teaching is an embodiment of beliefs concerning antiracist education. While this is a significant distinction, antiracist teaching should not be an either/or concept. The educators who described more of a philosophy of antiracist teaching also included direct instruction as an element. Riley explained how she experienced this at Sandburg:

> How do we go from like *teaching equity* to *being* an equitable teacher or being an equitable leader? I think the shift right now is it feels kind of siloed and people are like 'I'm gonna do this read aloud and then I did my equity thing'…versus 'I do it because for me it's about building this inner fire'…I have to start getting it integrated and embedded because right now it feels siloed and separate and then it's easy for people to just like check the box.

As several participants described, a "check-list" approach to antiracist teaching does not achieve larger goals for antiracist and equity-centered education. Jackie shared that she doesn't "want to be the people that just say, 'here's a book to read. Here's an activity to do.'" Antiracist teaching is not to be confused with an "add ingredients and stir" formula. A desire for a "check-list" or a demand for materials was largely expressed by teachers who described the increased national

attention to race and (anti)racism as an impetus for or the beginning of their antiracism journey.

Conversely, teachers who described antiracist teaching to be a part of their identity as a teacher,

thus highlighting their internal beliefs, were more likely to have described the increased attention

to be an accelerant for their journey. Meredith described the necessity of having the entire

teaching staff on board because of the detrimental consequences that can arise from some

teachers just going through the motions:

> We want it to be something that everyone embraces and feels like it's
> important…Because if people don't want to teach certain things, they don't have their
> own intrinsic motivation to do better, it's not going to go well. If there's a teacher that has
> a book they're supposed to read, they're just going to read it and check that box but
> they're not going to have the important conversation with it or give kids background…it's
> not going to make as much of an impact.

A sense of urgency as a result of events or a new policy can result in rushed and surface-

level practices and initiatives that will only be short-term. Without intentionality, this type of

urgency can leave little room for racial identity work for those who identify as being at the

beginning of their "journey." Joanna explained her experience:

> I still get caught up in that too, like, 'just give me some strategies, give me some
> practices.' But it's really about checking myself, and reminding myself it's really about
> my knowing myself, knowing my learners, and how I am thinking about things…How
> can I reflect on what I have been doing to see that I'm not centering my own whiteness in
> everything I do. So, it's not just like, 'oh, grab a tool off the shelf! Off I go!'"

If participating in "equity read alouds," celebrating BLMWOA, and checking other items off the

list are done in isolation without the required learning and reflection that Joanna references, they

fall short of meaningful change and can leave space for inconsistent implementation across

classrooms.

Lessons on race, racism, and antiracism cannot stand alone in a school's effort to adopt

antiracist practices. To fully embrace antiracist education in a meaningful way, there must be a

more intentional, routinized way of including race in the curricula and classrooms every day

(Matias & Liou, 2015). As explained earlier, leaders must build organizational identity and school culture centered on beliefs that are grounded in antiracist education to foster teachers' learning and ability to embody antiracist teaching, rather than misunderstanding antiracist teaching as a checklist of strategies and/or practices.

Factors Influencing Teachers' Decision-Making

The emergent findings reinforce that leaders need to be politically savvy (Carpenter et al., 2014; Solomon, 2002). They also demonstrate new ways of being for teachers. Teachers make innumerable decisions during a school day and in the planning for each day, and there are many factors at play that need to be considered in those decisions. The current findings indicate there are four main forces at play that influence teachers' decision-making concerning their adoption of antiracist teaching: 1) politics, 2) district-level policies and practices, 3) school-level policies and practices, and 4) personal commitments and beliefs. There are also external factors that impact how those forces interact in the process: 1) leadership support; 2) school culture and identity, and 3) networks and collaboration. Figure 5 portrays the external factors and forces that can influence and shape teachers' decision-making. As discussed earlier, antiracist education cannot be taken up without an understanding of whiteness. Accordingly, we must recognize that whiteness undergirds the entirety of this context and process. There are four elements of critical whiteness that are omnipresent in the decision-making process: 1) the white racial frame, 2) critical race consciousness, 3) white privilege and supremacy, and 4) the normalcy of whiteness. Figure 5 illustrates how these components of critical whiteness are all-encompassing of the other components of the decision-making framework. For the purpose of this chapter, I reference the earlier sections on whiteness and do not discuss the four elements separately.

Social justice, equity, or antiracist-driven leadership[34] research largely stresses leaders' practices that create a teaching and learning environment (e.g., building antiracist school culture, having a strong vision, developing an antiracist curriculum) (Diem & Welton, 2020; Hirsch & Hord, 2010; Mullen & Jones, 2007; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Solomon, 2002). As I investigated the influence teachers perceive on their adoption of antiracist teaching, the practices that stood out as impactful were those hardest to quantify: leaders' support and transparency about their own learning and decision-making. Teachers' perceptions of their leaders and their narratives of adopting antiracist teaching highlight the importance of leaders being intensely aware of what teachers navigate as they make decisions. This includes what hinders or motivates their decisions. This type of awareness would also require leaders to utilize strategies such as building a school culture to influence teachers' decision-making. Understanding this process will advance leaders' ability to create a school culture and identity, and leaders' ability to navigate their own practices.

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[34] Hirsch & Hord (2010), Mullen & Jones (2007) and Rivera-McCutchen (2014) refer to "social justice-driven principals" and not antiracist-driven principals. However, as explained in Chapter 2, even as there is little research that explicitly names *antiracist* leadership, we have previous literature on the practices of social justice-oriented principals.

Figure 5

Framework For Teachers' Decision-Making Concerning Antiracist Teaching

Influencing Forces

As stated above, teachers' decision-making concerning their adoption of antiracist teaching is influenced by 1) politics, 2) district-level policies and practices, 3) school-level policies and practices, and 4) personal commitments and beliefs. First, as the politicization of teaching about race grows, politics has become a more significant force in teachers' decision-making. This force is evidenced by increasing parent involvement and pressure at school board meetings both nationally and within WSSD. Next, the district-level policy and practices include, but are not limited to, policies outlining district goals and beliefs, communication concerning lessons and language, and policies concerning politics and neutrality. Next are school-level policies and practices. This factor comprises mission and vision statements, school-wide initiatives, and curricular guidelines. Teachers are thus required to navigate policy, practices, and messaging from both the district and school levels and to act accordingly while balancing other forces at play. Lastly, perhaps most obviously, is the importance of teachers' personal commitments, such as their commitments to antiracist education and related beliefs that influence their decision-making.

Political Forces

Political pressures have started to play a more significant role in influencing teachers' decision-making. Some of these forces include parent influence, polarized rhetoric about teaching race, and the introduction of bills and policies attacking antiracist efforts. Many of the proposed laws and policies seek to reduce content on race and equity that can affirm students of color. The people who support such policies create a local political force as they apply pressure on school boards.

Teachers often found themselves caught between the forces of politics (e.g., parent pushback) and school- or district-level policies as they made decisions concerning their antiracist practices. Accordingly, teachers must be politically savvy themselves. Like leaders, they must be prepared for feedback (and pushback) from families, and not let it stun them. As the rhetoric around teaching about race has grown outside of the classroom, teachers have felt the tug of this pressure in their adoption of antiracist practices. Jenna described what she observed at Lakeside:

> I think people are nervous of how other people are going to react to us, especially because we're in the homes of many families…so, I think there's a fear there and I think since we've already gotten complaints, there's even more of a fear.

This reaction exemplifies how the political influence of white parents can impact teachers' decision-making, causing either hesitation or inaction.

Teachers appealed to the district for more support to feel more secure in their adoption of antiracist practices (e.g., having conversations about race in class). They felt that with explicit support from the district, they could move forward talking about race in their classrooms and implementing other antiracist-centered initiatives, in some ways pushing back against political forces. Navigating mixed-messaging, or lack of messaging, between what the district communicates internally and what it communicates externally (i.e., to families), influenced teachers' decision-making and led to confusion, hesitancy, and inaction in some cases. After naming "parent backlash" as the first barrier for adopting antiracist practices, Jamie explained what district communication needed to look like to support school-level commitments and practices:

> We all need to know what is our actual goal. Like, do the parents know that we are working towards equity and that our goal is that, you know, Black and Brown and Latinx students make gains? How much do parents know that is our goal and that we are focusing on these groups?... If we are doing antiracist teaching maybe parents need to know that…like this is where [Western Springs] wants to go.

More communication to families concerning the district's commitment to and goals for antiracist and equity-centered education would decrease the pull teachers feel from political influence and increase the confidence they have moving forward based on their personal commitments.

While all of this proved true, educators must also be honest in naming the political pressures and who they feel it from. There was a significant fear and hesitation concerning teachers' perceptions of "parent pushback" and "loud white voices." Educators must be honest in their reflection on exactly *how many* parents are pushing back and how many are loud in their opposition. Many participants indicated it was only a handful of families and typically only one per school. Educators give small, typically white, vocal groups such power over their decision-making and practices when the few individuals become exaggerated in their number and presence.

