

Disrupting Racial Silences in a Predominantly White School District

Jennifer Krill

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Abstract

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This research study invited teachers to participate in an inquiry discussion group in order to disrupt the racial silences that existed in a predominantly white school district. The ways Americans think, act, and talk about racism and white supremacy have become more complex over time as they have shifted from explicit to implicit (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This is true in American society and also in America's school systems, where racism has shifted from overt segregation (many school systems remain de facto segregated [Wells et al., 2014]) to covert colorblind silences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2004). Even though there have been efforts to disrupt racial silences in schools, previous attempts framed the problem in terms of culture rather than addressing race in explicit ways. These curricular initiatives (e.g., multiculturalism, culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy) introduced in schools were also problematic in that teachers were treated as technicians (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), which assumed they could take these curriculum tools and implement them without questioning their own mindset or beliefs about race. Therefore, this study was a next step toward disrupting racial silences in educational settings by explicitly discussing race and positioning teachers as knowledge producers.

For this research, intersecting theoretical ideas from Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies, and inquiry as stance were used to strengthen an understanding of what happened when the silences that existed around topics of race in white educational settings were disrupted. Data produced in ten weekly inquiry discussion group meetings were analyzed using

discourse analysis. Results of this analysis pointed to a gradual shift in the discourse, which suggested a shift in comfort with explicitly talking about race. These results were organized into three phases: discomfort of not knowing, embracing discomfort, and grappling toward change. It is important to note that this study also highlights the complexities of race work in predominantly white schools as is evidenced by the ways this shift was not always perfect (i.e., Discourses of white supremacy and colorblindness circulated throughout). Therefore, teachers in predominantly white educational settings, teacher educators, and educational researchers need to be prepared for tensions and contradictions that may arise when disrupting racial silences. Educators and researchers in the field should encourage educators to embrace the role of knowledge producer and also be aware of the ways “nice white women” typically engage in this work so that important steps toward disrupting the racial silences that exist in predominantly white educational settings can be achieved.

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J. K.

Dedication

To my mom and dad.

Without them I would not be the woman, teacher,
runner, sister, wife, or mother I am today.

Preface

May 2020

On Friday, May 8th, 2020, people all across America participated in the #IRunWithMaud event in which they ran 2.23 miles to honor what would have been Ahmaud Arbery's 26th birthday. Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old unarmed African American male, was murdered on February 23rd, 2020 by Travis McMichaels, a 34-year-old white male, and his father, Gregory McMichaels, a 64-year-old retired police officer and District Attorney Investigator. The McMichaels shot and killed Arbery while Arbery was out on a run in his neighborhood in Brunswick, Georgia because they claimed that they believed Arbery was a suspect in some recent break-ins in the area.

On Friday, May 8th, 2020, I 'ran with Maud' in the morning and then spent the day engaged in distance learning lessons about groundwater pollution with my mostly white 5th grade students. Later that day, I also participated in a Zoom team meeting with my fellow white 5th grade teachers, where we discussed the following week's ELA poetry lessons. At the end of our team meeting, we discussed the recent news coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic and what it meant for our teaching. In the back of my mind, I wondered if I was the only one thinking about Ahmaud Arbery. I wondered why it was so easy for us to discuss some current events as they related to our teaching, such as COVID-19, but not so easy to discuss the implications of the murder of Ahmaud Arbery.

On Monday, May 25th, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old unarmed African American male, was brutally murdered by four police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Floyd was arrested for allegedly using a counterfeit 20 dollar bill and was then placed in handcuffs. While

Floyd was in handcuffs and lying face down on the floor, Derek Chauvin, a 44-year-old white male police officer, knelt on Floyd's neck for more than 8 minutes while Floyd repeatedly said, "I can't breathe." Three other police officers further restrained Floyd and prevented onlookers from intervening. Floyd stopped moving during the last two minutes of Chauvin kneeling on his neck and was pronounced dead at the scene.

The next day, on Tuesday, May 26th, 2020, my principal put out our morning announcements letting the families in our school district know that we would be beginning a new theme this week: Art Week! Throughout that day I led a virtual science review session with my 5th graders for their upcoming science test and then met virtually with my 5th grade team of teachers to discuss the upcoming car parade our school would be participating in. Our principal and my team of teachers were very concerned about the route of the parade. I was growing more concerned that nobody was discussing the race relations in our country.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

When considering the idea of teacher learning, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytle (2009) warn that initiatives that embrace practitioner learning can include assumptions about teachers, teaching, and learning such as teachers are technicians that are trained to be “faithful implementers of received knowledge and curriculum” (p. 2). Instead, Cochran-Smith and Lytle suggest that “practitioners are deliberative intellectuals who constantly theorize practice as part of practice itself” (p. 2). They believe that in order for teachers to learn and develop their profession, it is important for teachers to unpack assumptions about teachers, teaching, and knowledge. In particular, it is important for teachers to be able to critique concepts of “teacher as technician, consumer, receiver, transmitter, and implementor of other people’s knowledge as well as a critique of many of the prevailing social and political arrangements of schools and schooling” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 276). When teachers implement this stance toward improving their profession, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2009) refer to it as inquiry as stance. In other words, this stance encourages teachers to push back against the idea of a teacher as a technician or as someone who just mechanically distributes knowledge from outside sources without questioning the curriculum or its social and political implications.

This is an idea that has stuck with me since I was exposed to it and one I use as a lens to look back at my experiences in education as a student and now as a teacher. As a student, I wonder if my teachers ever questioned the curriculum they used with me and if they considered the social or political implications, especially in terms of the racial silences and racial inequalities that existed in the community where I grew up and attended school. I grew up in a

suburb one hour north of New York City that was approximately 70% white. All of my neighbors were white. All of my friends were white. Most of my classmates were white. All of my teachers were white. My memories of learning about race involve very brief overviews of what white people consider important: Slavery existed a very long time ago. Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln came along and inspired the good guys to end slavery. After slavery was abolished, there were still existing inequalities, such as the Jim Crow Laws, so people like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks inspired people to make things right. Racism still existed, but only in unknown parts of our country and certainly not in our town.

I can agree with some who come before me when they say that growing up white meant that the polite thing to do was not to speak about race at all and that this led to feelings of discomfort any time race did come up (Michael & Bartoli, 2014). This was where and how I spent the first 18 years of my life, quite ignorant of the privileges afforded to me by my race and quite silent about topics of race. The systems I grew up within benefitted those who were white, and I was raised, by my parents and teachers, to believe that the correct way to deal with racial differences was to engage in colorblind discourses, which meant not speaking about them at all. I never questioned why my neighborhood was mostly white families or why the black families that did attend my school district all lived in what was labeled the “bad” parts of town. I also never questioned why the In-School-Suspension room at my school consisted of mostly black and brown students, I just knew I didn’t want to end up there with the “bad kids”. My parents never discussed it, my teachers never discussed it, so I never questioned it. I had internalized the idea that to be a good parent, a good teacher, and a good person meant to remain silent about racial topics. As I grew up and these beliefs developed within me, I continued to feel that race was not

something I could bring up in conversation, a discomfort I have carried with me throughout my educational career.

Once I became a teacher, I tried my hardest to learn the profession and do right by my students. Prior to pursuing my doctoral degree, I was mostly confident in my abilities as an elementary school teacher. I had spent four years teaching in a NYC public school, followed by another five years teaching in a public school in a suburb of NYC where I am currently teaching, and I always felt that I was a particularly strong English Language Arts (ELA) teacher. I would spend hours scouring the teacher manuals for prepackaged discussion questions on a chapter book deemed appropriate for millions of America's youth. I would type up daily lesson plans, teach my students to play the game of school, and consistently had a high percentage of my students earning 3s and 4s on the ELA state exams. In hindsight, though, I realize that I was really acting as a vessel for distributing top-down curricula without questioning my role as the teacher or questioning the social and political implications of what I was teaching my students.

After entering my doctoral studies program, I continuously found myself struggling to figure out why I had spent years viewing good teaching as being a technician (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) who remained silent around issues of race. I realize now that my own lack of understanding about race and whiteness impacted my students of color in the NYC public school and continues to impact my white students in the suburbs. I had spent my first years of teaching as a 'faithful implementer of received knowledge and curriculum' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) without ever questioning how this curriculum was impacting my students. I had armed all my students with the ability to discuss character change and figurative language, but not the ability to discuss the reality of race relations in our country. I, as my own teachers had done,

taught my students to engage in a colorblind discourse simply by continuing to choose silence when it came to issues of race.

While I want to avoid being essentialist, I do not think that my experiences are unique. Considering 83% of America's teaching force are middle-class whites (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012), I think my lack of experience with discussing race in educational settings is similar to that of many of America's teachers. I also think that adopting inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009) and looking closely at my experiences and the experiences of those similar to me can contribute to a better understanding of the continuing silence around race that exists in America's schools and curricula. While I still to this day feel uncomfortable having explicit conversations about race and education, I also feel compelled to have them both inside and outside of the academy. I believe it is important to invite white educators to engage in conversations about race because, if we feel more comfortable having these conversations with each other, then we can be more prepared to discuss these topics with our students. Fostering these conversations can work toward growing a generation that can interrupt the silences in our colorblind society.

Background

In the current reckoning of race that America is undergoing, Americans are being called to acknowledge and name the white supremacy that exists in the nation. Americans are more aware than ever of the history and extensive writing around topics such as systemic racism, white supremacy, and colorblind discourses. The brutal murder of George Floyd and the civil unrest in response to the continued systemic racism toward black people have acted as a catalyst and caused people to turn to scholars who point out the ways that white supremacy has been baked into American society and how it has evolved over time, thus making explicit what has been

implicit, but ever present (Alexander, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Gould, 1981; Guinier, 2004; Hannah-Jones et al., 2019; Kendi, 2017; Leonardo, 2004).

The Changing Discourses of Racism

The ways Americans think, act, and talk about racism and white supremacy have become more complex over time as they have shifted from explicit to implicit. White supremacy has been overt since 1619 when enslaved Africans were brought to Virginia, a British colony, and sold to colonists (Hannah-Jones et al., 2019), and while it became more covert during the Jim Crow Era and in today's "New Jim Crow" (Alexander, 2010), white supremacy in America has always secured white racial domination.

From the inception of America as a country, Blacks were not treated as humans. "Enslaved people were not recognized as human beings but as property that could be mortgaged, traded, bought, sold, used as collateral, given as a gift and disposed of violently" (Hannah-Jones et al., 2019). This white racial domination was first secured by the ideology of scientific racism, or the belief that scientists could dilute the complexities of human intelligence to one single number and to then "use these numbers to rank people in a single series of worthiness, invariably to find that oppressed and disadvantaged groups ... are innately inferior and deserve their status" (Gould, 1981, p. 57). This ideology, that Blacks were not humans due to scientific differences, was used almost like a "psychological balm" (Hannah-Jones et al., 2019) for white supremacy. Whites used this "balm" as an excuse so that they could maintain their privilege and continue to control Black Africans and use them for economic exploitation. This logic was used by whites in positions of power as the basis for almost 250 years of enslaving Black Africans and forcing them to commit the labor that made America what it is today.

Even after slavery was abolished, the Jim Crow Laws, laws that enforced racial segregation, continued to position Blacks as inferior to whites. In the 1940s, the ideologies of racial liberalism began to emerge, which discredited the idea of inherent Black inferiority (Guinier, 2004). Racial liberalism was thought to be a sign of racial progress because those acting under racially liberal beliefs admitted that racism was something that was socially constructed and admitted that there were no scientific differences between the races. However, racial liberalism remained problematic, as those who acted under these beliefs did not work to dismantle the structural racism in America. Instead, those with racially liberal beliefs viewed racism as a problem existing only between individuals, when in reality racism in America has led to a legal set of practices that are rooted in our institutions. During this time period, America still remained silent about this systemic racism.

Even though advocates of social justice spoke up, protested, and won many steps forward during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the systems of white supremacy and racism still prevail today. Edward Bonilla-Silva (2015) calls today's racism "new racism" and explains that this racism is more covert than the overt racism that prevailed during slavery and the Jim Crow era. This "new racism" embraces the use of covert racial discourses and avoids direct racial terminology (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This "new racism" is subtle and covert, but that does not stop it from recycling racist practices of the past. Laws, policies, and practices continue to keep racism and white supremacy in place and legally separate Blacks and whites. Practices like redlining, which is the systematic denial of services and other discriminations in the housing market, as well as obstacles in the labor market related to wage earnings and occupational mobility, continue to maintain white racial domination in America (Bonilla-Silva, 2015) and

have caused Blacks to have 1/10th to 1/100th of the wealth of white Americans (Sorkin et al., 2020).

Similarly, Michelle Alexander (2010) coined the term ‘the New Jim Crow’ to describe her belief that the mass incarceration seen in America’s prison system is just a reincarnation of Jim Crow laws. On top of using laws to legally segregate the races, America now also uses the prison system to continue to oppress Blacks and treat them as inferior. Even ten years after she first made this claim, Alexander (2020) stated that, “despite appearances, our nation remains trapped in a cycle of racial reform, backlash and re-formation of systems of racial and social control.” Alexander explains that even though America continues to take some steps toward reckoning with our racial history, these steps have led to backlash from white nationalists, who re-form the systems that maintain the control of the racial hierarchy of our nation.

In short, even if racism and white supremacy have taken different forms over time, the ways most Americans think, act, and talk about racism and white supremacy have stayed the same. In particular, throughout American history, Americans have remained silent about the explicit and implicit acts of violence and injustice committed toward Black Americans (Hannah-Jones et al., 2019). This silence is complex and dangerous because it leads to colorblind racism, which makes people think racism does not exist.