District Level Policies and Practices

Teachers navigated conflicting forces of district policy (e.g., to "remain neutral") and their personal commitments to teaching relevant current events that could be perceived as political. This decision-making was evident in Lakeside's equity team meeting when making instructional decisions concerning what language to use for student-facing materials about the Derek Chauvin trial. To navigate district policy and practices (e.g., communication), teachers looked to school-level support for their respective principals' interpretation.

Instances of mixed messaging highlighted the influence of external factors as teachers turned to the support of principals and their peers (e.g., equity teams). This dynamic reinforces the importance of clear policy and communication alongside explicit support from district leadership. However, principals are often intermediaries between the district and teachers and as a result can be in a position to communicate decisions that are beyond their control.

At Lakeside, when BLMWOA was changed to "[School Mascot] Week of Action," the equity team expressed frustration with the disconnect between what the district communicated as its mission and goals in the district's Improvement Plan and how that mission and goals actually play out. Becca explained,

> I feel like the district is very cautious about making the jump to the end, like 'yes, antiracist work is on our [Improvement Plan], we're doing this' and it's not just going to be [Lakeside]...There's a lot of hesitancy because of family pushback or the district's not ready. But I'm sorry, that's not an excuse anymore to engage in this work.

Becca highlighted the influence of racialized politics on the implementation of district policy and practice. Teachers described district policy and practice as "roadblocks" in the way of their goals for adopting antiracist practices. Brooke conveyed that the roadblocks were not due to the district disagreeing or changing course but arose in response to the white backlash. She shared:

> Sometimes I think the pressure from the district and what their opinion is, [it] definitely pushes our work in other directions…Sometimes we do a lot of work and it gets shut down but it's not because the work isn't right. It's just that there are a lot of people in our district who aren't ready for that.

With the removal of *Black Lives*, race was erased from the team's plan. This change is an example of educators deferring to race-neutral language. However, if initiatives or policies do not name race, how are educators in a position to truly adopt antiracist teaching? Jill conveyed how she felt this erasure impacted students at Lakeside:

> I feel like it's more important here because it's like [Black] students, nobody's telling them Black Lives Matter, nobody. I mean, like I don't know that for a fact, but like, they're not seeing it everywhere they go because what they're seeing everywhere they go is white students.

Rarely did educators talk explicitly about the impact these decisions would have on students of color directly. While some teachers referred to implementing antiracist practices as "risk-taking," they were less likely to talk about the consequences for students. Teachers may be fearful of the

consequences they could face in light of parent pushback and growing legislation concerning teaching about race, but more attention must be paid to the impact on students.

Explicit commitments must work to prevent prominent race-neutral policies and reforms. As Noguera and Alicea (2020) remind us, even while educators may avoid explicit language, it "can help reformers stay focused on critical questions that educators often try to avoid, even though they are key to school improvement" (p. 55). There was a significant appeal for the district to "go on record" and be more transparent with parents and the community about their antiracist and equity-centered commitments and goals. If teachers had the support of more external transparency from the district, the political forces would not be as significant a factor in their decision-making. This appeal comes amidst the growing politicization of teaching about race, evidenced by rhetoric at school board meetings, growing parent pressure, and legislature censuring teaching about race. Moreover, we see the erasure of people of color being promoted by the political efforts of white backlash.

School Level Policies and Practice

While they were described as influential, school-level policies and practices were not discussed as frequently as those at the district level. School-level practices were primarily described as the principal's interpretation and implementation of communication from the district. Leadership support was a significant factor that mediated teachers' decision-making between this force and others at play, such as politics and district policy.

When schools had established, or growing, practices that were antiracist or equity-centered, those heavily influenced teachers' adoption of their own practices. Such practices included school-wide initiatives like regular communication or PD from the respective school's equity team and Sandburg's equity read alouds.

Personal Commitments and Beliefs

Some teachers' personal commitment to antiracist education was strong and acted as the driving force for their decision-making. While they were not oblivious to the politics and policies at play, their individual beliefs and goals for antiracist teaching outweighed those forces. At Sandburg, Meredith conveyed that she sometimes would be nervous about parent pushback but didn't change her practices: "I think it's too important not to so I will push that aside, go ahead with [teaching] and if there's a reaction from a family, then I'll deal with it when it happens."

Individual teachers' commitments and beliefs can influence their decisions, but at the same time, teachers are navigating other forces at play. As such, we know the principal plays a significant role in the creation of an antiracist-oriented school. Without system-wide commitments, goals for antiracist education will fall short (Welton et al., 2018). Meredith, along with other teachers at Sandburg, shared they didn't feel they needed to "ask permission" of Riley to implement antiracist-driven practices. As a result, Riley's support of her staff's antiracist-driven practices played an important role in bolstering their confidence to follow her conviction in adopting antiracist practices in their classrooms.

External Factors

As we know, teachers are not acting in a vacuum (Vaught & Castagno, 2008); teachers' decisions are never made in isolation. There were instances of different forces garnering more significant strength to sway a teacher's decision (e.g., the political pressure of parent pushback). At the same time, there are three external influencing factors that shape how those forces interact: 1) leadership support (e.g., principal and district level), 2) school culture and identity, and 3) networks and collaboration. These factors impact how teachers navigate the four forces. It is evident principals can have significant influence through their communication and policy

implementation, cultivation of school culture, and providing support to teachers. Principals may be included in teachers' networks and be collaborators as well.

Leadership Support

Principal and district-level support were paramount to teachers' consideration and adoption of antiracist practices. Teachers explicitly described what they felt comfortable doing, and not doing, depending on their perception of support from either their principal or from the district level. As Jocelyn said directly, "as long as administration continues to support, then I feel confident to be brave." Joanna also explained that she believed teachers would "take more risks" if they had the support of the district leadership through more transparent communication. The language of being "brave" and "taking risks" can potentially indicate that their personal commitments may not be as strong a force in their decision-making.

Principals' transparency and open communication are critical components of antiracist and social justice-centered leadership (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Hirsch & Hord, 2010; Mullen & Jones, 2007; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). Teachers articulated this at all three sites. When there is clear communication and transparency concerning policies and practices, teachers are able to adopt antiracist practices. When teachers feel supported, they are more inclined to make decisions based on their personal commitments and to be less swayed by political pressures. Principals must be prepared and equipped to receive pushback from white parents (Welton et al., 2018). At Sandburg, many teachers described the positive influence Riley's "unwavering support" had on their adoption of practices. Meredith shared how she weighed the white backlash and support she felt from Riley at Sandburg:

> I remember thinking 'am I going to get backlash? Am I going to have parents that are going to be upset about this?' And it was kind of sitting yucky with me like I was feeling nervous about it…Then I was just like, 'no, this is *our* work. We talked about it so much as a staff. This is our work, this needs to go out.

Principals were most successful in supporting teachers navigating these forces when they created and maintained a school culture centered on their beliefs and goals concerning antiracist and equity aims (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Welton et al., 2018); communicated openly with their staff (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014); and were forthcoming and vulnerable about their own racial identity work and antiracism journey. In these ways, principals can be influencers through both their construction of the context (i.e., school culture and identity) and translation of factors (i.e., policy).

School Culture and Identity

Principals' ability to create and maintain a school culture and identity that embodies their commitment to antiracist education is critical for teachers' implementation of antiracist practices. Furthermore, this increases teacher buy-in to develop the entire school's commitment (Diem and Welton, 2020; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Solomon, 2002). When teachers felt their school had a strong culture and identity centering on commitments to antiracist education, political forces were not as strong a factor in their decision-making. This was evident with the organizational identity Riley developed at Sandburg, described in Chapter 8. Marsha shared that teachers knew Riley leaned on the school's commitments when faced with resistance. If teachers felt their school culture was strong, they could rely on it when navigating other forces, such as politics and district-level policies and communication.

Network and Community

Lastly, there was a strong sense of team identity, shared interest, and collaboration among the members of both Sandburg's and Lakeside's equity teams. The existence of collaborative teams provides teachers with spaces for learning and development, as well as leadership opportunities. Teachers relied on peers and collaborative teams to make decisions about

antiracist teaching. The school's culture and identity influenced ways in which teachers either made decisions alone or with peers. Without collaborative spaces or a strong network of "like-minded" peers, teachers may be more influenced by forces such as policies or practices. However, even in productive collaborative spaces, political pressures can still seep in. It is a matter of how much influence those pressures play. At Sandburg, the team had planning meetings where they developed goals and action plans for the school. Marissa described this experience:

> We have our planning meetings and we talk about 'oh, this would be so great' and then we kind of like tap the breaks a little bit and think about the parents who have called our school and berated our principal because we have Black Lives Matter signs out in our yard…So we need to approach it in a way where we're teaching our students but also, quote unquote, making the parents happy, or trying to. It's a fine line to walk.

The team found support in knowing that Riley left the BLM sign in the yard, grounding her response in the school's beliefs and identity concerning antiracist education. However, the political forces were still present: the team continued to feel they had to balance their practices and the potential for white backlash.

Principals play a role in the creation of school cultures that foster collaboration. When all teachers are "on-board" and committed to antiracist education, the school's commitments and goals are strengthened by actions. The influence of personal commitments and beliefs is strengthened when an entire school community is on board. Without the entire school community on board, antiracist efforts will be inconsistent and ultimately symbolic (Solomon, 2002).

Principals' utilization of a shared leadership model strengthens both the school culture and teacher buy-in. It is an essential component of antiracist leadership, as principals can't be the only ones driving the conversation about race in education (Brooks et al., 2008; Brooks, 2012;

Hirsch & Hord, 2010; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Wasonga, 2009). When teachers have

leadership opportunities, their decision-making can be strengthened by the influence that comes

with their own leadership roles.

Implications

This study contributes to the existing literature on educational leadership, white

educators, antiracist leadership and teaching, and related policy. In this section, I elaborate on the

implications in the subsequent areas: practice, preparation, research, and policy. Within these

areas, there are specific implications for teachers and for principals as well as for both group's

preparation programs. These implications provide several suggestions for principal and teacher

practice and are derived directly from the reflections and conversations of educators in this

study.

Implications for Practice

There are significant implications for practice concerning 1) teaching practices, 2)

leadership practices, and 3) professional development and learning.

Teaching Practices

Adopting antiracist teaching practices must be grounded in an understanding of it being

an *embodiment* and not solely explicit instruction. The findings indicated that deeper engagement

in racial identity work, learning about whiteness, and the development of educators' "why,"

educators will be more equipped to move away from "check-list" type teaching. This shift in

understanding can be accomplished in several ways as outlined here.

To embed commitments and efforts concerning antiracist teaching, teachers must be able

to have meaningful conversations with students about race. This desire and ability to have such

conversations are required to meaningfully adopt practices such as "equity read alouds,"

decentering whiteness, and embedding antiracist efforts throughout the classroom and

school. Lessons concerning race and (anti)racism cannot be one-offs that stand alone. An over-

emphasis on one-off lessons and dedicated months (i.e., Black History Month), detracts from the

goals of antiracist teaching.

Learning environments and curricula must reflect the students in the class and provide

meaningful opportunities for a diverse range of representation. Participants described this

concept as "providing mirrors and windows." It was evident many educators were focused,

potentially hyper-focused, on their white student population. This neglected the 40%-50%

population of students of color in the elementary schools. At Lakeside, specifically, this was

predominantly the Asian student population. The focus highlights the need for educators to know

and understand their students and community. Meredith explained she aims to be intentional

about her curriculum representing all students. To accomplish this, and not center whiteness,

teachers must know and understand their students and the school community. With this type of

dedication and understanding educators can provide "mirrors and windows" as they reflect

teachers' classrooms.

Leadership Practices

This study builds on the existing literature concerning antiracist leadership by

investigating the relationship of *principal to practice*. By interrogating teachers' experiences and

perceptions of their principals' leadership practices, the field gains a new perspective on

leadership. These findings were achievable because of the non-evaluative nature of the study. A

feedback survey coming from the school or district level may be perceived as a more evaluative

opportunity and yield different results. While we know there is not a direct correlation between

principals' practices and teachers' perceptions, this study provided insights into principals' perceptions of antiracist leadership as well as teachers'.

By highlighting teachers' voices and experiences in this way, this study addressed a need for further understanding of leadership practices. These findings surfaced through the investigation of practicing educators' attitudes, behaviors, and practices. Gaining teacher perspectives garnered several practices for principals' adoption of antiracist leadership: centering commitments and goals in practice; communicating openly and sharing and being vulnerable about their own racial identity work and antiracism journey. These are practices that don't necessarily live in principal preparation or development programs. They are skills that are developed over time with the bolstering of school culture and identity.

The two perspectives help illuminate overlaps of intended leadership practices and how teachers experience such leadership. The findings in Chapter 8 highlight several principal practices that teachers perceive to be influential and shape their practices. Principals' practices were perceived to be influential in teachers' decision-making and adoption of antiracist-centered practices.

Leaders must be aware of and understand the factors that influence teachers' decision-making concerning antiracist teaching. The proposed Framework for Teachers' Decision-Making Concerning Antiracist teaching depicts these forces and influencing factors (Figure 5). When leaders can act on that information, they can shape what may hinder or motivate educators while responding to these factors. The findings highlight the importance of creating a school culture, organizational identity, and efforts to embed goals and initiatives for antiracist education. School culture and identity is an external factor that can influence and shape teachers' decision-making. Teachers described the efforts Riley made at Sandburg to achieve this type of school culture and

identity. They frequently described how Riley emphasized that, in regard to the commitment to racial equity, "this is who we are" and embedded corresponding goals and belief statements school-wide.

Utilizing shared leadership structures or practices influences principals' ability to develop and sustain a school-level commitment and corresponding practices. Such structures and practices also foster teacher voice and empower teachers' adoption of antiracist teaching. This practice can be accomplished through the utilization of equity teams, building trust, and providing PD opportunities for teacher growth.

A common question, both theoretically and practically, concerning antiracist leadership and education centers on the ideas of changing hearts and minds and implementation of practices. Do leaders work to change the hearts and minds of educators first? Do they lead with practices and hope hearts and minds will follow? The findings in this study suggest it does not have to be an either/or, but rather is a *both*/*and* practice. Both Anna and Riley shared how they aimed to hire teachers who were antiracist and equity-driven to build their school culture and hire for alignment. This practice highlights the importance of hearts and minds and mission-alignment and was one way the principals worked to get everyone "on board" in this way from the start. Anna was in a unique position to do this as 2020-2021 was Lakeside's first year and she shared that she was able to hire 90% of the staff. At Sandburg Riley was able to advocate for an additional position that aligned with her goals concerning antiracist and equity-centered education. This position was filled with a social worker and ultimately focused on community and family engagement. This individual proved to be an active contributor and leader on the equity team and worked with Riley in tangent to further embed these goals and beliefs throughout the school.

There is also evidence that a focus on practices, assuming hearts and minds will follow, can lead to less meaningful practices. As many participants shared, they are worrisome of teachers focusing on a "check-list" type teaching and the consequences of teachers (often described as not "on board") going through the motions. Meredith and Courtney shared this concern specifically with Sandburg's equity read alouds as teachers can read a book but without the meaningful conversations with students concerning race. This exemplifies the need for leaders to focus on hearts and minds while moving forward with such practices (e.g., equity read alouds).

Leaders must be conscious of this binary and be aware of the need to focus on hearts and minds *and* the implementation of practices. If educators place their focus on hearts and minds prior to implementing related practices, there is potential of reinforcing the safety and comfort white teachers' find in "the learning phase" of their antiracism journey. Some participants in this study exemplified how a focus on hearts and minds can lead to "getting stuck" and "living in the learning phase." However, their antiracism journey is not linear. As highlighted in the framework for Teachers' Decision-Making Concerning Antiracist Teaching, teachers' personal commitments and beliefs influence their practices. Teachers' commitments and beliefs and their practices inform each other. Moreover, a focus on hearts and minds *and* practices can further teachers' decision-making concerning their adoption of antiracist and equity-centered practices.

There was a notion at the elementary schools of there being a population of teachers who are "on board" and those who are not. This categorization surfaced in individual interviews and in the schools' equity team meetings. Leaders must be cautious of perpetuating a binary in these conversations and school culture alike to good white people and bad white people. The notion of there being two groups according to their commitments disregards the educators' shared beliefs

that antiracist teaching and leading is on a continuum. At the same time, it can be helpful for

principals to have a pulse on individual teachers' beliefs and commitments (hearts and minds)

and their implementation of antiracist practices. As a leader this can allow principals to

individualize and differentiate professional development and learning opportunities (e.g., one-on-

one conversations and sharing resources).

Riley shared her struggle with the pacing of her goals and practices for antiracist-centered

education. There was a sense that outside of the teachers who were more outspoken about being

"on board," there are some teachers that "just aren't there yet" and those who may never be. In an

equity team meeting Riley responded to Marissa's concern about the implementation of practices

across the school and question about action and accountability. She said,

> What's hard here is I think what we're saying is like those of us that are doing the work,
> it's really great to have some voice and choice in it because we know we're gonna do it.
> And then there's other people that, you know, maybe aren't 100% on board and like how
> do we have an accountability kind of system right, like so that we know it happens…I
> agree, [Marissa], I think it's maybe a bigger discussion of like what are actions that we
> can take just to make sure everybody's moving forward even through discomfort.

Riley's conversation also hinted at the ways to influence the hearts and minds of people who are

not yet on board. She shared that her hope is by sharing stories of students' engagement and

examples of teaching practices others may feel empowered or encouraged to join the

conversation or implement some new strategies. Furthermore, it is evident she is conscious of the

role learning opportunities can influence and shape teachers in various ways (e.g., racial identity

work and concrete practices).