Compounded by Silences

Despite the changing forms, racism remains a constant truth. This racism is systemic, meaning that across systems of law, education, employment, and commerce, white supremacy leads to direct processes, acts, decisions, and policies that secure white racial domination (Leonardo, 2004). This structural racism is a part of the fabric of American society, and one of

the reasons it continues to remain unchallenged in America is, in part, because of the silences associated with colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

In the contemporary racial ideology of colorblind racism, whites engage in certain discourses, actions, and laws that justify current racial situations through “raceless” explanations, and as a result, whites no longer sound racist. Yet, this silence does nothing but perpetuate systemic racism. This ideology encourages a silence around race, and with this silence comes the implication that if it isn’t talked about, it must not exist, which leaves little room for explicit interventions that could confront and disassemble racial inequality. These issues have impacted all of America’s institutions, including America’s school systems, and despite previous steps toward racial progress, if we do not *directly acknowledge* the simultaneous pernicious racism, then Americans will continue to be “stunned” that racism exists and continue to be ignorant of ways to combat it (Kendi, 2017). This is a problem because, if Americans do not expect that systemic racism still exists, then they will not “...have the wherewithal to combat, the progression of racism that historically has come after racial progress” (Kendi, 2017). Zeus Leonardo (2002) argues against a colorblind ideology by explaining his idea of a “neo-abolitionist” or the ways that the idea of being an abolitionist, someone who works toward abolishing slavery, has evolved. He claims that in order to be a white abolitionist in today’s world, whites should not deny their whiteness or engage in the silences of colorblind ideology; instead, whites should explicitly name and recognize their whiteness and be open to discussing what it means. The time to break these silences is overdue.

Problem Statement

The racial inequalities experienced in American society and the silences surrounding them are also experienced in American schools. While there have been many attempts to disrupt

these racial silences and work toward racial equity in school settings, these attempts have not succeeded in making explicit and disrupting structural racism in American schools and society.

Racial Inequalities and Silences in America's Schools

The racial inequalities experienced in American schools are “a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47). Similar to the ways that the discourse of racism has shifted from overt to covert in American society, racial inequalities in schools have gone from overt segregation to more covert practices and policies. Some of the structural racist policies that continue to plague America's school systems include the fact that those living in areas with higher property values (most often whites) attend better schools, or schools that have high-quality curricula and more extracurricular options (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Even when issues of housing segregation are addressed and Blacks are bused to white schools, Blacks are still underserved. The continued use of tracking, or the separating of students into groups by ability, has contributed to resegregating students within school systems (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Black students are disproportionately represented in special education programs (Ferri & Connor, 2014) and also disproportionately disciplined in comparison to their white counterparts (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Meek & Gilliam, 2016). Overall, educational ideas with positive correlations like “school achievement” and “intelligence” are considered white traits, while educational ideas like “welfare” and “underclass” are considered Black traits (Ladson-Billings, 1998). So, just like in American society, America's schools used to overtly segregate schools based on race, and even though that is no longer the case, there are still less obvious policies and practices that promote the idea that whites are superior to Blacks.

American schools also embrace the same silences of colorblind ideology as American society (Leonardo, 2004). The teachers and the curricula work to maintain silences around race, which produces students that are conditioned not to discuss race in direct ways. This continues to solidify race relations and white supremacy in America and America's schools. School curricula might acknowledge that racial disparities exist, but no curriculum on race relations directly deals with the problems of colorblind discourses (Leonardo, 2004). Students are conditioned not to question racial disparities, even though they may be experiencing them firsthand. Black boys who may feel that they are being disciplined more than their white counterparts are taught to keep quiet about it and not to question the persisting narratives that they are less academically inclined, mischievous, and overly aggressive (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Nelson, 2020). White students who may notice and wonder why they attend schools where there are only a handful of Black students present are taught that this is not something you can bring up in conversation. And even though there have been attempts to embrace diversity and to close achievement gaps, teachers could and do engage in these attempts without ever uttering the word "race" or without directly acknowledging white privilege (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

Attempts to Disrupt the Silences

One way American schools tried to address racial inequities in education was through multicultural education. The idea of multicultural education was first introduced during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and continued throughout the 1980s. Scholars like James A. Banks (1981) argued for true structural change and foregrounded the idea of multicultural education in "educational equality" by pushing for changes such as a transformation of curricular materials, teacher attitudes, and assessments. The introduction of multicultural education was transformative because it was "instrumental in moving away from the cultural deprivation and

deficit explanations that had become entrenched in the professional literature about students of color” (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017, p. 5). This attempt was also transformative because it recognized the racial, ethnic, and cultural changes that were coming in America’s schools and realized this would require a rethinking of curriculum and practice. While the aims of multicultural education were admirable, many of these efforts were problematic. Some of the ways it was taken up in schools ended up perpetuating colorblind ideology because issues of racism were not explicitly addressed. As a result, initial efforts toward multiculturalism contributed to the “othering” of marginalized groups through superficial add-ons to curriculum, such as focusing on famous Black Americans or famous women in history for one week (Gorski, 1999) or through “single group studies” that focused on the differences between groups, but not on the structural issues that caused inequalities and not on solutions to these inequalities (Banks & Banks, 2016). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate (1995) agree, stating that “current practical demonstrations of multicultural education in schools often reduce it to trivial examples and artifacts of cultures such as eating ethnic or cultural foods” (p. 61).

Other attempts to disrupt racial silences in schools included culturally responsive (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) pedagogies. Much of this work built on the work of multicultural education by continuing to suggest that theorists and practitioners needed to rethink curricula and pedagogies to be culturally relevant (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). In particular, culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy aimed for a more synergistic relationship between home and school culture by incorporating students’ cultures into the classroom and encouraging students to understand and critique the existing social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Looking back at the ideas central to culturally responsive and culturally relevant

pedagogy, Django Paris (2012) argued that the terms *relevant* and *responsive* did not go far enough in describing what was needed when teaching students from marginalized linguistic and racial backgrounds. Instead, Paris introduced the idea of culturally *sustaining* pedagogy that required teachers to encourage students to sustain their home culture and language while simultaneously encouraging them to become adept in the dominant culture and language. But despite the differences between culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally sustaining pedagogies, each approach recognized the importance of affirming students' culture, advocated for student achievement to occur without compromising cultural integrity, and aimed to develop students who could use this knowledge to critique existing inequities and power structures in American society (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017).

Just like the aims of multicultural education, the aims of culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally sustaining pedagogies were admirable, but also could be problematic. One problematic aspect of these attempts was that culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally sustaining pedagogies were taken up in schools in ways that did not explicitly acknowledge race (Milner, 2017). For example, even though Gloria Ladson-Billings conceptualized culturally relevant pedagogy to include race as an explicit and essential component, the ways others took it up moved away from race and instead focused broadly on culture (Milner, 2017). Specifically, this led to classroom practices that conflated race and ethnicity, and used race as a descriptive category, but did not examine race historically, socially, or legally. Furthermore, these approaches centered diversity as a goal of schooling, but avoided explicit discussions about the tensions that exist between and among various racial groups that are treated as the same under the umbrella of diversity (Milner, 2017). As a result, the silence around race was maintained in school settings. It is not uncommon for teachers to engage in a

pedagogy that aims to sustain the cultural experiences of students without ever mentioning the word “race” or discussing the racial inequities that exist in America that have marginalized these students in the first place (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Even the names of all of these pedagogies highlight the lack of explicitness. Multiculturalism, culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining all fail to explicitly employ the word *race* and instead continue to rely on the euphemism of culture. The unintended consequence of this linguistic choice may contribute to the inability to critique systemic racism. In revisiting culturally relevant pedagogy more than 20 years after it was proposed, H. Richard Milner (2017) states that race needs to be

re-centered and re-emphasized in the fight to support students of color with what they rightfully and highly deserve: educational opportunities that address and build on their many strengths and that have the potential to support students with tools to improve their communities for the benefit of mankind. (p. 24)

Another way these attempts could be problematic was due to the ways they were taken up by curriculum developers and school districts. When a school views teaching as a technical job, the underlying belief is that teachers are not the generators of knowledge. Instead, these schools believe that teachers are technicians who disseminate knowledge, and this “depends on the assumption that the knowledge teachers need to teach well is produced primarily by university-based researchers and scholars in various disciplines” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 255). This idea promotes the belief that knowledge that is useful in the classroom is produced outside the classroom and the teachers just transmit this knowledge. Curricula that were created outside the classroom under the umbrellas of multicultural education, culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining pedagogies were problematic because they assumed that teachers could take these curricular tools and implement them without questioning their own mindset or beliefs about race (Martinez & Johnston, 2019).

One example of this is the current New York State Education Department's (NYSED) Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Education Framework (2018). Interestingly, this framework opts to use both the terms "responsive" and "sustaining" in its title, which suggests that it associates itself with culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies of the past. However, unlike these pedagogies from the past, this framework identifies goals that explicitly address race and the tensions that exist between historically marginalized groups. The introduction to this framework states that the goal now is not just to

prevent the exclusion of historically silenced, erased, and disenfranchised groups, but also to assist in the promotion and perpetuation of cultures, languages and ways of knowing that have been devalued, suppressed, and imperiled by years of educational, political, economic neglect and other forms of oppression. (Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework, 2018, p. 6)

Yet, early critics point out that this framework is not something that can just be placed into the hands of teachers and expected to be successfully carried out (Martinez & Johnston, 2019). This sentiment is aligned with the critique of the idea of teachers as technicians (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). For too many years, teachers have been expected to take top-down initiatives and carry them out in order to fix the education system, as if following a checklist can help fix years of a historically inequitable system. It is important that teachers do not view the use of this framework as "doing" CR-S, but instead shifting their mindset to understanding that they can learn to *be* culturally responsive and sustaining (Martinez & Johnston, 2019). Teachers who try to reduce culturally relevant teaching to teaching one lesson or engaging with how-to steps miss the mark and "fail to recognize the intricacies of culture and the importance of pedagogy, and will fall short in understanding that the idea is built on a particular ideology about diversity, meaningful relationships between students and teachers, and the role of culture in the learning process" (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017, p. 9). In reality, teachers need opportunities to be introspective about the way they are thinking, acting, and speaking (or *not* thinking, acting, and

speaking) about race before they can begin to explicitly incorporate these anti-racist beliefs and practices in their classrooms.

Rationale for the Study

In light of the history of the silence around structural racism in schools and the attempts to shift the curriculum without engaging teachers in examining their own histories and understandings of race, there is a need to study how teachers discuss race when invited to do so. Therefore, this study invited teachers to explicitly discuss race and also treated teachers as producers of knowledge. This took place in an inquiry discussion group where white educators were positioned as intellectuals capable of producing knowledge in terms of explicitly talking about race and racial inequalities in their own classroom spaces. I chose to carry out this study at a predominantly white school district because, as a white educator who grew up attending school in a mostly white school district and now teaches in a mostly white school district, I could not help but notice the similarities to my own educational experiences and felt it was important to disrupt the cycle of silence around topics of race that I experienced myself.

The data produced in this study may give educators and scholars an understanding of how white educators react and move past moments of discomfort when they are invited to explicitly interrogate race. The results of this study may also be helpful for white teachers who are often hesitant (Matias & Mackey, 2015; Picower, 2009) to engage with topics of race. If white teachers can become more comfortable with direct discussions of race in the classroom, then we can work toward interrupting the current cycle of producing white students who turn into white adults that embrace the colorblind ideologies of “new racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). It also continues to be important to focus on issues of race today, as we are currently living in a time that has seen a

resurgence of white nationalism and nativism; therefore, “generating insights about race and Whiteness [is] more relevant than ever” (Leonardo, 2018, p. 371).

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to disrupt racial silences in a predominantly white school setting through a study grounded in beliefs from practitioner research and inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) that invited teachers to participate in an inquiry discussion group where they directly acknowledged their own beliefs about race and whiteness and then considered how these beliefs related to their classrooms.

Previous research in this field shows that when whites are invited to engage in discussions about race, they can react by displaying many forms of discomfort (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009). Therefore, while the purpose of this study was to learn what white educators did when investigating these topics, I also aimed to focus on moments of discomfort and the ways white educators did or did not move past them so that data could be produced that showed what keeps (or doesn't keep) participants engaged in a productive process of disrupting racial silences. Specifically, this study aimed to explore the following research questions:

- What happens when educators at a predominantly white elementary school are invited to disrupt silences around race?
 - How do educators inquire into whiteness and racism within the context of a school-based inquiry discussion group?
 - What ideas about whiteness and racism are surfaced, and how are these ideas engaged within the group?
 - How do teachers move past moments of discomfort to remain engaged?

Theoretical Framework

For this research, I drew on intersecting theoretical ideas in order to strengthen my understanding of what happens when the silences that exist around topics of race in white educational settings are disrupted. In particular, I employed theories presented in the fields of Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies, and inquiry as stance. Ideas from these fields were used to frame the problem and acted as the belief system and lens guiding each stage of this study.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that has roots in legal scholarship from the 1970s and was initiated in order to critique the slow incremental progress of the Civil Rights Movement and to point out that race, as opposed to class or gender, could be a stand-alone explanation for the hegemonic inequities present in American society (Crenshaw, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT was later introduced to the field of education by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate (1995) to point out similar incremental racial progress in the field of education and to point out that race could also be the singular axis of understanding inequities in American school systems. When related to education, a CRT scholar is not just any scholar who looks at race or racial issues in her work; a CRT scholar uses certain analytic tools to guide her research and understanding of how race operates (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Particularly helpful for this study were tools from CRT that help to analyze why people continue to think and talk about racism as if it isn't there.