Anna, Kathy, and Riley all indicate the importance of teachers' hearts and minds but also

not waiting for teachers who may be described as "not on board" or not as far along on their

journey. As explained in Chapter 6, educators understood their adoption of practices to be a part

of their antiracism journey. Both elementary principals demonstrate the importance of teachers'

hearts and minds, individual commitments and beliefs, and supporting that with moving forward adopting antiracist and equity-centered practices. As such, the adoption of antiracist teaching and leading is not liner, but rather is an evolving journey.

Professional Development and Learning

When schools as institutions and educators collectively and as individuals commit to adopting antiracist missions and practices, the need for meaningful PD is increasingly important for both teachers and leaders. Such PD must be intentionally designed, ongoing, and include differentiated opportunities. When I reference PD I purposefully include *learning* to recognize the learning that happens outside of district PD. It is important principals are conscious of this inclusion, build in and provide additional opportunities. Learning can take place in coaching conversations, school-level PD (e.g., reoccurring groups) and in other reoccurring spaces such as department and content level teams. Educators need to think about learning beyond the traditional conversation of PD and the associated days (e.g., occurring quarterly in auditoriums). Both leaning on an understanding of PD in this way is limited in practice, research, and policy.

Given the previously discussed findings concerning how white educators have, or largely have not, wrestled with their whiteness, this study demonstrates areas of need for white educators' development and learning in four specific areas. Broadly, the development and learning need to consist of the following categories: 1) whiteness and white supremacy, 2) racial identity, 3) race in education, and 4) teaching practices (e.g., having conversations about race with students).

These categories capture white educators' need to learn about whiteness and white supremacy, in addition, to reflect on their racial identity and how these components manifest and influence their roles as teachers and leaders. PD concerning these areas needs to be ongoing and

not a "one and done" type of session. Accomplishing these objectives requires intentionally designed sequence and development and learning opportunities that are connected to each other and ongoing. Furthermore, such opportunities should be differentiated and designed with the context of the school and community in mind. As educators described their antiracism journeys, there is evidence that educators have varying levels of experience and knowledge concerning their racial identity work and related antiracism journey. Accordingly, such PD and learning opportunities must consider this and provide differentiated options and varying topics. Racial autobiographies are a practice educators should engage in as a part of their racial identity work. Such reflection provides an opportunity for both principals and teachers to explore the ongoing development of their antiracist practices through the reflection on their racial identity and race in education.

The findings in Chapter 6 indicate the benefits participants found in having a space to reflect and consider questions concerning race and education. This suggestion was different from the PD sessions they had previously participated in. As educators shared, they believed they benefited from having the space of the interviews and focus groups to answer open-ended questions and reflect on their practices, a similar structure could be replicated for educators in a school or district. This can be accomplished through the implementation of ongoing learning groups, affinity groups, or groups that are a component of other PD sessions. Greater focus on these four categories requires prioritizing educators' learning in this way as foundational components of adopting antiracist teaching and leading.

Implications for Preparation

Just as there are implications for practicing educators, implications for teacher and principal preparation program can be gleaned from the study's findings.

Teacher Preparation

Teachers indicated they either did not have specific preparation concerning equity and antiracist practices or such conversations were "one-offs." Teachers perceived he latter conversations or mentions of race and equity were inadequate and lacked the necessary depth for teachers. There is significant research that investigates white individuals in teacher preparation programs (Matias & Mackey, 2015; McManiman & Casey, 2018; Ohito, 2020). The findings from this study concerning teachers' wrestling with whiteness and understanding and implementation of antiracist-driven practices provide further implications for preparation programs in consideration of teacher preparedness. Educators' developing knowledge concerning whiteness, white supremacy, white privilege and the way whiteness operates in schools is critical to their adoption of antiracist and equity-centered practices. Teacher preparation programs must include these topics and meaningful spaces for future teachers' racial identity work. Making racial identity work a component of teacher preparation advances future teachers' ability to adopt antiracist and equity-centered practices in more meaningful ways.

Just as embedding the antiracist and equity-driven goals and practices is critical in the PreK-12 setting, teacher preparation programs must model the same. When preparation programs communicate commitments to antiracist and equity-centered education, such practices cannot be done in isolation or in ways that uphold whiteness. Moreover, teacher preparation programs must consider their belief statements, goals and related policies *and* the way they are implemented. Teacher preparation programs need to evaluate how such policies are performed and not only communicated. This type of evaluation must be done intentionally and regularly.

Principal Preparation

In their first interview, all three principal participants shared they did not have any explicit preparation concerning leadership practices for social justice, equity, or antiracism. They each graduated from certification or masters programs (e.g., in education leadership or social work). Anna and Kathy graduated from the same masters program in educational leadership. They described this program to have more of an emphasis on the managerial and task components of being a principal such as school finance and school law.

Leadership preparation programs, like the PreK-12 schools themselves, must embed commitments and practices for antiracist and equity-centered leadership throughout their coursework and program. This study indicates a need for principal preparation programs to support principals' readiness and ability to have and lead conversations about race; model racial identity work as critical and ongoing; and be intentional in their development of a school culture and identity concerning antiracist education. This study's implications for principal preparation add to a scarcity of current research in this area.

Implications for Research

Existing literature on antiracist leadership addresses both ideology and related practices (Brooks & Witherspoon Arnold, 2013; Irby & Clark, 2018; Welton et al., 2018; Young & Liable, 2002). In this study I center whiteness as all participants are white and I ask questions concerning their racial identity work. I explained how looking at white educators is necessary given the overwhelming majority of white leaders and teachers and consequential frequent mismatch between educators and their student population. At the same time this study centers whiteness, some participants also engage in questions and reflections concerning how they aim to *decenter* whiteness in their teaching. There is a tension here between centering whiteness but also arguing for the need to decenter whiteness. My conceptual framework that couples

antiracism with critical whiteness includes identifying and dismantling both white privilege and supremacy as well as examining the normalcy of whiteness. There is evidence of some educators asking such questions explicitly (e.g., Brooke at Lakeside) and others reflecting on such practices and structures without the explicit language naming whiteness. While pursuing such lines of inquiry, researchers must be conscious of this tension as they collect data (e.g., conducting interviews), analyze their data, and in their ongoing reflexivity.

Welton and colleagues (2018) posit the need for school leaders to understand more organizational change to implement successful systemic antiracist change. Such large changes are difficult and call the norms and practices that have been routinized and normalized into question. Accordingly, there is a need for developing research concerning the school and district-level organizational decision-making and structures or procedures for making change. This study highlighted the necessity of such inquiry as participants discussed the forces that influence their decision-making and the barriers they encounter (e.g., politics, school and district-level policy, and their personal commitments). It was evident principals play an important role as intermediaries between teachers and the district personnel. Further investigation here can result in a more nuanced understanding and yield implications for antiracist-driven leadership. Additional research, or through a continuation of this study, needs to investigate district-level leadership and decision-making as well as how principals can be intermediaries in this process. Such research will help school leaders understand how to implement more systemic antiracist change.

There are few existing studies that contain an investigation of educators' conceptualization of race and how their conceptualization influences their practices (Galloway et al., 2019; Solomon, 2002; Swanson & Welton, 2019). Future research can investigate this further

asking questions concerning educators' racial identity work and practices. Considering the findings shared in Chapter 7, there are ways a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences with antiracist-driven leadership can continue to develop an understanding of such leadership practices.

In addition to this insufficiency in the research, this study also addresses the need for research that specifically investigates *practicing* white educators in this context. This study addresses this gap in the literature by examining ways practicing educators are, or are not, wrestling with their whiteness and how that influences their teaching. It would be interesting to identify a PD or learning experience (e.g., ongoing affinity groups or other small groups) for white teachers that focuses on whiteness and white supremacy to explore teachers' experience with that type of specific learning and reflection. This type of exploration could further the field's understanding of white educators' racial identity work and conceptualization of antiracist education. While contextualizing a future study with teachers' experiences of PD or learning experiences, it permits an opportunity to learn more about such PD and learning experiences as well. Such a study would have further implications for teacher practice and PD. Further exploration into white educators and PD concerning racial identity work and antiracist education can be achieved in multiple ways. Identifying a school district that has a more racially diverse student population or a district where there is required PD that is specifically focused on whiteness, racial identity work, and antiracist education can yield further understanding of teachers' racial identity work and their practices. Replicating this study in various contexts can provide further insight into the strategies and practices of white, antiracist-driven leaders and teachers and what influences their decision-making. Such replication can take place in a larger metropolitan school district with a more diverse student population or a rural district. Locating

the study in different contexts, both regionally and in terms of the student population, can advance the understanding of teachers' racial identity work and practices. Furthermore, placing the study in either a larger more metropolitan district or a smaller rural district can result in advanced comprehension of the role of leadership and policy. Following the same eligibility requirements and research questions but looking at various contexts can add to the existing body of literature.

As described in Chapter 4, the entirety of this study was conducted online. The methodological innovation of such potential merits further consideration. There are components of conducting a study online that can be transferable to other studies such as potential increased confidentiality and anonymity and ease of scheduling. Additionally, future studies can use long-term focus groups as a means of data collection. Participants in this study, as described in Chapter 6, shared the benefits they gleaned from continued conversations (e.g., interviews and focus groups) as new spaces for reflection and learning. This trend also points to the impact of multiple interviews to increase my relationship and trust building with participants. Specific inquiry concerning continued small groups being utilized as a research method for data collection is warranted to promote possibilities for research design in similar studies.