One core idea of CRT is that racism is not just seen in badly behaved individuals. Instead, racism is the systemic basis on which American society is built (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013). CRT scholars also know that race is a social construction. Even though race is socially

constructed, meaning there are no actual scientific differences between people of different races, it also means that people of different races experience very different treatments within America's systems and that these socially constructed differences between races have caused many disparities for people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These beliefs help those researching race to understand that racism is not something that exists only in the beliefs of individuals or the comments between them. Racism is the basis of the systems of our country, and it exists in the processes, policies, and laws of America's institutions. This includes America's education system, where very real inequalities exist and have been held in place by often not being explicitly discussed (Leonardo, 2004). This helps explain why people continue to remain silent about race. Without an understanding of systemic racism, people can continue to believe that racism only exists between individuals. So, when analyzing race in educational settings, CRT scholars do not attribute racial inequities to individuals; they look to highlight the ways systemic racism is at play.

CRT scholars also know that interest convergence plays a role in solidifying this systemic racism. Interest convergence is the belief that whenever whites, or any group that is in a position of power, agree to something regarding racial justice, there must be some benefit in it for them (Ladson-Billings, 2013). It cannot be expected that those in positions of power, in this case whites, will just do what is right for the sake of social justice. This, again, can help explain why people continue to think and talk about racism as if it weren't there. Without a compelling reason, whites can continue to remain silent around topics of race. CRT scholars must look to align the interests of the dominant racial group with those that are marginalized in order to make strides toward racial justice.

CRT scholars also express skepticism toward colorblindness and neutrality (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Oftentimes whites will hold colorblindness or a neutrality toward racial issues as the ideal, but this ignores social and historical realities and also maintains white supremacy. Being skeptical helps to highlight instances when whites use colorblindness to justify current racial situations by engaging in silences around the topics or by claiming neutrality on topics of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). This skepticism also helps to highlight instances when whites embrace a colorblind stance when it comes to racial issues, yet in reality they may be using colorblindness to mask an actual understanding of how race is operating (Hyttén & Warren, 2003; Leonardo, 2008; Lewis, 2001).

Finally, CRT scholars argue for the importance of intersectionality as a tool for explaining and understanding existing inequalities and the experiences of individuals in American society (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Even if CRT centers racial injustice,

when we move into the complexities of real life we recognize that we each represent multiple identities—race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and many more. We perform our identities in myriad ways and can never be certain to which of those identities others react. (p. 40)

In other words, CRT scholars aim to analyze the ways that race can explain hegemonic inequities in American society, but also acknowledge that individuals hold multiple identities and aim to consider the ways in which these other identities interact with racial identities to explain experiences and injustices. This tool helps to understand why some people continue to remain silent about race. If all identities and experiences are not considered, people can struggle to find a connection or an entry point into breaking the silences that exist around race.

Critical Whiteness Studies

In order to understand how these issues operate in particularly white settings, I also employed theories present in Critical Whiteness Studies. Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) are

related to studies and ideas having to do with Critical Race Theory (CRT) in that both fields are interdisciplinary and both fields offer ways to see that racism is endemic in American society (Matias et al., 2014). “Unlike CRT, CWS focuses on problematizing the normality of hegemonic whiteness” (p. 291), and while CRT insists that racism is real, CWS further emphasizes the ways that whiteness, white privilege, and white supremacy are operating to secure this racism (Matias et al., 2014).

One idea that CWS explores is that when whites resist conversations or solutions concerning racial disparities, it is not a passive resistance, but an active protection of whiteness (Leonardo, 2008; Picower, 2009). Research in these areas has found that whites are not as ignorant to the realities of racial inequities as they claim and that when they resist discussions or actions that could work toward progress, they are really doing so out of a desire to protect their white privilege. When this privilege or the normalcy of whiteness is questioned and problematized, whites can react in certain ways. For example, research shows that whites can deflect, ignore, get angry, or get defensive (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009).

Central to understanding CWS is the idea that whiteness is multifaceted, not flat or one-dimensional. The complexity of white identities is important to acknowledge if the goal is to engage white participants in disruptions of racial silences (Lensmire et al., 2013; Leonardo, 2002). Too often, white identities are assumed to include a component of privilege, yet white identities are complex and nuanced and may also include racialized hegemony (Jupp et al., 2016). This is similar to CRT’s consideration of intersectionality when looking at existing inequities. It is important to avoid essentializing the experiences of any identity group and ignoring the multiple and intersecting identities that all people hold because, when these are ignored, people end up being marginalized based on only one dimension of their identity

(Crenshaw, 1991). If researchers assume that all whites experience privilege in the same ways, many whites can shut down and resist productive conversations that are necessary for progress. Instead, acknowledging the fact that whites do not all experience whiteness in the same ways and acknowledging that all individuals hold multiple identities that intersect and explain their experiences can be a helpful tool.

CWS also points out that it is important to decenter white privilege and center white supremacy in explorations of race (Leonardo, 2004). Discourses that focus just on white privilege are important because they give whites an entry point into discussing race issues, but discourses on privilege can also be dangerous because they make it seem like whites have these privileges without there being an agent of action. CWS argues instead for discourses that focus on the white supremacy that allows white privilege to happen.

CWS tells us the ways that whites have reacted in previous studies where silences around race have been disrupted, so I will be prepared for these reactions in my own study and prepare for ways to move past these reactions. I have also constructed methods that aim to account for the multifaceted intersectional nature of white identities and that aim to decenter white privilege and instead center white supremacy in my research project.

Inquiry as Stance

The idea of inquiry as stance is rooted in a history of action research. Action research can be understood as research that works toward change within educational practice and aims for the improvement of the lives of students and those that work with students, as well as an improvement of larger societal issues (Noffke, 2009). This type of research focuses on doing research *with* teachers in educational settings instead of doing research *on* teachers. This type of research also embodies “the political, in that they all work through, and often against existing

lines of power” (p. 6). It is also important to point out that this understanding of action research, as a political response to structural societal issues, stems from African American academic literature. African American scholars have pushed back on the idea of schools being a vehicle for social advancement and instead have pointed out that schools have often been used as instruments to perpetuate the social order (Noffke, 2009). Ideas and theories rooted in this history of action research can help address educational issues that are connected to the larger political issues of society.

I relied on theories present in this body of knowledge because my study aimed to disrupt racial silences in educational settings with the aim of improving the lives of the students and those that work with the students, aiming also for an overarching improvement of larger societal issues. More specifically, this study incorporated ideas from an area of action research called inquiry as stance. Inquiry as stance is a concept introduced by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) as a stance that is associated with practitioner research. Cochran-Smith and Lytle agree with the idea that practitioner research and learning can be the key to reshaping schools and improving education. They warn, though, that current initiatives that embrace practitioner learning still include assumptions about teachers, teaching, and learning, such as the idea that teachers are technicians that are trained to be “faithful implementers of received knowledge and curriculum” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 2).

Instead of the idea of teachers as technicians, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) believe in different ideas about teachers, teaching and learning, such as

the idea that practitioners are deliberative intellectuals who constantly theorize practice as part of practice itself and that the goal of teacher learning initiatives is the joint construction of local knowledge, the questioning of common assumptions and the thoughtful critique of the usefulness of research generated by others both inside and outside contexts of practice. (p. 2)

In other words, instead of viewing teachers as technicians who will implement curriculum created from outside sources without questioning it, teachers are viewed as intellectuals who aim to question and critique what is happening in their schools in order to decide what curriculum decisions work best in their classrooms. This stance embraces a lifelong commitment to learning across the professional lifespan (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). This commitment pushes back against the dualism of novice-expert teachers and instead posits the idea that all teachers, no matter their assumed level of expertise, should engage in a collective inquiry of their teaching.

Within inquiry as stance is the assumption that schools operate and teaching occurs within webs of social, historical, cultural, and political significance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Teacher learning that operates from this stance is not about increasing test scores or aiming for standardized classroom practices. Instead, it is “about enhancing educators’ sense of social responsibility and social action in the service of a democratic society” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 58). When teachers adopt this stance, the goal is for them to engage in an interplay of knowledge, practice, and communities all surrounded by democratic purposes. When teachers gather to engage in inquiries about their schools and curricula, the aim is to critique with larger movements for equity and social change. This ensures that these “inquiry communities exist to make consequential changes in the lives of teachers and, as important, in the lives of students and in the social and intellectual climate of schools and school” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 295).

Inquiry as stance was an important theory of teacher learning for this study because the topics explored in this study connect to larger movements related to racial equity and social change. In particular, teachers of all experience levels were invited to engage in a disruption of racial silences that existed in our school and curricula. Through this disruption teachers were

encouraged to push back on the idea of teaching as a technical job in order to engage in productive disruptions of the racial silences that existed in our school community and curricula so that we could aim to improve the experiences of all of our students.

Conclusion

Overall, ideas from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) helped point out the ways that the silent, colorblind Discourses associated with whiteness are ingrained in mostly white educational settings and helped analyze what happened when these silences were disrupted. Ideas from inquiry as stance encouraged myself and my participants to value the perspectives of practitioners as we worked in local settings to construct knowledge and question common assumptions through an inquiry discussion group that disrupted racial silences and aimed to connect to larger movements of equity and social change.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to analyze what happens when white educators at a majority white elementary school were invited to disrupt silences around race. In particular, I aimed to learn not just *how* teachers inquired into whiteness and racism—that is, what they did when investigating these topics—but to learn what ideas about whiteness and racism were surfaced and how these ideas were engaged within an inquiry discussion group. Furthermore, I aimed to focus on moments of discomfort and the ways white educators did or did not move past them so that data could be collected that showed what keeps (or doesn't keep) participants engaged in a productive process of disrupting racial silences. In order to situate this study in existing research, I reviewed the existing literature on disrupting racial silences in school settings.

Because I was aiming to learn what the existing research says about what happens when disrupting racial silences and also to learn about successes and struggles that can occur when disrupting racial silences in school settings, I did not confine my search by any time parameters. This allowed me to situate my study in research as far back as 1997 and as recently as 2020. I also did not limit my search to a particular school setting. Even though my study would take place in an elementary school, I found there was a lot to learn about disrupting racial silences from studies that took place in middle schools, high schools, and even college settings. I also found there was a lot to learn from studies conducted in diverse settings as well as studies conducted in mostly white settings.

A good literature review “is the basis of both theoretical and methodological sophistication, thereby improving the quality and usefulness of subsequent research” (Boote & Beile, 2005, p.4). In other words, a good literature review aims not just to summarize, but also synthesize the existing research on a topic by looking at the research in terms of relevant theoretical ideas as well as analyzing the research in terms of methodology. Looking at the research from both of these lenses can help to better inform a new study in the field. The following analysis aims to do just that. Through a theoretical analysis of the existing research on disrupting racial silences in educational settings, I identified the following five themes: Treating Racism as a Thing of the Past; Reacting to Discussions of Race in Colorblind Ways; Reacting to Discussions of Race with Discomfort; Whiteness and Racial Understandings are Not Static; and Treating Teachers as Technicians. These themes will serve as organization for the first part of this analysis. Following this theoretical analysis, this literature review will include a discussion on issues of trustworthiness based on a critique of the research methodologies of the studies reviewed. This section will be organized by analyses related to theory, data collection, and data analysis. This literature review will conclude with a discussion of how the literature reviewed informed the decisions made for this study.

Theoretical Reading of the Literature

Treating Racism as a Thing of the Past

Critical Race Theory (CRT) states that racism is the systemic basis on which American society is built (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013). CRT scholars also know that race is a social construction, but even though race is socially constructed, meaning there are no actual scientific differences between people of different races, people of different races experience very different treatments within America’s systems, and these socially constructed differences between races

have caused and continue to cause many disparities for people of color in America (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Even though this is true, many people in America tend to think that racism ended with the abolition of slavery and the Jim Crow laws. When using this idea as a lens to look at the studies reviewed for this analysis, it is clear that when racial silences are disrupted in educational settings, some participants react by treating racism as if it were a thing of the past (Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Kailin, 1999).

When Julie Kailin (1999) set out to understand the perceptions of racism held by the white teachers at a Midwestern school district that consisted of schools that ranged from 25% to 50% students of color, she found that one of the most salient issues was that “teachers seemed to show little awareness or understanding of the structural nature or roots of racism or its institutional manifestations in education” (p. 743). The teachers at this school district seemed unaware of the ways systemic racism continues to cause disparities for people of color within all of America’s institutions, including schools, and this led to the teachers blaming certain behaviors of students of color on the individuals instead of on systemic causes.

Similarly, when Desiree Cueto and Susan Corapi (2019) worked with teachers at a diverse elementary school to directly address controversial social justice issues with their 4th and 5th grade students, they found that up until the 2016 election, the teachers at this school district were under the impression that racism was no longer a major issue in America. In conversations with the teachers in this study, the researchers stated that before the 2016 election, during the Obama era, many teachers thought racism had declined and that having a Black man in the White House meant that we were establishing a future of equality in America. Instead, the political rhetoric of the 2016 election brought issues of race back to the forefront, causing

students at this school to be more aware of the social justice issues of our country and causing the teachers to want to explicitly deal with them in their curriculum.

Reacting to Discussions of Race in Colorblind Ways

Ideas from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) help to highlight the ways colorblindness can operate in discussions of race. CRT scholars express a skepticism toward colorblindness because oftentimes whites hold colorblindness or a neutrality toward racial issues as the ideal, but this can be dangerous because these stances ignore social and historical realities and also maintain white supremacy (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). These enactments of a neutral colorblind stance are also dangerous because, as CWS explores, when whites resist conversations or solutions concerning racial disparities, it is not a passive resistance, but an active protection of whiteness (Leonardo, 2008; Picower, 2009). So, CRT and CWS encourage a skepticism toward neutral colorblind behaviors because, in reality, these behaviors could be a sign that white participants are ignoring historical realities and actively protecting white supremacy. Many of the studies analyzed for this literature review found that participants reacted in this way (Bell, 2002; Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Glazier, 2003; Hollingworth, 2009; Kailin, 1999, Lewis, 2001; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Schultz et al., 2000).