Extension of Current Study

I am continuing this line of inquiry and new ones as I maintain my relationship with the school district and participants. There are several ways I have started to expand this inquiry and plan to move forward. First, I revised my IRB to include district personnel in interviews and observations (e.g., meetings and PD). Participants have expanded to include district personnel such as superintendent, assistant superintendent, and directors of curriculum and specialized services. This inclusion allows me to investigate ways that district policy, leadership, and

decision-making are influencing principal and teacher practices. Specifically, how it shapes principals' roles as intermediaries between the district and teachers. The extension of the study in this way provides an opportunity to take a deeper look at the organizational systems and policies driving goals for antiracist education. It is critical to develop an understanding of how policies are developed *and* performed. Next, as the findings suggested educators have a limited understanding of whiteness, I am continuing to unpack more about what participants know about whiteness and white supremacy through ongoing interviews and focus groups. As shared earlier, conducting multiple interviews (i.e., two or more) and focus groups over a period of time can increase the researcher-participant relationship, levels of trust, and an ability to continue member checks and share initial findings. Talking about their whiteness can be challenging and as some described uncomfortable. This type of data collection is increasingly influential when discussing what participants described to be more personal in a "safe space" that has permitted ongoing reflection and learning.

Implications for Policy

As discussed earlier, the findings suggested the language in existing policy, such as "equity," was not defined and often led to uncertainty, hesitation, and inaction. There was evidence of communication and policy changing to more race-neutral language. Educators described the role this change had on their interpretation of district policy and uncertainty of support from the district level.

District policy must define what "equity" or "antiracist education" means for the various stakeholders (e.g., principals, teachers, students). In Chapter 1 I discussed the importance of language and its specificity. When educators utilize language such as equity, diversity, and inclusion it can allow for multiple interpretations, assumptions, and watering down of practices.

It was evident when the language shifted in the district policy that teachers and principals experienced uncertainty, hesitation, and sometimes even inaction.

Educators, namely principals, described the lack of preparation they had concerning antiracist practices. Accordingly, there are implications for preparation programs both in practice as described earlier and for policy. There is a significant need for higher education programs to require such learning opportunities in meaningful ways. Again, language is important. Are preparation programs requiring courses cover equity and inclusion? If so, how does the university or college define equity and inclusion? Are the requirements rhetoric or practice? Race must be named. Educators must be able to address issues of equity as they pertain to students with disabilities, English Language Learners, the range of gender and sexuality, and students with various socioeconomic backgrounds. Doing so requires educator preparation programs cover these areas intentionally.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations; however, they also lead to new lines of inquiry. I specifically looked at the practices of white principals and, as a result, the teachers at those principals' schools. However, focusing on white principals reflects the reality of the majority of principals in public schools across the U.S. By not choosing principals who are people of color, I was able to investigate principals within this majority. As discussed earlier, it is paramount that white educators take up antiracist and equity-centered education.

I attempted to identify a selection of teachers from different racial and ethnic groups, genders, the extent of teaching experience, and range of self-identification on a commitment to antiracist education on the survey. A diverse selection of teachers would allow me to gain a maximum variation sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that represents the teaching population of

the schools. However, the lack of diversity both in terms of race and gender within the teacher sampling is reflective of the teacher population within the district. My nearly entire female-identifying participant group (excepting only one) is also reflective of the overall demographics at the three school sites.

There is a notable difference in both the number of participants and the observations conducted at the PreK site and the two K-4 sites. The initial teacher questionnaire sent to the PreK site did not yield any participants after sending it twice. After emailing each teacher individually, I was able to recruit two participants. Both of these participants participated in two interviews but did not have a focus group. As described earlier, the PreK site did not have a specific equity team. As a result, I did not observe any meetings at this site, but the PreK teachers did attend the observed district-wide PD and were able to share their reflections on it. It is possible that the PreK teaching staff was less interested or motivated to participate in the study given the concerns about discussing race with younger students that were brought up by participants as discussed earlier. Out of the six 4K teachers that took the survey, four indicated they are "beginning to learn about antiracist teaching" when asked about their level of commitment. Accordingly, they may have less motivation to engage in further conversation due to their decreased confidence and understanding. Ultimately, the two sites (i.e., Lakeside and Sandburg) with the most participants, observations, and documents collected were both K-4 elementary and more comparable in terms of student age and school size.

All participants self-identified as at least being committed to antiracist education per the questionnaire. This was a requirement for principals' eligibility. As a result, these educators may have been more forthcoming and comfortable talking about race than other educators. However, as elaborated earlier, it is evident there is a range of comfortability and confidence when talking

about race, both specifically related to teaching and more generally. Between the two elementary sites, the majority of teacher participants indicated a strong commitment to antiracist education and a strong familiarity with antiracist education on their questionnaires. The selective nature of disclosures may be in part due to self-protection or self-enhancement, to present themselves in a positive light. At the same time, in interviews participants did disclose instances when they were not proud about how they handled conversations concerning race or ways they wanted to grow and improve. A future study that includes educators with a wider range of both self-identified commitment and confidence could provide further insight.

It is possible that teachers may not have been as forthcoming in interviews when the principal, their direct supervisor, was a topic of conversation. This power dynamic may also have been a potential reason why a teacher would not have initially participated in the study. To counter this limitation, the description of the study in the initial questionnaire described the non-evaluative nature of the study and clearly stated the study's aims. Additionally, it indicated that antiracist leadership was only one component of the study. Throughout the duration of the study, I continued to build trust and have generative interviews, not information-seeking interviews. Questions were framed using language such as "in what ways do you see your principal as a leader for antiracist education?" and "how does that influence your learning or teaching?" The conversation about leadership would follow from there.

Given the quantity and depth of the interviews, the study has a reliance on interviews as a primary data source. I conducted one or two interviews with each teacher participant and three with each principal. These are heavily relied upon as they represent a majority of the data collected. However, they were not in isolation. I used multiple sources of data (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents) to gain multiple perspectives, uncover more nuance,

and, in part, mitigate any preconceived ideas. Moreover, with the abundance of interviews came the necessity to attend to any personal biases and ways my insider and outsider status could be influential. Such subjectivity and personal reflexivity are unavoidable in critical qualitative research. I address this in my positionality statement in Chapter 4.

Initially, I anticipated the virtual setting of the study would pose limitations. I worried conducting interviews virtually would make it more challenging to form relationships and build trust with participants. However, this did not tend to be the case. As described in Chapter 6, many participants engaged in reflective conversations and shared how they viewed the study as a reflective experience altogether. Many reached out to me via email throughout the course of the study to share resources such as lesson plans and reminders for upcoming meetings. These reflections and actions demonstrate a level of relationship and trust. However, I did find the focus groups to feel more like a group interview than a group conversation due to the virtual format. It took time for participants to get into a more natural flow and ease of conversation after initially going around and taking turns answering or responding to my prompts. Because the focus group was held online, I was able to easily record the session, with participants' consent, and watch the session again. This allowed me to observe participants' nonverbal cues, other dynamics in the group, and make reflective notes. Having held the interviews online limited the number of nonverbal cues participants (and myself) can pick up on that they would normally in conversation. However, as it was spring of 2021, participants utilized various "Zoom norms" that aided the evolving flow of conversation such as muting and unmuting to cue when one was listening or preparing to speak next.

This study was initially designed to include more ethnographic practices to observe teacher practices and professional development in person. However, due to the COVID-19

pandemic, mitigation policies, and virtual learning, the interviews and observations were limited to virtual settings. A future study to observe the enactment of teachers' practices and interactions would permit a more nuanced understanding of both teachers' practices and principals' leadership. Including more ethnographic practices in which the researcher could be fully immersed in the school would permit the observation of more organic interactions (less structured circumstances and situations), and to witness the daily interactions and nuances of how antiracism is discussed, taken up, and carried out by teachers and school leaders. Some of this nuance was observable during meetings and the various focus groups. While the benefits of incorporating ethnographic practices are true and they would yield further insights, I was still able to access unit and lesson plans, materials distributed district-wide and school-wide, student work, and more. Such documents allowed for a deeper understanding.

Further lines of inquiry surfaced in the interviews, with participants, and in other areas of data collection that are not included in the discussion. This decision was made intentionally to stay focused for the purpose of the dissertation. As considered earlier, the social-political context of the study influenced the interviews and potentially the way participants think about race and (anti)racism both within and outside of education. These contextual factors led to very rich conversations and findings, some of which will be elaborated upon in further papers.

Due to challenges gaining research privileges with a school district, I was unable to begin data collection until mid-March. This start date dictated a concrete timeline for data collection with teachers due to their contractual school year. I would need to complete data collection by the last day of school, in the first week of June. I was unable to avoid this typically busy and rushed time of the school year. Ultimately, the focus groups and a few second interviews were held at the end of May. Three teachers who initially signed up for the focus groups declined at the last minute,

sharing they could no longer participate due to the busy time of the school year. While this decrease in second interviews may have impacted the number of participants in focus groups and the response rate of member checks in late May, it did not appear to influence participant engagement for those attending groups or interviews at the end of the school year. Educators' engagement was evident when analyzing interviews and focus group transcriptions to confirm the level of engagement and richness of response in relation to the dates when they took place. Observing meetings at the end of the school year also allowed for the opportunity to hear about how school sites were talking about the upcoming year and what goals had been developed for instruction, new programming, PD, and making changes.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the field of educational leadership and antiracist education with its new insights into both teacher and principals' perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, it addresses the omission of research that investigates white principals and teachers specifically in their pursuits and adoption of antiracist education. There was evidence that individual events can play the role of an impetus for teachers' antiracism "journey." However, the implications that had on their adoption of antiracist teaching varied and most frequently corresponded with explicit teaching *of* race and (anti)racism rather than an embodiment of antiracist teaching. While the study unpacks white teachers' understanding of what antiracist teaching is, there was a distinction between this concept of explicitly teaching practices and striving for an embodiment of antiracism. The findings posit that while *some* white educators were wrestling with their whiteness while adopting antiracist-centered education, largely they were not. Accordingly, development and learning are necessary for white educators concerning whiteness, white supremacy, and their racial

identity. Such learning and unlearning are paramount to educators' adoption of antiracist teaching and leadership.

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Appendix A

Table 9

Teachers' Definitions of Antiracist Teaching

Participant	Commitment Level	Definition	Code[a]
Becca	5	I pull my definition from Betina Love and abolitionist teaching - Abolitionist Teaching is built on the creativity, imagination, boldness, ingenuity, and rebellious spirit and methods of abolitionists to demand and fight for an educational system where all students are thriving, not simply surviving.	
Justine	4	Actively working to dismantle the structures and systems that create barriers and perpetuate inequities for people of color.	SRWS
Jocelyn	3	Being cognizant and aware of microaggressions that lead to stereotype lifts and threats. Using that knowledge to confront racist teaching practices that aims to be inclusive of all.	PRP
Jenna	4	Teaching our students about race, ethnicity, microaggressions, biases, stereotypes, discrimination, and accepting everyone for who they are. Appreciating and accepting the traditions and all the "ways of being" in our classroom, school, community, and society. Not seeing people who are white and their traditions as superior to people of color. Not learning about our world (history, norms, etc.) through a white frame of reference.	SRWS DIS
Blair	3	This is hard, because I don't think that I am able to fully grasp anti-racism yet on the whole. I think that it means working to teach in a way that is not biased, and that is equitable for all students (giving each student what they need). It is constantly working against oppression and trying de-center myself as a white person in my teaching.	PRP SRWS

Jamie	4	To teach others to go against racism and to grow our knowledge around what is happening in our society,	PRP DIS
Jill	5	As an educator who identifies as white, I define anti-racist teaching as a never ending journey that educators take part in minute by minute each day to continuously reject and fight against their own unconscious biases, systemic racism and barriers within their school, classroom and district, and the racism that is present in and between their students and families. I believe it is a critical facet in education in order to ensure every single child's success and well-being.	SRWS
Jackie	3	To me, antiracist teaching is first and foremost understanding my own biases that might be standing in the way of providing equitable and safe instruction to my students (i.e. microaggressions or other types of interactions that I might be unaware of etc. It also looks like analyzing curriculums to make sure we are not teaching biased or racist material. We are also currently working toward ways of dismantling stigma and misconceptions around race with our students. We are currently discussing ways to undo some of those unconscious beliefs our students hold.	PRP SRWS DIS REC
Brooke	5	Acknowledging my whiteness both in and out of the classroom, helping students understand that we live in an unjust world, engaging in identity work to support relationship building across all people.	PRP DIS
Courtney	3	Anti-racist teaching includes being proactive in planning. In planning, teachers create lessons and units based on the students in front of them. The concepts, materials, and assessments must be fitting to the needs of students. Teachers must have a lens for assessing how material will be interpreted. Teachers must help students learn to use a critical lens in what they read, see, and hear. Teachers must give students the opportunity to share their perspectives in a safe environment.	DIS REC
Marsha	4	Offering opportunities for students to notice racism and discuss. Make space for students to share experiences and things they are aware of. Share books that are windows and mirrors.	DIS

Meredith	5	The process of identifying and changing systems and policies in education to provide more equitable opportunities for students of color.	SRWS
Marissa	3	Antiracist teaching is taking the time to recognize and get to know students, their cultures, backgrounds, prior experiences, hopes and dreams. It's also knowing many students of color have not been afforded the opportunities their white peers have. Antiracist teaching is also taking the time to explore other curriculums and ways to teach in order to make sure every student is heard and understood for the person they are.	SRWS REC
Mark	4	Actively teaching students to think outside their race to support P.O.C. who have been discriminated against and marginalized since the founding of this country.	DIS
Cecilia	2	To me that means thinking about how you present, talk and think when it come to other cultures and races. Making sure that you take into account everyone in the room not just a few or what your comfortable with.	PRP REC
Caroline	2	Teaching proactively against racism and the subtle racist messages that are hidden in our curriculum, materials, and society.	DIS REC
Kaley	3	Explicit instruction on how to counteract long standing racist structures/beliefs.	DIS

[a]SRWS = Systemic Racism & White Supremacy. DIS = Direct Instruction with Students. REC = Reviewing & Evaluating

Curriculum. PRP = Personal Reflection as a Practitioner.

Appendix B

<div align="center">

Preliminary Screening Questionnaire for School Principal Participants
Study Team Contact: Sarah D. Lent
Study Email: sdlent@wisc.edu

</div>

Name: _____

Do you identify as a white principal?

____ Yes   ____ No

Have you been a principal for at _____ for a minimum of 2 years?

____ Yes   ____ No

Or have been a principal for a minimum of 2 years?

____ Yes   ____ No

Do you identify as being committed to antiracist leadership?
The language you use at your school is "antiracist", not only social justice or equity.

____ Yes   ____ No

Have you attended or participated in a training on antiracist leadership?

____ Yes   ____ No

Do you lead a school with a diverse student racial demographic?
you wouldn't describe your student demographics as "predominantly white"

____ Yes   ____ No

Appendix C

<div align="center">

Recruitment Script
*Introductory email script

</div>

Hello, my name is Sarah Lent. I am planning a study with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This study is about how schools are taking up antiracist practices. I am specifically studying white principals committed to antiracist education and how they shape or influence the way teachers adopt antiracist attitudes and behaviors. You have been recommended as a principal committed to antiracist education.

I have attached a preliminary screening questionnaire to further determine your eligibility to participate.

Please let me know what questions you have and if you are interested in further discussion to participate in the study. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,
Sarah

Appendix D

Teacher Initial Questionnaire
An e-questionnaire (e.g. Google form) will be sent to all teachers to collect information on their background information, confidence, and commitment to antiracism and interest in participating in the study.

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey! I know this is an especially demanding school year. This survey is **confidential** and will be used to identify participants for the study in addition to learning more about your school and its work towards antiracist education.

[more details will be included regarding the specific timeline of the study]

Thanks,
Sarah D. Lent

How do you identify in terms of gender?
Female
Male
Non-binary/non-gender
Prefer not to say
Other:

How do you identify in terms of race?
(open answer)

What is your current age?
(open answer)

What is your current position at [name] school?
(short answer)

Grade level
(selection)

How many years have you been employed at [name] school?
0-2 years
3-5 years
6-8 years
9-11 years
12+ years

What are the total number of years you have been teaching (including [name] school and any previous schools)?
0-5 years

6-10 years
11-15 years
16-20 years
21-15 years
26+ years

On a scale of 1-5, how familiar are you with the term "antiracist teaching"?
5= most confident
4= very familiar
3= somewhat familiar
2= not very familiar
1=not familiar

Have you attended any antiracist-related training or PDs? If so, describe.
yes/no/describe

Provide the title of the PD or describe its objective.
(short answer)

Have you attended any equity or social justice-related training or PDs? If so, describe.
Yes/no/describe

Provide the title of the PD or describe its objective.
(short answer)

How do you define antiracist teaching?
(short answer)

How do you describe your level of commitment to antiracist teaching?
5=antiracist teaching and schooling is at the core of everything I do
4=I have a strong commitment to antiracist teaching
3=I am committed to antiracist teaching
2=beginning to learn about antiracist teaching
1=considering a commitment to antiracist teaching
0=not committed

Describe your experience with antiracist teaching and schooling.
(short answer)

Describe a situation at your current school that you consider an example of antiracist education at work.
(short answer)

Are you willing and interested in participating in this study? Options for participation:
_Yes. I am willing to participate in 1 individual interview and 1 teacher focus group.
_Yes. I am willing to participate in 1 individual interviews

_Yes. I am willing to participate in 1 teacher focus group
_No, I prefer not to participate further in the study.

interviews will take place via Zoom/WebEx or in-person as COVID-19 safety protocols allow.
interviews will be scheduled at teachers' discretion to the greatest extent possible. They may take place outside of contracted hours if desired.