Some of the studies analyzed for this review found that teachers displayed colorblind attitudes toward discussions of race. For example, when Jocelyn Glazier (2003) studied the book club discussions of white educators who were aiming to bring issues of race to the forefront, she found that participants would enact a colorblind silence when invited to engage with topics of race by initially avoiding the topic of race and choosing to explore other topics instead. Also, when Gloria Swindler Boutte, Julia Lopez-Robertson and Elizabeth Powers-Costello (2011)

analyzed weekly literature discussions about race that occurred in a second grade classroom, they found that teachers enacted this neutrality toward race because they thought a colorblind stance was desirable. Similarly, when Liz Hollingworth (2009) observed a white teacher attempting to engage with issues of race with her fourth and fifth grade students in a mostly white school district, she found that the teacher ended up emphasizing similarities between the races in order to avoid explicitly discussing the differences that exist between racial groups.

This enactment of colorblindness toward race was also seen with student participants. When Rebecca Schaffer and Debra G. Skinner (2009) spent two years looking at how the school context shaped fourth graders' understanding of race at a diverse public school in the Southeast United States, they found that white students were much more likely to react in colorblind ways by avoiding explicit race talk. When they looked closer at this issue, they found that white students were doing this because they believed unsolicited discussions of race were rude and inappropriate. Katherine Schultz, Patricia Buck, and Tricia Niesz (2000) invited students from diverse racial backgrounds to participate in multiracial discussion groups to reflect on racial experiences in their lives. They found that some of these students engaged with what they called 'bridging talk,' which was a form of race neutral language that aimed to keep the peace instead of getting into real issues. Finally, when Carlin Borsheim-Black (2015) looked at how one white English teacher incorporated an antiracist approach into her classroom, she found that some students did enact colorblindness in order to claim racial differences did not exist.

In some of these studies, the researchers also reported the dangers or negative effects of this colorblindness. One dangerous way that colorblind beliefs manifested was when teachers who witnessed racist behavior by their white colleagues chose to remain silent and did not challenge the behavior (Kailin, 1999). Instead of confronting the racist behavior, these teachers

looked for colorblind excuses for what they witnessed. Another danger of colorblindness was seen when Rebecca Rogers and Melissa Mosley (2006) looked to see how white second graders and their white teachers were taking up race. They found that the colorblind, race-neutral language that was seen in the books the students were reading could end up reifying the ways some of the white students discussed race. One final danger of colorblindness that emerged was that when teachers operated under the belief that a colorblind stance is desirable, these beliefs were passed on to the students (Boutte et al., 2011; Hollingworth, 2009). One way this was seen was when teachers rewarded students that agreed with an emphasis on the similarities between the races instead of questioning the differences between the races (Hollingworth, 2009). All of these studies concluded that race needs to be explicitly discussed at schools so that teachers don't continue to pass these beliefs on to their students.

As stated above, one final reason to be skeptical of colorblindness is because sometimes when whites enact colorblind, race-neutral stances, they could be using them to mask a real understanding of how race is operating. Two of the studies incorporated in this review found that to be the case (Bell, 2002; Lewis, 2001). When Lee Anne Bell (2002) interviewed 65 white teachers to discuss their opinions of race and racism, she found that many participants overtly responded in race-neutral or colorblind ways. As the interviews unfolded, though, she found out that many of these participants really did know how race operates in American society and that these systems benefited whites. Similarly, when Amanda E. Lewis (2001) spent one year analyzing the curriculum and racial discourses at a white suburban school district, she found that colorblindness was enacted to mask a real understanding of what was going on. Community and school district members consistently denied the local prominence of race in order to mask the reality of racialized practices occurring at the district.

Reacting to Discussions of Race with Discomfort

Lenses from Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) also help scholars see that when racism or the normalcy of whiteness are questioned and problematized, whites can react in certain ways. For example, research shows that whites can deflect, ignore, get angry, or get defensive (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009). For the purposes of this study, I use the term *discomfort* as an umbrella for all of the ways whites can react. Many of the studies in this body of research found that participants reacted with discomfort when invited to analyze issues of race (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Henze et al., 1998; Hollingworth, 2009; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Kailin, 1999; Lewis, 2001; McIntyre, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Schultz et al., 2000; Skerrett, 2011).

In the research studies incorporated in this literature review, there was a range of reactions seen that I include under the term *discomfort*. Similar to the colorblind stances discussed above, one common reaction to topics of race was denial (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Lewis, 2001; McIntyre, 2002). This denial was seen when participants tried to make excuses for white behavior and also denied any individual responsibility for racism (McIntyre, 2002); it was also seen when participants distanced themselves from a productive interaction with systems of racial privilege by claiming racism is no longer an issue in America (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Hytten & Warren, 2003).

It was also common that when participants were invited to disrupt racial silences, they responded with anger (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Henze et al., 1998; Lewis, 2001; Schultz et al., 2000). This anger was seen from the participants themselves, but also from parents who responded to a focus on racial issues in school settings. One parent responded by claiming, “Talking about race is divisive!” and another parent yelled, “I’m so tired of Martin Luther

King!” (Lewis, 2001, p. 788). Parents at another school district even responded by demanding the teacher be fired (Borsheim-Black, 2015).

A final common sign of discomfort was hesitance or apprehension (Boutte et al., 2011; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Hollingworth, 2009; Skerrett, 2011). Some teachers who were invited to implement a racial literacy curriculum hesitated at first, saying that they were feeling apprehensive (Skerrett, 2011). Other teachers said they were feeling insecure and fearful (Cueto & Corapi, 2019) or nervous and enacted circular talk during initial discussions about race (Hollingworth, 2009). Researchers pointed out that oftentimes the participants who responded initially with these reactions of hesitancy and apprehension were responding this way due to a lack of confidence in their knowledge about topics of race, a lack of preparation, or a lack of awareness of the resources available to them (Boutte et al., 2011; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

One final point about reactions of discomfort to disruptions of racial silences in educational settings is that these reactions were much more typical with teachers than they were with students (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Henze et al., 1998; Hollingworth, 2009; Kailin, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Skerrett, 2011). Some of the researchers found that while teachers were reacting with discomfort, the students were actually ready to engage (Flynn, 2012; Hollingworth, 2009). One study even found that when teachers hesitate, students, especially Black students, don’t want them to. Black students in this study reassured teachers that, even if they do not have all of the answers, they should not shy away from explicit conversations about race (Flynn, 2012).

Whiteness and Racial Understandings are Not Static

Another theme identified through an analysis of the findings of this body of research was that, in some cases, participants displayed a wide range of reactions when disrupting racial silences and engaging with topics of race, and these reactions were not static or linear (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Chubbuck, 2004; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Glazier, 2003; McDonough, 2009; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Skerrett, 2011). This idea is consistent with ideas from Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) that state that white racial identities are not flat or static (Lensmire et al., 2013; Leonardo, 2002) but, instead, multifaceted and subject to nonlinear changes. In other words, not all whites experience whiteness in the same way. The experience of white racial identity and the way it manifests itself change over time and might not indicate sequential positive growth.

When racial silences were disrupted with white participants, researchers found that participants displayed a hybrid range of reactions (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Participants would sometimes display reactions that *enact* whiteness and other times display reactions that *disrupt* whiteness; the researchers found that at times these different reactions occurred within the same participant from one moment to the next (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Chubbuck, 2004; McDonough, 2009; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Some of the studies reviewed found that sustained engagement with racial discussions led to an increased comfort with such topics (Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Glazier, 2003; Skerrett, 2011). Some of the findings in these reviewed studies attributed this increased comfort to components such as incorporating a discourse structure for participants to rely on (Flynn, 2012; Glazier, 2003) or being explicit with the participants about their own discourse moves and habits (Glazier, 2003).

Treating Teachers as Technicians

When practitioner researchers adopt an inquiry as stance, they embrace the idea of teachers as knowledge producers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). This idea counteracts the long-held belief that teachers are only technicians that are trained to be “faithful implementers of received knowledge and curriculum” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 2) that are created outside of the classroom contexts. When teachers are embraced as knowledge producers, they are encouraged to question their school environments and teaching practices in order to produce local knowledge that can be used in their own classrooms. Using this idea as a lens to look at this body of research showed that some of the studies reviewed positioned teachers as technicians (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Flynn, 2012; Henze et al., 1998; Hollingworth, 2009; Kailin, 1999; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009), while others positioned teachers as knowledge producers (Bell, 2002; Chubbuck, 2004; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Glazier, 2003; Hytten & Warren, 2003; McDonough, 2009; McIntyre, 2002; Pennington, 2007; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Skerrett, 2011; Tanner, 2018).

Some of the reviewed studies positioned teachers as technicians when they stated that teachers needed to be *trained* in order to address race and educational equity (Flynn, 2012; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009) or gave teachers “Steps for Engaging in Self-Reflection and Conversations with Children” (Boutte et al., 2011, p. 338). Even though these are small examples of language choice, they insinuate that in order to be effective, teachers need to receive knowledge from outside sources instead of creating this knowledge themselves. Similarly, some of the other studies positioned teachers as technicians in more clearly overt ways (Henze et al., 1998; Kailin, 1999). In these studies, teachers were forced to go to whole staff professional development courses on racial equity in educational settings or were required to be trained in

antiracist frameworks. Finally, some studies positioned teachers as technicians when there was collaboration between the researcher and teacher, but only the researcher was listed as an author of the study, and the researcher was the one positioned as the knowledge producer while the teacher was positioned as the knowledge receiver (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Hollingworth, 2009).

On the other hand, some of the reviewed studies positioned teachers as knowledge producers through the way they invited teachers to voluntarily participate in a disruption of racial silences instead of requiring them to attend a professional development session (Bell, 2002; Chubbuck, 2004). This voluntary invitation positions teachers as knowledge producers because it allows for an incorporation of teacher knowledge instead of requiring teachers to come together to receive knowledge that is produced outside of their school settings. Other studies positioned teachers as knowledge producers through the way they valued teacher input in the studies (Glazier, 2003; McDonough, 2009; Pennington, 2007; Skerrett, 2011). In these studies, teachers were explicitly asked for their opinions or to share their experiences, or the findings of these studies stated that more collaboration was needed so that teacher knowledge could be incorporated into the field of racial literacy instruction. Finally, some of these studies positioned teachers as knowledge producers because the researchers were teachers themselves and used their own classrooms as sites to produce local knowledge (Hyttén & Warren, 2003; McIntyre, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Tanner, 2018).

One particularly strong example of the benefits of positioning teachers as knowledge producers is Desiree Cueto and Susan Corapi's (2019) study in which they invited five elementary school teachers to participate in an inquiry group that aimed to explicitly address controversial social justice issues in their classrooms. In the findings of this study, the researchers stated that prior to the study, teachers at this school would discuss teaching as

‘following the curriculum,’ but about halfway through this study, teachers began to talk about themselves as curriculum developers and to take ownership over what was happening in their classrooms. The researchers even stated that the “story that came out of this work showed these teachers’ ability to rise above fear and divisiveness with openness and curiosity. Inquiry provided the structure and support to challenge the status quo” (p. 40) in terms of disrupting silences around racial issues in educational settings.

Trustworthiness and Methodological Issues

As stated earlier, a good literature review looks at existing research in terms of both theoretical and methodological concepts (Boote & Beile, 2005). At this point I will shift from looking at the research from a theoretical lens to looking at the existing body of research in terms of methodology. The studies reviewed for this literature review were all qualitative studies. They ranged from studies using ethnographic methods (Lewis, 2001; McDonough, 2009; Pennington, 2007; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Schultz et al., 2000), to case studies (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Chubbuck, 2004; Henze et al., 1998; Kailin, 1999), to studies that used methods of practitioner inquiry (Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Glazier, 2003) or methods of narrative research (Tanner, 2018) and other qualitative studies that incorporated the use of observations, artifact collection, and in-depth interviews to produce data (Bell, 2002; Flynn, 2012; Hollingworth, 2009; Hytten & Warren, 2003; McIntyre, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Skerrett, 2011). Even though these studies varied in specific methodology, they all chose to ground their study under the umbrella of qualitative research. Through these qualitative methods, the researchers were able to learn more about what happens when disrupting racial silences in educational settings. As I analyzed these studies in terms of methodology, I began to notice the ways they incorporated theory in designing their research study, how they produced data and

explained data production, and how they analyzed data and explained data analysis. I found that some of the decisions related to these areas made some of the research studies more trustworthy than others.

Incorporating Theory

Some of the researchers from this body of research explicitly stated the theoretical or conceptual lenses they were operating from and how these lenses influenced their research designs (Bell, 2002; Borsheim-Black, 2015; Chubbuck, 2004; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Hollingworth, 2009; McDonough, 2009; Pennington, 2007; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Tanner, 2018). Many of these studies explicitly stated that they were using lenses from Critical Race Theory or lenses from Critical Whiteness studies (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Flynn, 2012; Hollingworth, 2009; Pennington, 2007; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Tanner, 2018). One study used the idea of ‘sincere fictions,’ an idea borrowed from Joe R. Feagin (2001), as a lens to explain that when whites engage with topics of race, they enact an overt colorblindness when in reality this colorblindness is a fiction that masks a covert understanding of what is really going on (Bell, 2002). Other studies chose to analyze the problem of disrupting racial silences from identity performance lenses (McDonough, 2009) or psychological frameworks of identity (Chubbuck, 2004). And one study chose to use lenses from critical pedagogy and critical inquiry to understand the problem of racial silences in educational settings (Cueto & Corapi, 2019). Whichever lenses or frameworks these researchers chose to use, all of these studies had a clear section of their research dedicated to explaining how theory influenced their research design and helped them understand the proposed problem. This made the findings from these studies more trustworthy because it was easy to follow how the researcher moved from identifying a problem, to designing a study, to producing and analyzing data in order to come up with their findings.