Name, only if willing to participate further in the study as indicated above.
(open answer)

Email to coordinate participation in study
(open answer)

Appendix E.

Interview Protocol: Principal (1 of 3)

Date of interview:	
Time of interview:	
Location (type of room) of interview: (e.g. classroom, office, coffee shop)	
Interviewer:	
Interviewee: (Pseudonym only)	

Introduction:
- ❑   **Introduction: myself & project**
- ❑   **Review consent (including permission to audio record interview)**

Personal Background and Information

Please describe your family.

Can you recount for me what your K-12 education was like? i.e. public or private school, small or large school

Where did you go to undergrad? Graduate school? Licensure program?

Did your graduate school or licensure program have any classes concerning antiracism or equity?
-     If so, what did they entail?
-     Was it embedded in the program in any way? How so?
-     Did it include any identity work? Address whiteness in any way? How so?

How did any of those experiences influence where you are in your career now?

Professional Background Information

How long have you been in education?
- How long have you been at [name] school?

- What did you do prior to being a principal?
- What determined your interest in school leadership?

Do you have any other relevant professional experience in education?

Antiracist Attitudes & Practices

How do you describe your commitment to antiracism as a school leader?

- What motivates this commitment?
- Has your answer to that always been consistent or the same? What has changed?
- How has that looked in your school in the past? So far this fall?

You participated in [name] training/development for antiracist school leadership. Please describe this training.

- Why did you choose to participate in this specific training? Choice? Mandatory?
- What were your biggest takeaways from this?
- How did what you learned at this training influence how you lead at [name] school today?

Outside of this specific training, have there been pivotal experiences or people that have influenced this development? Please describe.

What was your response to the increased attention to race and antiracism this summer?

What feelings did you have about the upcoming school year concerning antiracist work?

In what way is this different from previous years?

Professional Development Concerning Antiracism
What are your goals and initiatives for [name] school's focus on antiracism this year? (e.g. ongoing PD for teachers, changes in curricular mandates, changes in discipline policy).

- What were some considerations you made when developing these goals and initiatives?
- How is this the same or different from last year?
- How else are you supporting teachers' growth and development? (in addition to "professional development", observations, lesson plans, community engagement)
- Has anyone influenced your goals and focus on antiracism work? (mentors? Colleagues? How have they influenced this?

What goals do you have specifically for your teachers to grow as antiracist practitioners this year?

- Were these influenced by this summer's increased attention to race and (anti)racism?

    In what ways?
    - How will you meet this goal?
    - What challenges do you anticipate?

Challenges & Barriers
What challenges or barriers have you experienced explicitly bringing up antiracism?
- Implementing equity-based initiatives?
- With PD for antiracist education?
- What is your response to such barriers?

Who presents barriers to you implementing antiracist agendas?
- Do you get any pushback from parents or other community members? What does that entail?
- What is your response to such barriers?

Who most supports your initiatives?
- How do they support you?

Thank you for your time and insight. Do you think there is anything else we missed that would be helpful for me to understand?

Appendix F.

Interview Protocol: Principal (2 of 3)

Date of interview:	
Time of interview:	
Location (type of room) of interview: (e.g. classroom, office, coffee shop)	
Interviewer:	
Interviewee: (Pseudonym only)	

Introduction:
- ❏   Review consent (including permission to audio record interview)

PART 1: Individual follow-up questions

PART 2: Defining Antiracist Leadership

I want to start by giving you 5, or so, minutes to write your philosophy, your vision, for antiracist school leadership.
- How do you articulate this to staff?
- How do you model this?
- Can you give me an example?

When are your practices centered on an antiracist orientation?
- Can you give me an example?

PART 3: Talking About Race

Can you tell me about a time when race was on the table and you felt proud of how you responded/engaged?
        - How did you feel?

Who do you talk to about race?
        - What do those conversations entail?
        - How do they make you feel?

Was there a time when race was on the table and you felt less than proud of how you responded/engaged?
        - How did you feel?

Where do you find yourself still upholding racist ideas?
              - How can you work to get rid of them?

Have you ever had an issue with a colleague concerning race?
              - What happened?
              - How did you respond?
              - How did you feel?

Have you ever had an issue with a student concerning race?
              - What happened?
              - How did you respond?
              - How did you feel?

Thank you for your time and insight. Do you think there is anything else we missed that would be helpful for me to understand?

Appendix G.

Interview Protocol: Principal (3 of 3)

Date of interview:	
Time of interview:	
Location (type of room) of interview: (e.g. classroom, office, coffee shop)	
Interviewer:	
Interviewee: (Pseudonym only)	

Introduction:
- ❏ Review consent (including permission to audio record interview)

PART 1: Individual follow-up questions

PART 2

What have you learned about yourself in the last year concerning race?
    - Concerning antiracist education?

Are there policies that you would change, at the school or district level, to increase equitable opportunities?
    - What does making those changes require?

What are your goals concerning antiracist education for [SCHOOL NAME] next year?
    - What does that look like or entail for teachers?

Thank you for your time and insight. Do you think there is anything else we missed that would be helpful for me to understand?

Appendix H

Interview Protocol: Teacher (1 of 2)

Date of interview:	
Time of interview:	
Location (type of room) of interview: (e.g. classroom, office, coffee shop)	
Interviewer:	
Interviewee: (Pseudonym only)	

Introduction:
- ❏   Introduction: myself & project
- ❏   Confirm receipt of consent signatures (including permission to audio record interview)

Personal Background Information

Please describe your family.

Can you recount for me what your K-12 education was like? I.e. public or private school, small or large school

Where did you go to undergrad? Graduate school?

How did any of those experiences influence where you are in your career now?

How do you describe yourself (your identity) to people within education and outside?

Professional Background Information

How long have you been in education?

How long have you been at [name] school?

(Potential follow-up: where did you teach prior? For how long?)

Why did you choose to work at [name] school?

Do you have any other professional experience relevant to education?

Antiracist Attitudes & Practices

In your survey you identified as being [insert answer] in your journey and level of confidence with antiracist education. What steps have you taken, or are you taking, to identify as such?

Have there been pivotal experiences or people that have influenced this development? Please describe.

What do you want to know concerning antiracist education? What do you wish you were learning more about?

How do you define antiracist education?

- Has your answer to that always been consistent or the same? What has changed?
- What does that entail for teachers? Principals? Students?
- How has that looked in your school in the past? So far this fall?

In your initial survey, you shared that your commitment to antiracist teaching is [enter individual information]. Please say more about your level of commitment.

- What motivates this commitment? (prompts as needed: People? Events?)
- Has this commitment changed over time? If so, how?

What was your response to the increased attention to race and antiracism this past summer?
- What was your principal's? school district's?

Professional Development Concerning Antiracist Education
What are the goals or focus areas teachers at [name] school are learning about this year?
- Do you know how or why this was chosen?
- Do you think this is important? Why/why not?
- When is your school focusing on these focus areas?

What feelings did you have about the upcoming school year concerning antiracist work?

Is your principal helping staff develop as antiracist educators?
- How are they accomplishing this?
- Or to connect social issues to how you teach? And students' learning?

In what ways is this different from previous years?

What other roles does your principal play in your professional learning in this area?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?

-       Does your principal play an important role? How so?
-       Can you think of some examples of what your principal has done in an attempt to help develop your professional learning?

<u>Thank you for your time and insight. Do you think there is anything else we missed that would be helpful for me to understand?</u>

Appendix I.

Interview Protocol: Teacher (2 of 2)

Date of interview:	
Time of interview:	
Location (type of room) of interview: (e.g. classroom, office, coffee shop)	
Interviewer:	
Interviewee: (Pseudonym only)	

PART 1: Individual Follow-up Questions

PART 2: Reflections on Race

Has there been a time when race was on the table and you felt proud of how you engaged or responded? What happened?

Who do you talk to about race?

Has there been a time when race was on the table and you felt less than proud of how you engaged or responded? What happened? If it was to happen again, what would you do differently?

Have you had an issue with a colleague concerning race?
- What happened prior to this (situation/conversation)?
- How did you respond?
- How did this make you feel?

Thank you for your time and insight. Do you think there is anything else we missed that would be helpful for me to understand?

Appendix J.

Observation Protocol
Staff meetings, Department or Grade Level Meetings, and Professional Development Sessions

Date of Observation:	
Type of Meeting/PD:	
Location (type of room) of interview: (e.g. classroom, office, WebEx, Zoom)	
Facilitator(s):	
Time:	

Attendees:
- Role at school
- Role in meeting
- Gender/Race (identified through staff survey)
- Amount of participation (verbal participation)
- Other means of participation

Stated Objective/Goals:
- Adherence to objective
- Meet objective/goals?

Stated Agenda:
- Adherence to agenda
- Additions to agenda

Concerning Antiracism
- Language used (by facilitator(s) and participants)
- Individual, behavioral or institutional?
- Mention of whiteness?

Appendix K.

<div align="center">

Principal Focus Group Protocol

</div>

Date of group:	
Time of group:	
Location (type of room) of interview: (e.g. WebEx, classroom, office)	
Facilitator:	
Participants: (Pseudonym only)	

Introduction:
- Introduction: myself & project
- Confirm receipt of consent signatures (including permission to audio & video record focus group)
- Overview of focus group : 1) topic; 2) assurance of confidentiality; and 3) discussion norms.
  - Confidentiality: What is said in this focus group stays here. Any individual, school and district names will not be included in any reports.
  - The purpose of the focus group is to discuss antiracist education. I am exploring the role principals play in shaping and influencing teachers' practices and am interested in your input. As such, I want you to share your honest and open thoughts with us.
  - Operating Principles: 1) I will facilitate the conversation, but want participants to lead the conversation. *I would like everyone to participate and do the talking;* 2) There are no right or wrong answers. Everyone's experiences are important. Speak up to agree or disagree; 3) Confidential space: what is said in this room stays here. I want individuals to feel comfortable sharing when sensitive issues come up.

PART 1:

[Questions and scenarios concerning initial findings]

PART 2:

1. What does it mean to be an antiracist principal?
   1. What does it look like?

       2. What is the most challenging about it?

2. Has your answer to that always been the same?
       1. What has changed?

3. Does it look different last school year to this school year?
       1. How?
       2. What made it change?

4. What shapes these practices (e.g. *refer to practice mentioned earlier,* coaching, modeling, development of PD)? Or Attitudes?
       1. How does your identity shape these practices or attitudes?
       2. Specific people?
       3. Your community?
       4. Events? Readings?

5. What practices are you reading about, observing and want to take up?
       1. Tell me about a time you used the new information?
       2. What have you most recently read or watched that really challenged you? How did it challenge you?

6. What is the next step for you to keep pushing yourself as an antiracist leader?
       1. How would other principals describe themselves as an antiracist leader?
       2. How do you know you are progressing in a way that is meaningful or beneficial?

Other topics/prompts:
- Language: social justice/equity/culturally responsive
- What causes racial disparities?
- What are barriers for antiracist education?

Conversation prompts:
- Can you talk about that more?
- Can you give an example?
- Thank you. What do other people think?
- Tell me about a time...

Appendix L.

Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Date of group:	
Time of group:	
Location (type of room) of interview: (e.g. WebEx, classroom, office)	
Facilitator:	
Participants: (Pseudonym only)	

Introduction:
- Introduction: myself & project
- Confirm receipt of consent signatures (including permission to audio & video record focus group)
- Overview of focus group : 1) topic; 2) assurance of confidentiality; and 3) discussion norms.
  - Confidentiality: What is said in this focus group stays here. Any individual, school and district names will not be included in any reports.
  - The purpose of the focus group is to discuss antiracist education. I am exploring the role principals play in shaping and influencing teachers' practices and am interested in your input. As such, I want you to share your honest and open thoughts with us.
  - Norms: 1) Participants lead the conversation. *I would like everyone to participate and do the talking;* 2) There are no right or wrong answers. Everyone's experiences are important. Speak up to agree or disagree; 3) Confidential space: what is said in this room stays here. I want individuals to feel comfortable sharing when sensitive issues come up.

PART 1:

[Questions and scenarios concerning initial findings]

PART 2:

1. What does it mean to be an antiracist teacher?
   1. What does it look like?

2.   Has your answer to that always been the same?
      1. What has changed?
      2. What made it change?

3.   What shapes these practices? Or Attitudes?
      1. How has your identity shaped your practices or attitudes?
      2. Specific people?
      3. Events? Readings?

4.   Do you think your principal influences your antiracist practices?
      1. Why or why not?

5.   Does your principal support and foster your professional learning in this area? How or how not?
      1. Can you tell me about a time your principal fostered your professional learning?

6.   Does it look different from last year to this year?
      1.   How? Why?

7.   What practices related to antiracist education are you reading about, observing and want to take up? (this could be in your own time or in community with others)

Other topics/prompts:
      -   Language: social justice/equity/culturally responsive
      -   What causes racial disparities?
      -   What are barriers for antiracist education?

Conversation prompts:
      -   Can you talk about that more?
      -   Can you give an example?
      -   Thank you. What do other people think?
      -   Let's have some other comments

Appendix M.

Journaling for Antiracist Teaching Study

I invite you to journal alongside your participation in the study. There is no right or wrong way to journal. You may write here or on paper - whichever you are most comfortable with. This journal, like your interviews, is confidential between you and me. This journal can be a space to free-write or there are prompts to respond to. All I ask is that you date your entries.

- Post-interview reflection: *do I have any lingering thoughts or reflections afterward?*
- Post-professional development or staff/team meeting: *do I have any lingering thoughts or reflections afterward?*
- When I get feedback and critique, am I reflective or defensive? Grateful or grouchy? Do I ask questions to explain it away? Am I upset that they're hurt or upset that my ego's hurt?
- Am I comfortable talking about race? What about race am I comfortable talking about? What am I less comfortable about?
- Who do I most look up to on issues of race and antiracism? What are their views? Why have I been drawn to those views? (Kendi, 2020)
- Why is it necessary for antiracists to call out racism? (Kendi, 2020) How comfortable am I doing this? What makes it hard or not?
- How am I amplifying the voices of students of color?
- Recall a recent racial injustice I observed or identified. Did I say something or do something? Why or why not? (Kendi, 2020) Can I think of something that occurred in relation to education? In a school setting?
- In my institution or community, are darker people of color more likely to be in less desirable roles than lighter people of color and White people? Think about the color characteristics of my environment (Kendi, 2020).
- How does white privilege show up in my community and institution?
  - How does my whiteness show up in my teaching?
- Have I ever observed white students treated differently than students of color?
  - Have I ever treated white students differently than students of color?
- What policies or practices could be changed to create more equity in my institution or community between lighter people, darker people, and White people? (Kendi, 2020)
  - Have I witnessed any change?
  - What role can I play in this change? What power do I have?
- What have I learned about my white privilege?
  - About whiteness in education?
  - About myself as an antiracist?
  - About what growth I have made and still need to make?
  - How am I thinking differently about some of these ideas?
- To be an antiracist is to be hopeful. We must all find hope. How do I find hope? (Kendi, 2002)
  - Where do I see hope in my school community? In education?
  -

This study is confidential. Neither your name, the school's name or any other identifiable information will be published. Only members of the study team will have access to the data.

Kendi, I. X. (2020). *Be anti-racist: A journal for awareness, reflection, and action.* One world.

Appendix N

Sources Utilized in Document Analysis

Study[a] Site	Document	Code[b]
3	Overview of Antiracism Curriculum Professional Development (Powerpoint presentation)	PD
3	[Sandburg] Identity and Social Justice Work (Powerpoint presentation	PD
3	Culture Flipbook	IM
3	Example Read Aloud Guides	IM
3	Action Resources	CPM
3	Equity Word Wall	IM
3	[Sandburg] Antiracism Work Timeline	I
3	Antiracism Working Team (agendas)	TD
3	Identity Read Aloud Suggestions	CPM
3	Equity PD Since Beginning of [District PD]	I
3	Identity Journal for Students	IM
3	Equity Check-in	PD
3	August 2019 PD	PD
3	Equity Team Commitments	TD
3	Equity Team Agenas	TD
3	*Martin Luther King Jr., More Than a Dream* e-book	IM
3	Justice and Empathy (Powerpoint)	IM
3	Caregiver Letter	SC
3	Diversity & Culture Resources	CPM
3	Identity Resources	CPM
3	"What's In My Toolbox" (Handout)	IM

3	Chauvin Trial Talking Points K-2	IM
3	Chauvin Trial Talking Points 3-4	IM
3	Race Lesson Guidance	SC
1	Equity Team Agendas	TD
1	School Improvement Plan (Goal setting document)	TD
1	School Leadership Team Agendas	TD
1	(Voluntary) Book/Podcast/Documentary Clubs Invitation	SC
1	Chauvin Trial Lesson	IM
1	Chauvin Trial Lesson K-1	IM
1	Chauvin Trial Lesson 2-4	IM
1	Student Racism Presentation	O
1	[School Mascot] Week of Action Lessons	IM
1	AAPI Month Lessons	IM
D	Race Lesson Guidance (Chauvin Trial)	DC
D	Staff Communication Concerning Chauvin Verdict	SC
D	History of Professional Development Courses	PD
D	District Improvement Plan	I
D	Professional Development Plan	PD
D	Racial Identity (worksheet)	PD
D	Community Equity Agreements	I
D	Staff Communication Concerning PD	DC/PD
D	Leadership Team Communication	DC/PD

[a]Site 1= Lakeside. Site 2 = PreK. Site 3 = Sandburg. D = District.

[b]IM= Instructional Material. PD = Professional Development. CPM = Curricular planning materials. I = informational. TD = team document. SC = school communication, DC = district communication. O = other