On the other hand, some of the studies analyzed for this literature review did not explicitly state which theory or conceptual lens they were operating from and instead left the reader to infer where they were coming from (Boutte et al., 2011; Glazier, 2003; Henze et al., 1998; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Kailin, 1999; Lewis, 2001; McIntyre, 2002; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Schultz et al., 2000; Skerrett, 2011). These studies did not have a clear section that explicitly explained which theoretical or conceptual ideas influenced their studies, but they did include ideas or phrases that implied they were operating through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) or Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS). This was seen in the ways the researchers referenced ideas from CRT, such as racism being a central problem of American life and a prevailing explanation for the inequalities in American society (Henze et al., 1998; Kailin, 1999; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Skerrett, 2011), or by referencing ideas from CWS, such as stating that colorblind stances need to be addressed and dismantled (Boutte et al., 2011; Glazier, 2003; Henze et al., 1998; Lewis, 2001; Schultz et al., 2000) or by stating the aim of the study was to analyze how whiteness gets inscribed and reified (Hytten & Warren, 2003). The lack of a clear section or explanation of how theory influenced these studies made it more difficult to trust the findings these studies produced because it was hard to follow the through-line from what beliefs about the world the researchers were operating from to the findings produced.

Data Production

Many of the reviewed studies not only described the multiple data sources that were produced, but the researchers also explicitly explained how these data related back to the research study (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Chubbuck, 2004; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Glazier, 2003; Hollingworth, 2009; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Lewis, 2001; McDonough, 2009; McIntyre, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Schultz

et al., 2000; Tanner, 2018). For example, in Jocelyn A. Glazier's (2003) study of literature circle discussions around topics of race, she explained that the data production included "an instructor's journal, students' written texts, participant observer field notes, audio and videotapes of book club discussions, and follow-up interviews with participants" (p. 75), and then explained how these multiple data points helped answer her research questions. Glazier stated that "transcripts, fieldnotes and interviews enabled me to determine topics of conversation, forms of participation, and conversational moves" (p. 76) in order to understand the avoidance around the topic of race. Another strong example of this is Desiree Cueto and Susan Corapi's (2019) study into integrating children's literature into the curriculum as a way to approach social justice issues. These researchers not only mentioned that their study would produce observations, interviews, and "other materials such as lesson plans, rubrics, multicultural booklists, students' work, and teacher reflections" (p. 40), but they also explicitly explained how these pieces of data related to their theory and research questions. Because their study was grounded in action research with an inquiry as stance approach, they explained that "the setting for the data collection and research was a natural setting as opposed to an artificial one" and that the participants would be "taking action and reflecting on it, both in terms of what their students were learning and in terms of what they were realizing about their own understandings" (p. 40). This made clear which methods the researchers were using to produce data and also how these data production methods were relevant to the posed problems.

Some of the reviewed studies produced data in situations that were mandatory for the participants involved (Henze et al., 1998; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Kailin, 1999; McIntyre, 2002). For example, in Julie Kailin's (1999) study of white teachers' perceptions of race at their school, some of the data were collected from mandatory all-school in-services. This is

problematic because, when teachers are forced to confront issues of race, especially with their entire staff, they could react with anger, denial, or deflection (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009). Kailin (1999) even concludes her study by stating that these mandatory “workshops are frequently received as an obligation and a chore, not as an informative or inspiring opportunity, and cannot meaningfully provide teachers with the tools needed to address the problem” (p. 746). It was more difficult to trust the findings from these studies because if the participants were forced to participate and viewed the study as an obligation or a chore, then the findings and data produced would not be helpful for understanding how to successfully disrupt racial silences in educational settings.

Data Analysis

Similar to the way data production was discussed, many of the studies included in this literature review not only explicitly stated which methods of data analysis they used, but also explained these methods and how they related to addressing the problem that was posed in the beginning of the study (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Chubbuck, 2004; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Glazier, 2003; Henze et al., 1998; Hollingworth, 2009; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Kailin, 1999; McDonough, 2009; McIntyre, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Skerrett, 2011; Tanner, 2018). For example, in Rosemary Henze, Tamara Lucas, and Beverly Scott’s (1998) exploration into having open and explicit dialogue about power, privilege, and racism with teachers, the researchers explained that they used discourse analysis to analyze their data. They went further to explain that their discourse analysis “focused on content analysis, topic shifts, turn-taking procedures, and conflict; microethnographic analysis of conflicts” (p. 195). Even further, these researchers explained the way their discourse analysis was informed by the researchers’ perspectives. They stated that “discussions we had in the process of analyzing and interpreting

the data were in fact part of the method—a coming together of three diverse perspectives which enriched and broadened the resulting work” (p. 195). This explanation ties their data analysis back to the proposed problem and research questions because the researchers explained that they had personal experiences with discomforts in engaging with dialogue about race and issues of power and that these personal experiences informed their focus on the topic and their analysis of the data. As a reader of this study, I appreciated the explicit way the researchers discussed a clear through-line between their research questions, positionality, and methodology.

On the other hand, some of the studies reviewed did not clearly explain how data were analyzed (Bell, 2002; Boutte et al., 2011; Lewis, 2001; Pennington, 2007; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Schultz et al., 2000). These studies may have mentioned which method of data analysis they used, but they were not clear in the ways this data analysis was carried out or why these methods of data analysis were logical choices for their studies. For example, in Rebecca Schaffer and Debra G. Skinner’s (2009) study of productions and performances of race in a fourth grade classroom, they stated that they “examined” all of the data from their observations and interviews and “looked closely” to conduct an “interpretive analysis”, but they never fully explained what that meant (p. 280). Similarly, in Gloria Swindler Boutte, Julia Lopez-Robertson and Elizabeth Powers-Costello’s (2011) exploration into encouraging an early childhood teacher to engage in conversations about race and racism, the researchers were vague about how they analyzed their data. These researchers gave some examples of how they analyzed student participants’ discussions and drawings, but they never explained which method they used other than stating that they were annotating and discussing the data that were produced. These studies made it more difficult to trust the findings because the methods used for data analysis were not clear, and therefore it seemed like any analysis and findings produced were also unclear.

Discussion of Current Research

In my overall review of this literature, I noticed that the majority of the studies were qualitative in nature and framed by Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness lenses. My study was qualitative in nature and operated within these theoretical frameworks, but also built off the theoretical noticings discussed above and responded to the methodological issues that were revealed.

Theoretical Discussion of Literature

When looking at this body of research through theoretical lenses, five themes were identified. One theme was that some of the participants reacted by treating racism as a thing of the past, and researchers have pointed out that this can be dangerous (Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Kailin, 1999). It is dangerous because when participants believe that systemic racism and unequal treatment of the races is not a reality, they can attribute certain behaviors and actions to the fault of marginalized individuals instead of the systems that actually caused them. This informed my study because I was prepared for this type of reaction from my participants. It was my role as the teacher-researcher to explicitly guide teacher-participants to explore alongside me the racial silences and inequities that exist in our school district and to consider the systemic reasons for why these silences and inequities might exist. Before we began to explore these systemic racial silences, I worked with participants to unpack their own beliefs about and experiences with racism and then entered into inquiries related to larger issues of racial silence, structural racism, and inequity.

Two other themes identified from this review of the literature were that participants can react to discussions about race in colorblind ways and in ways that reflect discomfort (Bell, 2002; Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Glazier,

2003; Henze et al., 1998; Hollingworth, 2009; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Kailin, 1999, Lewis, 2001; McIntyre, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Schultz et al., 2000; Skerrett, 2011). Considering that many of the reviewed studies found participants to react in this way, I was prepared for the strong possibility that my participants would react similarly. I wondered about the possibility that the researchers from these studies may have treated whiteness as a flat identity or may have focused on white privilege instead of the white supremacy that causes white privilege. The lens of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) points out that if researchers assume that all whites experience privilege in the same way, many whites can shut down and resist productive conversations that are necessary for progress (Lensmire et al., 2013; Leonardo, 2002, 2004). Discourses that focus just on white privilege are important because they give whites an entry point into discussing race issues, but discourses on privilege can also be dangerous because they make it seem like whites have these privileges without there being an agent of action. CWS argues instead for discourses that focus on the white supremacy that allows white privilege to happen. This informed my study because I planned to incorporate methods that acknowledge white privilege as an entry point for the participants, but also focus on the white supremacy that has produced white privilege. If my participants reacted in colorblind ways or with examples of discomfort, I was prepared to consider that it might be because privilege was being centered in our discussion instead of white supremacy. Jocelyn A. Glazier (2003) found that being explicit with the participants about their own discourse moves and habits when explicitly discussing race can lead to an increase in participants' comfortability. I planned to incorporate this same transparency with the participants in my study and revisit any displays of discomfort with the participants to determine what was taking place and how to move past it.

Another theme in terms of colorblind reactions and reactions of discomfort is that these reactions were more typical with teachers than students (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Henze et al., 1998; Hollingworth, 2009; Kailin, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Skerrett, 2011). That is why my study had teacher participants. Based on existing research, I believe that teachers need to get comfortable disrupting racial silences and feel prepared before attempting to disrupt racial silences with students. Researchers from this existing body of research found that oftentimes reactions of discomfort came from a lack of teacher confidence in their knowledge about topics of race (Boutte et al., 2011; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). This solidifies the importance of my study, because my study allowed teachers to build up their confidence and broaden their knowledge around topics of race.

In the same vein, while many researchers pointed out that participants reacted by either treating racism as a thing of the past, by enacting colorblind discourses or with other reactions of discomfort, they did not present findings that showed how to work toward keeping participants engaged with the disruption of racial silences past these identified points of shutdown or resistance. This is why my study focused on these reactions and moments of discomfort. I was explicit about these moments with the participants when they occurred and worked with the participants toward remaining engaged with a disruption of racial silences so that my study could discover what kept participants engaged.

A fourth theme identified was that whiteness and racial understandings are not static. Findings from this body of research pointed out that some participants can enact a wide range of racial understandings and that these understandings can change from minute to minute (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Chubbuck, 2004; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Glazier, 2003; McDonough,

2009; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Skerrett, 2011). Findings also pointed out that being comfortable with these topics could be encouraged through disruptions of racial silences over longer periods of time, through the incorporation of specific dialogic techniques or structures, and through the researcher being explicit with the participants about the discourse moves they make (Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Flynn, 2012; Glazier, 2003; Skerrett, 2011). All of these findings informed my study.

One final theme identified in this existing body of research was the positioning of teachers as technicians (Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Flynn, 2012; Henze et al., 1998; Hollingworth, 2009; Kailin, 1999; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009) or as knowledge producers (Bell, 2002; Chubbuck, 2004; Cueto & Corapi, 2019; Glazier, 2003; Hytten & Warren, 2003; McDonough, 2009; McIntyre, 2002; Pennington, 2007; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Skerrett, 2011; Tanner, 2018). When teachers are positioned as knowledge producers, they can begin to take ownership over what is happening in their own classrooms, and when this happens in relation to explorations on topics of race, teachers can move past the discomfort and approach a disruption of racial silences with openness and curiosity (Cueto & Corapi, 2019). This informed my decision to create a practitioner-research study that would take the form of an inquiry discussion group. This inquiry discussion group would position myself and other teacher-participants as knowledge producers as we disrupted racial silences that exist at our own school and produced local knowledge to be used in our own classrooms.

One last tenet to consider when synthesizing this body of research is interest convergence. Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars believe that whenever whites in a position of power agree to something concerning social justice, it usually requires that they see a benefit for themselves (Ladson-Billings, 2013). CRT scholars look to align the interests of the dominant

racial group with those that are marginalized in order to make strides toward racial justice. While none of the studies analyzed for this literature review explicitly discussed or identified instances of instance convergence, I wonder about the ways in which it could have played a part. When participants from the reviewed studies reacted with discomfort, I wonder if this could have been because whites in positions of power will not do what is right just for the sake of social justice. I also wonder if the researchers in these studies could have been more successful in moving past moments of discomfort or shut down by considering how interest convergence could have been used as a tool. Therefore, when conducting my inquiry discussion group, I considered the ways in which interest convergence could be at play and also how I could aim to align the interests of my participants with the social justice aims of the study.

Methodological Discussion

Whether it was outright stated or not, most of the studies reviewed from this body of research operated through the lenses of Critical Race Theory and/or Critical Whiteness Studies. This solidified my choice to use these lenses to understand the problem of successfully disrupting racial silences in educational settings. Instead of being vague about how these theoretical lenses influence my study, though, my study has aimed to be explicit about which ideas from Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies and which ideas from inquiry as stance have been used to identify the problem, analyze the literature from this review, and inform methodological choices.

One of the most trustworthy studies I read was Desiree Cueto and Susan Corapi's (2019) study in which they formed an inquiry group with teachers to embrace an exploration of controversial social justice issues instead of avoiding them. I believe this was the most trustworthy because of the way they incorporated theory into their research, produced data, and

analyzed data. These researchers explicitly explained how they formed their conceptual framework by combining critical pedagogies with inquiry as stance to generate *critical inquiry*. They also explained how these ideas provided structure and support to challenge the typical avoidance of controversial social justice issues in educational settings. They explicitly explained how the structure of an inquiry group and the use of constant comparative analysis helped with data production and data analysis, allowing them to achieve their goal of describing a phenomenon in depth. Although the goal of my study is not the same, Cueto and Corapi's study did solidify my choice to operate from lenses of Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies, and inquiry as stance, form an inquiry discussion group, and be explicit with my data production and analysis choices.

Based on the theoretical and methodological analysis of this existing body of research on disrupting racial silences in educational settings, I present a study that builds off these theoretical findings, incorporates a specific dialogic structure for participants to rely on, positions teachers as knowledge producers through an inquiry group discussion that was explicit about theory, data collection, and data analysis. My study used discourse analysis to look closely at the language produced, and this, together with my theoretical framework and my reflexive stance as a researcher, strengthened the trustworthiness of my study. I am hopeful that by building off this existing body of research, my study has successfully produced data that helps to understand how to move participants past moments of discomfort toward an engagement with a successful disruption of racial silences in educational settings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The aim of this study was to disrupt the racial silences that exist in a predominantly white educational setting by explicitly discussing race and positioning educators as intellectuals capable of producing knowledge of ways of talking about race and racial inequalities in their own classroom spaces. Previous attempts at race work in schools, such as multicultural education (Banks, 1981; Banks & Banks, 1989), and attempts that aimed to be culturally responsive, culturally relevant, or culturally sustaining (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012) did not address race in explicit ways and instead focused on culture, which contributed to silences about race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). These attempts were also problematic because the ways they were taken up in schools treated teachers as technicians (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), which assumed that teachers could take these curriculum tools and implement them without questioning their own mindset or beliefs about race (Martinez & Johnston, 2019). Therefore, this study attempted to disrupt racial silences that exist in a predominantly white elementary school with the goal of embracing teachers as knowledge producers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) and inviting them to directly acknowledge their own beliefs about race and whiteness and to consider how these beliefs relate to their classrooms. This provided the context for focusing on the following research questions:

- What happens when educators at a predominantly white elementary school are invited to disrupt silences around race?

- How do educators inquire into whiteness and racism within the context of a school-based inquiry discussion group?
- What ideas about whiteness and racism are surfaced, and how are these ideas engaged within the group?
- How do teachers move past moments of discomfort to remain engaged?

I focused on these questions as the inquiry discussion group worked to explicitly disrupt racial silences in a predominantly white school setting from the methodological perspectives of practitioner research, action research, and inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Noffke, 1997, 2009).

Practitioner Research and Inquiry as Stance

This study was located within the history of education research, where debates about the best way to approach a research study continue to play out. Some believe a positivist approach to research is best, which includes the belief that there is one absolute truth and that there are causes and effects to uncover that can help attain this one truth (Creswell, 2014). On the other hand, there are other approaches to research that are grounded in the belief that there are multiple realities and these realities can vary based on context. These approaches, called interpretive approaches, focus on individuals who are seeking to understand the environments in which they live and work. Interpretive approaches also believe that individuals can develop subjective meanings, and this leads the researcher to try to look for the complexity of varied truths instead of trying to narrow results down to one truth (Creswell, 2014). Interpretive approaches were appropriate for this study because I invited the teachers in my school district to seek an understanding of the racial silences that exist in our district, and this process resulted in varied

subjective truths. The findings from this study are subjective and particular to the Oak Tree Elementary School (pseudonym) context.

This study research approaches included a constructivist stance, a critical stance, and a participatory stance (Lincoln et al., 2011). This study included a constructivist stance because I did not set the teachers up to come up with certain responses; instead the aim was to try to understand the points of view they constructed. This study also took a critical stance because, as I tried to understand the participants' points of view, I also invited and supported a critical stance toward their own beliefs and the racial silences that exist in our school district. Finally, this study incorporated a participatory stance because teachers were invited to participate in the collaborative process of constructing truths that were applicable to the participants' school and classrooms.

In particular, this study was grounded in the histories of a practitioner research and action research approach. Practitioner research believes that valuable educational knowledge is constructed by teachers themselves and not by researchers who generate knowledge and curriculum tools outside of school settings. This stance pushes back on the idea of teachers as technicians that are trained to be "faithful implementers of received knowledge and curriculum" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 2). Instead of the idea of teachers as technicians, practitioner research assumes that teachers are intellectuals who can work together to construct knowledge and question the assumptions that are present in the context of their own classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Action research, a type of practitioner research, can be understood as research that works toward actionable change within educational practice and aims for the improvement of the experiences of students and of those that work with students in terms of larger societal issues (Noffke, 2009). To achieve these goals, this type of research focuses on

doing research *with* teachers in educational settings instead of doing research *on* teachers. Also, politics and larger societal issues are “seen as a constitutive element in action research, as well as all other forms of educational practice” (Noffke, 1997, p. 306). Grounding my study in these histories was a logical choice because, as stated above, previous attempts to disrupt racial silences in school districts have not positioned teachers as producers of knowledge. This project focused on the disruption of racial silences, a larger political societal issue that aligns with the aims of action research. Therefore, teacher-participants in this study were invited to pose problems and questions about their own beliefs and understandings of race and about existing racial silences at Oak Tree Elementary School and then encouraged to construct useful local knowledge related to the problems that arose and related to the larger issues of social justice in our society.

Building on the histories of both practitioner research and action research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) introduced the idea of inquiry as stance. Practitioners who embrace inquiry as stance voluntarily collaborate in order to question the assumptions that are present in their own teaching and also in other materials, tools, and curricula that exist in their classrooms in order to produce and incorporate locally generated knowledge. An important goal of inquiry as stance

is to provide the social and intellectual contexts in which teachers at all points along the professional life span can take critical perspectives on their own assumptions as well as the theory and research of others and also jointly construct local knowledge that connects their work in schools to larger social and political issues. (p. 283)

This goal is consistent with the ways this study encouraged teacher-participants to be knowledge producers regarding issues of race as they related to the Oak Tree Elementary School setting.

Teacher-participants were encouraged to use this stance to question and disrupt the racial silences that exist in our school, classrooms, and curriculum. Teachers were also encouraged to

critique their own social understandings of race, which contributed to their sense of social responsibility and aimed for a more democratic school environment.

In what follows, I will explain how knowledge from the fields of practitioner research, action research, and inquiry as stance contributed to the research design as well as the approach to initiating and supporting an inquiry discussion group. I will then outline the context for the study, the specific features of this group, and the impact of researcher positionality, followed by a discussion of how data were produced and analyzed. The chapter concludes with a consideration of trustworthiness in order to address limitations of this study.

Research Design

Inquiry Discussion Group

This study was designed as a practitioner research study that took the form of an inquiry discussion group. I designed this inquiry discussion group, which invited educators to explore issues of race in explicit ways, and encouraged them to collaboratively construct knowledge as a way to counteract the trends seen in similar attempts. While there are many types of teacher inquiry, the one most closely aligned with this study is what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) call Oral Inquiries. Oral Inquiries are when teacher participants engage in verbal examinations of school issues and experiences and also explore the relationship between these cases and theories. I intentionally called this group an inquiry discussion group because it incorporated these beliefs as we aimed to explicitly discuss race and whiteness in relation to our lives, our histories, and our experiences as teachers in an effort to address colorblind silences.

Research has shown that when whites are invited to engage in disruptions of racial silences, it is common that they react in a bevy of negative ways. For example, whites deflect, ignore, get angry, or get defensive (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009) when invited to talk

about race. In order to work through these negative reactions, it can be helpful to shift the focus from white privilege to a focus on the white supremacy that allows this white privilege to take place (Leonardo, 2004). Therefore, this inquiry group included a balance of discussions that explored topics related to white supremacy, to the self, and to our teaching. This allowed participants to consider how and why whiteness continues to dominate and why racial silences and colorblind stances remain unquestioned in educational settings like our own. The shift from a focus on white privilege to the systems that allow privilege created discussion settings that encouraged participants to remain engaged in a productive disruption of the racial silences that exist in Oak Tree Elementary School. Keeping this in mind in tandem with ideas from inquiry as stance allowed for a balance of discussions that were explicitly about white supremacy and related topics, white privilege and the self, and how these ideas intersected with our classroom practice and school environment.

This group met for one hour after school on Tuesdays for 10 consecutive weeks from October to December 2021. During these meetings, participants had discussions that aimed to explicitly disrupt racial silences. These discussions centered around different artifacts (e.g., documents, charts, articles, video clips) that either I forwarded to the group or that the participants brought to each meeting. While discussions centered around an artifact, artifacts also acted as springboards into discussion about larger topics and ideas. Artifacts were selected based on their relevance to the previous meeting's conversation and/or on questions being asked by the participants themselves (see below for a description of each meeting's topic and artifact). Each inquiry session culminated with time for the participants, including the teacher-researcher, to write in their reflective journals. At the onset of the research project, participants were informed that meetings would conclude with reflective journaling. At the end of each meeting, participants

were invited to either respond to prompts (e.g., *What are your initial thoughts after today's meeting? What is top of heart/top of mind? What did today's discussion mean for you as a human or as a teacher? What questions are still in your mind?*) or to write freely in their reflective journals in order to encourage a component of critical reflection. I told participants that I would not be forcing them to submit their journals because I felt this would invite honest reflections. The research project concluded with exit interviews that invited the participants to individually reflect on their experience in the inquiry discussion group with the researcher and share their perspectives on the inquiry group topics. In the end, even though none of the participants opted to share their reflection journals with me, four of the participants did opt to explicitly refer back to them during the exit interviews.

The table below provides a brief description of the aim, artifacts, and prompts that offered a starting point for each meeting:

Table 1. *Meeting Aims, Artifacts, and Prompts.*

Meeting	Aim	Artifact	Prompts
Meeting 1 10/21/2021	To think about race and look at our history with race as a country. To consider: What do we count as race? How do different people think about race?	-”Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race” (The Power of an Illusion, 2003) -”What Census Calls Us” (Pew Research Center, 2020)	- <i>What is race?</i> - <i>What does ‘race is a social construct’ mean?</i> - <i>How is it possible that race isn’t biological, but racism is real?</i> - <i>What stood out to you most in this article?</i> - <i>What questions did this article raise for you?</i> - <i>Are there parts of this article that you agree with/don’t agree with?</i>

Table 1 (continued)

Meeting	Aim	Artifact	Prompts
Meeting 2 10/26/2021	To consider our personal connections and experiences with race	<p>-Researcher’s autobiography in terms of race (Krill, 2017)</p> <p>-Participants’ autobiographical reflections</p>	<p><i>-Do you have any specific memories of becoming aware of race?</i></p> <p><i>-What are your experiences with discussing race?</i></p> <p><i>-What factors or circumstances do you think caused you to have the racial experiences that you did?</i></p> <p><i>-Is there anything that stands out from my racial understanding autobiography?</i></p> <p><i>-How did you feel when reflecting on your own racial understanding autobiography?</i></p> <p><i>-Was there anything surprising that came up when reflecting on your own experiences?</i></p> <p><i>-Do you think writing this kind of autobiography is useful? (useful as humans and/or useful as teachers?)</i></p>
Meeting 3 11/02/2021	To explore how these topics connect to education	<p>-”What White Children Need to Know About Race” (Michael & Bartoli, 2014)</p>	<p><i>-How did you feel when reading this article?</i></p> <p><i>-Which line or section stood out to you the most? Why?</i></p> <p><i>-The article states, “Yet few schools currently engage in conscious policies to support the development of positive racial identity...”. Do you think you have a positive racial identity? Do you think our school promotes positive racial identity for our white students? For our students of color?</i></p> <p><i>-The article asks, “What would the parallel process of positive racial identity development look like for white students?” Any thoughts on this question?</i></p>

Table 1 (continued)

Meeting	Aim	Artifact	Prompts
Meeting 4 11/09/2021	Laura asked the question: <i>what is systemic racism?</i> so we all gathered some resources. The aim was to understand what systemic racism is.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -”Systemic Racism Explained” (act.tv, 2019) -”#BLM How Can We Win?” (Jones, 2020) -”Social Inequalities Explained in a \$100 Race” (Link Year, 2018) -”What is Systemic Racism?” (Race Forward, 2015) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>Now that we’ve watched these videos, how would you explain what systemic racism is?</i> -<i>How does systemic racism relate to education?</i> -<i>Which video/part of a video stood out to you the most?</i> -<i>How can we work towards dismantling systemic racism?</i> -<i>What questions do these videos bring up for you?</i>
Meeting 5 11/16/2021	To make the connection between systemic racism and white privilege and also to start thinking about what we can do in our classrooms. Hannah asked for resources that help with this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Memes put out by @storysellercomics (2021) and @mariebeece (2021) -”White Privilege” (Sociology Live, 2015) -”The Windows and Mirrors of Your Child’s Bookshelf” (Lin, 2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>The concept of systemic racism and privilege are not easy to wrap your head around. How did you feel when watching these videos/looking at these memes?</i> -<i>What stood out to you the most?</i> -<i>How can the video with Grace Lin help us start to think about our classrooms/school in relation to these topics?</i> -<i>Do you have any personal stories that relate to these topics?</i>
Meeting 6 11/23/2021	To continue to look at ways we could approach these topics with our students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -”When a First Grader is Called a Racist” (Turner, 2018) -”So, What Do White 4th Graders Have To Say About Race?” (Denevi, 2018) -Table of Contents from <i>Being the Change</i> (Ahmed, 2018) -Google Folder with book database 	No prompts this week

Table 1 (continued)

<p>Meeting 7 11/30/2021</p>	<p>To continue to look at ways we could bring these ideas into our school.</p>	<p>-”Heritage Months and Celebrations: Some Considerations” (Menkart, 1999) -”Holidays: An Anti-Bias Approach” (Bisson, 1995) -”A Native Perspective on Thanksgiving” (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1977)</p>	<p>No prompts this week</p>
<p>Meeting 8 12/07/2021</p>	<p>To continue to look at ways we could bring these ideas into our school (libraries) and to start to build book orders.</p>	<p>-”6 Tips For Building a Diverse Classroom Library” (Blakenship, 2021) -”Expand Your Readers Palates With A Book Tasting” (We Are Teachers, 2021) -”Book Clubs: The Power of Giving Choice, Agency and Diversity in Reading” (Vandergalien, 2021)</p>	<p>No prompts this week</p>
<p>Meeting 9 12/14/2021</p>	<p>To co-construct the Teacher Excellence Grant application and continue to build our book database</p>	<p>-Teacher Excellence Grant application -Book lists put out by The Conscious Kid (2021) and by Sara Cordova (2021)</p>	<p>No prompts this week</p>
<p>Meeting 10 12/21/2021</p>	<p>To reflect on our time together and discuss next steps</p>	<p>-”Students Say Teach the Truth” (Kleinrock, 2021)</p>	<p><i>-Take a peek back at the artifacts we have explored during our meetings. Which stands out to you as the most impactful? Why? In what way do you think this artifact has impacted/will impact your personal or professional life?</i> <i>-As we near the end of our required time together, I am hoping that we will continue to collaborate in some way. What is one goal that you have for continuing these conversations/this work?</i></p>

Features of the Inquiry Discussion Group

Discussion

Discussion was an important component of this teacher inquiry group. This discussion group was grounded in dialogic tools and ideas from existing research that helped me balance the tensions between facilitator, teacher-researcher, and participant in this study. In particular, ideas were borrowed from Martin Nystrand's (1997) book, *Opening Dialogue: Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Learning*. In this book, Nystrand and his colleagues argue that people learn by participating in collaborative conversations, not by being spoken to. Real learning happens when teacher and learner roles are reversed in that the teacher takes notes on student ideas, and at the end of a conversation, students sum up key points instead of the teacher (Nystrand, 1997). These conversation strategies are in contrast with what Nystrand refers to as methods of recitation where students simply provide answers to teacher questions instead of interacting with each other. These strategies were useful for me as a teacher-researcher because, throughout our meetings, I encouraged participants to collaborate and take leadership roles instead of always positioning myself as a researcher with questions that needed to be answered.

Ideas were also borrowed from Maren Aukerman's research (2012), which suggests an approach she calls "critical literacy dialogic engagement" (p. 43). In this approach to critical discussions, the teacher relinquishes authority over what interpretations will surface and instead student perspectives take the floor. While this approach may be messier, it allows for multiple truths to surface and acknowledges that there can be multiple socially constructed perspectives related to a text or idea. I grounded the inquiry discussion group in these beliefs by trying to act as more of a participant than facilitator of the meetings; my goal was to allow for discussions that concluded with multiple socially constructed perspectives instead of discussions in which

the participants told me what they thought I wanted to hear. From the start of our inquiry discussion group meetings, I made it clear that everyone's input was encouraged as we worked together to construct useful knowledge about race and whiteness in relation to ourselves and our school.

This inquiry discussion group was also designed to be responsive and dialogical. I designed this study with the hope that discussions would be generated in response to artifacts and documents suggested by me, as the teacher-researcher, and the participants. During the first meeting, I suggested that the participants might eventually take over the role of facilitating a group meeting by bringing in artifacts or making other decisions for meetings. As the meetings unfolded and I continued to suggest a shared role of facilitating, participants did make suggestions for artifacts and had input on the topics our discussions centered on, even if they never fully engaged in facilitating a full meeting. Before our meetings began, I had a collection of artifacts I was prepared to use as springboards for our discussions, but the topic and artifact for each meeting was informed by suggestions made by the participants during the previous meeting, which resulted in the incorporation of artifacts beyond my original collection.

Critical Reflection

Throughout all stages of this research project, participants were invited to engage with activities that encouraged critical reflection on ideas and critical self-reflection. This took place during critical discussions about ideas present in artifacts and in our teaching environments, through reflective journaling at the end of each session, and in the individual exit interviews with participants at the end of the research project. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) propose that one major aspect of successful teacher learning is the ability to continually engage in a critique of one's own teaching and learning. In particular, they state that educators "learn by challenging

their own assumptions; identifying salient issues of practice; posing problems; studying their own students, classrooms, and schools; constructing and reconstructing curriculum; and taking on roles of leadership and activism” (p. 278). In this way, continuous critical reflection can lead to effective transformation of schools, classrooms, and even larger communities and societies.

Encouraging this type of thinking in a research project contributes to a fuller picture of what is actually going on in the research project (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Instead of only gathering data from the researcher’s point of view, activities that involved self-reflexivity and reflection from all of the participants, such as the reflection journals and exit interviews, included many points of view on what occurred within the inquiry group. This was helpful because it positioned all educators as intellectual knowledge generators and allowed multiple points of view to inform the findings.

Context of the Study

School District

This study took place at Oak Tree Elementary School, which is part of the Garden Grove School District (pseudonyms) located approximately one hour north of New York City. Due to COVID-19, the most recent data available for this school district was for the 2019-2020 school year. According to the New York State Education Department (2020), as of the 2019-2020 school year, Garden Grove School district consisted of one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. During the 2019-2020 school year, this district had 1,364 students with approximately 100-120 students per grade. Of the 1,364 students 78% identified as white, 8% as Hispanic or Latino, 7% as Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 6% as multiracial, and 1% as black or African American. Of the 1,364 students, 1% were identified as English Language Learners, 9% as students with disabilities, and 1% as economically

disadvantaged. The vast majority of practitioners (e.g., classroom teachers, classroom aides, special education support staff, administrators, etc.) at this school district were also white, which is consistent with findings from New York State Education Department's Educator Diversity Report (2019), which stated that even as New York State's student population has become more diverse, the racial and ethnic demographics of the teachers has remained at around 80% white over the past five years. This district, in particular, was a good choice for my research project because it was consistent with the dominance of whiteness that I had experienced in my own life and schooling. I felt that this school reflected similar characteristics and therefore was a place that needed a disruption of racial silences.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Participants were selected through the use of snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018), where I first invited one participant who I thought would be interested and then asked her to identify peers who might like to participate. I sent out a flyer with information about the study to these practitioners, and a total of six participants expressed interest. At this point, I realized that most of the participants were practitioners that worked with students in grades 3-5, so I sent out follow up emails to the grade leaders of each grade to recruit participants that worked with grades K-2 in order to ensure that there would be representation from each grade. This attempt did not gather any other participants. I then held an informational meeting on October 12th that let interested participants know that the plan for the inquiry discussion group was to inquire into how topics of race and whiteness intersected with our experiences as educators and also allowed time for questions to be asked and answered. During the informational meeting, all six participants expressed an intent to participate. Having six participants for this study provided enough variety in thinking and experience and allowed for enough time for each participant to

share thoughts and ideas. We decided that due to COVID-19 restrictions, we would meet via Zoom after school on Tuesdays from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. All participants from this study were practitioners from Oak Tree Elementary School with the exception of Maria, who at the time of the study worked in the middle school as a teacher's aide. What follows is a description of each participant (all details are in terms used by the participants themselves, e.g., white, Caucasian):

Felicity

At the time of this study, Felicity was a 49-year-old woman who identified as Caucasian. She had 21 years of teaching experience and at the time of this study was a 5th grade math and science teacher. Felicity began her teaching career in the Bronx borough of New York City, teaching elementary school for one year at a Catholic school followed by one year at a public school in the Bronx. She had been teaching for 19 years at the Garden Grove School District. Felicity was living in the same town she grew up in, a town that is in the same county as the school where this study took place. Felicity had described her hometown as not being diverse at all when she was growing up and as a place that had a tremendous amount of bigotry. While the town had seen some increases in diversity in the recent past, Felicity said it had struggled with a lot of fighting and hate. Felicity joined this study because she wanted to support me in my efforts to complete the work needed for my doctorate.

Beth

At the time of this study, Beth was a 49-year-old woman who identified as Caucasian. She had 25 years of teaching experience, and at the time of this study she was a 3rd grade classroom teacher. Aside from teaching at the Garden Grove School District, Beth had also taught at elementary schools in New York City and England. Beth grew up in a town in the same county in which this study took place, but had moved to a different town in the same county.

Beth had described the town she grew up in as not diverse at all, but the town she currently lived in was more diverse, which she said was a selling point as to why she chose to live there. Beth joined this study because she wanted to collaborate with more teachers and learn ways to make classrooms more inclusive.

Maria

At the time of this study, Maria was a 59-year-old woman who identified as white. She had 37 year of teaching experience, and at the time of this study, she was a classroom aide for students with disabilities in multiple 6th grade classrooms. Maria also grew up in a town within the same county in which this study took place and described it as one that was not diverse when she was growing up. She had since lived in several other surrounding towns within the county and described the town she currently lived in as not much more diverse than when she was growing up. Maria chose to join this study because she said diversity and racism was a subject near and dear to her heart. She also said she joined because she wanted to help me in my genuine desire to make a difference.

Laura

At the time of this study, Laura was a 52-year-old woman who identified as white. She had 30 years of teaching experience, and at the time of this study, she was a 3rd grade classroom teacher. Laura had been teaching for 21 years in the Garden Grove School District and also had experience teaching in New York City public schools. Laura currently lived in the same town in which she grew up, a town that was located in the same county as the school district in which this study took place. Laura described this town as not very diverse growing up, but said that the town had seen many more cultures and races joining the community in recent years. Laura chose

to join this study because she wanted more information on issues around race and how to discuss it with students.

Paige

At the time of this study, Paige was a 40-year-old woman who identified as Black. She had 11 years of teaching experience. She began her teaching career in the Bronx borough of New York City working at a public school for 5 years. She had been an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher at the Garden Grove School District for 6 years. Paige grew up in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City before moving to a suburb in a county north of the county in which this study took place. She has since moved to a town within the same county in which this study took place. She described her current town as a minority community with a mix of cultures. Paige joined this study because she thought the topic was interesting and also because I was the one running it.

Hannah

At the time of this study, Hannah was a 33-year-old woman who identified as white. She had 10 years of teaching experience. Hannah was a Physical Education teacher at the time of this study, and all 10 of her teaching years had been teaching in the school district where this study took place. Hannah grew up in a Long Island suburb, which she described as not very diverse. She had since moved to a town within the same county in which this study took place, a town which she described as more diverse than the one she grew up in.

Almost all of these participants stated that one of the main reasons for participating in this study was to help me complete the requirements for my doctoral degree. Some of the participants also noted that they found the topic of this study to be important or interesting in the current climate. Whatever their motivation for signing up, all six of the participants offered their

free time to participate in this voluntary inquiry discussion group. It is also important to note that it was impossible for me to untangle my position as a researcher from my relationship with the participants as friends and colleagues. As will be further discussed in Chapter 4, I had multiple and varying relationships with each of the participants, which at times led to uncomfortable and problematic moments within the discussions.

Positionality

My experience and identity as a white elementary school teacher influenced the selection of the problem to focus on for this study, as well as the theoretical framework and methodology choices made. I am a white woman who grew up in a majority white neighborhood and attended a school district that was attended by mostly white students and run by mostly white practitioners. I know what it is like to attend 12 years of schooling without ever considering the impact of race and whiteness. I represent the consequences of not explicitly discussing race in educational settings. Before attending this doctoral program, I never thought to discuss or consider how race impacts education, and once I did begin to think about having these discussions, I was uncomfortable. I do think that the racial silences I grew up with directly led to my being inept and uncomfortable when confronting racial inequities as an adult. I currently teach in Oak Tree Elementary, which has similar characteristics to the elementary school I attended while growing up. This has allowed me a different perspective on the racial silences that exist in educational settings. I have experienced them both as a student and now as an educator. Therefore, I wanted to work with educators, who may have had similar experiences as me, to explicitly address the racial silences that existed in our school setting so that we could work toward creating an environment that does not perpetuate these experiences for the students at our school.

Being a teacher with 10 years of experience teaching in elementary school classrooms also allowed me to have firsthand experience with teachers as producers of knowledge. Many times throughout my career, I have witnessed and also participated in conversations and teacher meetings where we gripe about new top-down curriculum tools we are expected to implement in our classrooms. I have seen the negative impact of implementing research-based curriculum tools without incorporating a teacher's perspective, and I have seen the positive results that come from teachers working to create curriculum tools on their own. All of this led me to design this study grounded in practitioner research with an inquiry as stance approach (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Even though I positioned myself as a co-constructor of knowledge with my participants and not as an expert researcher in the field, the fact that I was pursuing my doctoral degree and because I was the one who presented the idea for this study caused participants to position me as an expert. Therefore, I continually reflected on how I was impacting the participants during each session. I also tried to be transparent with the participants and let them know when I felt I was talking too much and encouraged them to have input on the way our discussions developed. This was consistent with the belief that positionality is an ongoing negotiation with participants and not something I could establish in the beginning and expect to remain static (Haas & Shaffir, 1980).

Data Production

The methods of producing data for this study included organizing, participating in, and supporting an inquiry discussion group; observing the non-verbal dimensions of the talk that occurred during the discussions; collecting artifacts used in the inquiry discussions; reflective

journaling; and, interviewing each participant at the conclusion of the study. These methods produced the following data sources:

Inquiry Group Discussion

Participants engaged in ten inquiry discussion group meetings where they used various artifacts (e.g., documents, charts, articles, video clips) as jumping-off points to explicitly discuss issues of race in relation to their experiences as practitioners at Oak Tree Elementary School. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, group meetings and exit interviews took place virtually via Zoom, which allowed the discussions to be both audio and video recorded. This was beneficial because it enabled me to review the transcripts from the discussions in order to catch nuances not caught when participating in the discussions or interviews in real time. However, relying on Zoom had limitations; for example, the visual recordings only included a view of the speaker, which prevented me from viewing the nonverbal responses and body language of participants who were not speaking.

Researcher Observation Journal

Discussion inquiry group meetings were supplemented with fieldnotes recorded in a researcher observation journal. These fieldnotes consisted of two different kinds of notes. “The first is descriptive—the concern is to provide a word-picture of the setting, people, actions, and conversations as observed. The other is reflective—the part that captures more of the observer’s frame of mind, ideas, and concerns” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 120). I jotted notes in my researcher observation journal during the meetings and followed up by expanding upon my jottings in greater detail after each meeting concluded.

Semi-Structured Interview

To conclude the research project, semi-structured exit interviews were conducted with each participant. The goal of these interviews was to encourage participants to share their perspectives on our inquiry discussion group meetings and to gain their insights on what it was like to disrupt racial silences. According to Fontana and Frey (2005), interviews can be understood as structured or unstructured. In structured interviews, the interviewer asks the participants all of the same prepared questions and does not interject with her own opinion or feelings. In unstructured interviews, the interviewer might not have any prepared questions and shares her own personal feelings. In unstructured interviews, the interviewer has the “desire to understand rather than to explain” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 695). Interviews for this study were semi-structured because I incorporated the following questions into each interview: *What was this experience of talking about race like for you? What was surprising? Which moments stayed with you the most? Do you think this experience will impact your teaching? Is there anything from your journal reflections that you would like to share?* But I was also flexible and allowed for each interview to unfold and take different shapes as I interacted with the participants. This was done with the goal of understanding their point of view, rather than just reporting and explaining what they were saying.

Participants also used their reflective journals during the exit interviews. At the onset of the research project, I told participants that I would not be forcing them to submit or share these reflective journals because I believed that if they thought the journals were being collected, it would change what they decided to write about. At the conclusion of our research project, I gave participants the option to share their journals with me, but all participants opted not to share the

actual document and instead to use their reflective journals as a talking point for our exit interviews.

Data Analysis

As stated above, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the audio and visual recorded discussions and interviews took place on Zoom, which produced initial transcripts of each session. Language from these transcripts of the inquiry discussion group meetings was the primary source of data to be analyzed. These transcripts provided a starting point for analysis of the inquiry discussions, but given that language is neither flat or static, but dialogical, contextual, and subject to change (Gee, 2011), I looked closely at this language in order to address my research questions. Therefore, I employed discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) to consider the ways language was working in the discussion group, shaped by the participants and the surrounding contexts. The analysis and interpretation were guided by tools from critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) in tandem with ideas from my theoretical framework.

Discourse Analysis Tools, Theoretical Framework, and Discourses

Discourse analysis is the study of language-in-use (Gee, 2011). Some discourse analysis can be categorized as *descriptive*, which means that language is studied with the goal of describing how it works in order to understand it. This type of analysis aims just to describe without being concerned with how this description can be applied for use in the real world. On the other hand, the goal of a *critical* discourse analysis is to describe how the language is working, but also to “speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, social or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world” (p. 9).. Data produced in this study were analyzed from this *critical* discourse perspective because my goal was to analyze how language was working in relation to ideas of race and education.

When doing critical discourse analysis, it is important to keep in mind that people do not invent the words and ideas they produce; they inherit them from others. As Gee (2011) points out, “People talk and act not just as individuals, but as members of various sorts of social and cultural groups” (p. 176). This was an important component of my data analysis, as I was looking at how the language was working and intersecting with social issues related to race and education, keeping in mind that “it is not ... out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his [sic] words, but, rather, it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s *own*” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). This means language is never a neutral medium but inscribed with histories and contexts.

Gee (2011) offers 27 tools for doing discourse analysis, and for this project I found three of them particularly useful: the Making Strange Tool, the Fill in Tool, and the Big “D” Discourse Tool. The Making Strange Tool encourages the reader to approach data as if they were an outsider in order to notice things that might be taken for granted by an insider. This was hard to do considering I was a part of the discussions in the transcripts I was analyzing, but forcing myself to try and view the transcripts as if I were outside them allowed me to notice things I did not notice while I was actually entrenched in the discussions. The Fill in Tool encourages the researcher to consider what is *not* being overtly said. When using this tool, the researcher considers the context in which the language was being used and then makes assumptions and draws inferences to get a clearer picture of what the speaker intended. This tool allowed me to consider the ways that the context of Oak Tree Elementary, along with current social and political contexts, shaped what the participants were saying. The Big “D” Discourse Tool encourages the analyst to consider how participants are using language to enact specific socially

recognizable identities or to ask what sorts of values and beliefs are associated with the ways the participants are using language. This tool was helpful because it allowed me to consider which unspoken Discourses were present that were impacting what the participants were saying and how they were saying it.

These tools are also closely aligned with ideas present in my theoretical framework. Within the fields of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies there are multiple socially recognizable identities or Discourses, one of which is white supremacy. Theorists from these fields posit that when certain conversation moves are present, they may serve to actively protect white supremacy (Leonardo, 2008; Picower, 2009). For example, Critical Whiteness Studies tell us that when discussing race, whites will often deflect, ignore, get angry, or get defensive (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009). Another example is that whites can at times portray an emotional (dis)investment (Matias et. al., 2014), which is when whites act nonchalantly or without a personal emotional investment to topics of racism. This can be associated with a White Supremacist Discourse because strong emotional investment (i.e., rage) is necessary to work toward eliminating racism, and without this investment, white supremacy is left intact (hooks, 1995; Matias et. al., 2014). A second Discourse of race is colorblindness. Critical Race Theory encourages a skepticism toward colorblindness (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005), which is when people act as though they don't see racial differences or act as though racial differences don't have real implications (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Finally, one widely accepted Discourse associated with race is that of an antiracist. When people acknowledge and embrace the discomfort that comes with explicitly discussing race, embrace intense race work, acknowledge whiteness, and reject colorblind ideologies, then an antiracist identity is present (Leonardo, 2002; Matias & Mackey, 2015). These Discourses of race were helpful in my

analysis of how language was being used during our discussions because they allowed me to consider the ways participants were enacting ideas that referenced the history of race and racism in the U.S.

Considering Discourses of school was also useful in my analysis. In schools there are certain assumptions about what counts as knowledge, as teaching, and as learning. For example, the way teacher knowledge has been understood in schools has evolved over time (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Historically, and even at times today, teachers are viewed as technicians. This idea of teachers positions them as knowledge receivers instead of knowledge producers. In this Discourse of teacher knowledge, which I will call “teacher-as-passive-learner” within my analysis, it is believed that any useful information or ideas about teaching comes from outside the field itself. Teachers in schools that operate from this understanding often receive their knowledge from professional development or from top-down administrative initiatives where they are just receiving the knowledge and then producing it in their classrooms. On the other hand, a different Discourse of teacher knowledge has been called Inquiry as Stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). This Discourse of teacher knowledge, which I will call “teacher-as-knowledge-producer” within my analysis, believes that teachers are producers of knowledge and that they can and should come together to take on roles of leadership and activism to transform their own classrooms and schools. As Foucault (1975) explains, when assumptions like these become commonsense knowledge or the norm, they result in the solidification of power dynamics over time. Therefore, if a school consistently positions teachers as knowledge receivers not capable of producing their own valuable knowledge, this can result in teachers who don’t feel they have the agency to make decisions about how to teach in their own classrooms. On the other hand, if teachers are positioned as knowledge producers, capable of producing valuable

knowledge on how to identify and solve problems within their own classrooms and beyond, then they begin to feel empowered and take ownership of their own learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Both of these Discourses on teacher knowledge were helpful in my analysis of the language present in the discussions.

The above discourse analysis tools (Gee, 2011), in conjunction with these theoretical ideas, helped me make inferences and assumptions about what was being said, how it was being said, and which Discourses were present in terms of race and teacher knowledge. All of this helped me to analyze the language produced in this study in order to help me find out how the participants inquired into whiteness and racism within the context of a school-based inquiry discussion group, how certain ideas about whiteness and racism were engaged within the group, and how the participants used language to move past moments of discomfort to remain engaged with a productive disruption of the racial silences present in Oak Tree Elementary School.

Phases of Discourse Analysis

I approached this analysis in a systematic way in which I first looked for what the participants were actually saying and then analyzed how they were saying it in conjunction with what they were doing. The first phase of my analysis included examining what the participants were actually saying within the transcripts from both the inquiry discussion group meetings and the exit interviews. To do this, I used the Find Tool within the Google Docs word processor. Using this tool required me to use certain keystrokes to cause the ‘finder tool’ to pop up, where I could then enter a keyword to search within one of my transcript documents. This tool helped locate transcript segments that included the words “race” or any form of the word (i.e., “racist” and “racism”) so that I could look closely at what participants were saying when explicitly discussing this topic. After doing this and continuing to read through the transcripts and my

researcher observation journal, I began to realize that when participants were discussing race, they weren't only using the word "race." They were also using other words, such as "culture" or "diversity." This caused me to do a second search using the Find Tool for these words or any forms of these words (i.e., "multicultural," "diversity," etc.). This process allowed me to identify more segments where participants were discussing the topics of race and any related topics. The final step of this phase included rereading my researcher observation journal to help me identify places when participants were explicitly discussing race or were making statements or displaying behaviors that related to my research questions. Once I had identified these segments, I eliminated any other segments, some of which included conversations on topics such as COVID regulations in our school, conversations related to our personal lives, and conversations related to what had occurred in school that day. These segments were unrelated to the topic of race and my research questions.

The next phase of my analysis involved looking farther than what the participants were actually saying and using the Making Strange Tool and The Fill in Tool (Gee, 2011) to begin thinking about what the participants were doing with the language as they discussed topics of race. This included trying to act like an outsider as I read and reread the selected transcripts and made inferences about the language. During this phase of analysis, I also consulted my researcher observation journal to see what I had written about the moments from the selected transcripts in terms of how the participants were behaving while they were speaking. As I did this, I began to notice certain conversation moves the participants were making, such as: asking and answering questions, adding onto an idea, making practical suggestions, and giving personal and professional examples of some of the broader topics we were discussing. I also began to notice what the participants were doing when discussing race, which consisted of things such as:

hesitating, being silent, deflecting, or avoiding topics. I made note of all of these noticings within the transcripts as I continued to look closely at the way language was being used within the discussions.

The final phase of my analysis involved looking through the segments once more to use the Big “D” Discourse Tool to think about which Discourses were operating within the talk in terms of my theoretical framework. This allowed me to notice which broadly accepted identities related to race and school were present in what the participants were saying and how they were saying it. As I analyzed the language that was produced, I thought about the ways participants’ language was shaped by these Discourses. All of this helped me to analyze the language that was produced in order to find out how the participants inquired into whiteness and racism within the context of a school-based inquiry discussion group, how certain ideas about whiteness and racism were engaged within the group, and how the participants used language to move past moments of discomfort to remain engaged with a productive disruption of the racial silences present in Oak Tree Elementary School. The findings of this systematic analysis will be presented in the following chapter.

Limitations and Trustworthiness

In order to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study, I considered certain limitations in the designing of this study and continued to keep them in mind as data were produced and analyzed. I also employed certain procedures throughout this project in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study.

Critics of practitioner research point out possible limitations of this type of study. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) identified three critiques that are commonly cited: the Knowledge Critique, the Methods Critique, and the Ends Critique. The Knowledge Critique is based on the

idea that there is generalizable formal knowledge about teaching, and then there is situated practical knowledge about teaching. This critique posits that if the knowledge produced in a study is not generalizable across contexts, then it does not count as knowledge. The Methods Critique challenges the idea that a teacher is able to be a researcher in her own classroom setting. If a teacher is to be successful at this, she must ensure that the research methods she is employing are consistent and reliable. The Ends Critique criticizes practitioner research that has instrumental goals instead of goals that connect to larger political or social issues. In other words, practitioner research that fits neatly into the goals of a school district that aim to standardize classroom practice or improve test scores are “more and less ‘benign’ constructions of teacher research” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 20). These benign forms of practitioner research can dull one of the goals of practitioner research, especially practitioner research that takes an inquiry as stance approach, which is to align with democratic social or political agendas.

Being aware of these limitations from the onset of the study prepared me to respond to them as the study unfolded. Practitioner research is meant to be contextual in that the aim is to produce knowledge to be used locally. Practitioner research is also “associated more with uncertainty than with certainty, more with posing problems and dilemmas than with solving them, and with the recognition that inquiry both stems from and generates questions” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 21). This research project was consistent with these goals, and it did not aim to be generalizable, employed the consistent and reliable methods described above, and did connect to the larger social issue of colorblind racial silences in America.

For this practitioner research project, I also used certain procedures to bolster the trustworthiness of the findings produced from this project. One aspect of trustworthiness I will attend to is my own subjectivity. This study relied on the subjective perspectives of myself and

the research participants because our aim was to generate local knowledge within our discussion inquiry group. That said, it was important to pay attention to my subjectivity throughout the research process and not to avoid it, but work toward taming it (Peshkin, 1988) so that I could make sure my subjectivity was not shaping the inquiry project more than it had to. In order to notice this subjectivity, Alan Peshkin (1988) looked “for the warm and the cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings, the experiences I wanted more of or wanted to avoid, and when I felt moved to act in roles beyond those necessary to fulfill my research needs” (p. 18). This encouraged me to monitor myself to see how I was feeling through each step of this project and to continually consider how these feelings were shaping my study. This self-monitoring took place in the researcher reflection journal, where I reflected after each session and used it to make necessary changes as the study unfolded. For example, writing in the researcher journal after each session and then listening to and watching the audio/visual recording of the initial meetings allowed me to notice that I was doing the majority of the talking in the initial two meetings. This caused me to have a transparent discussion with the participants where I explicitly pointed out this noticing, told participants that I would be working on sharing the talk, and encouraged the participants to let me know if I continued to dominate our conversations.

Egon Guba (1981) also discusses four aspects of trustworthiness that I considered for this research project. The first aspect is truth value, or, in qualitative research, this can be thought of as credibility. Considering my research project was grounded in ideas that assumed there is not just one single perspective, I was not looking to locate one single truth. Instead, I checked to make sure my research was trustworthy by encouraging participants to share their perspectives in relation to each of the artifacts and also encouraged the participants to share their perspectives on

our discussions during their exit interviews. This ensured that the findings were valid representations of what we produced during our inquiry group discussions and not just my perspective of what occurred.

The second aspect of trustworthiness is consistency (Guba, 1981). In quantitative research, this means that the researcher is aiming for findings that could be replicated in a similar setting. I was not aiming for findings that could be exactly replicated in other settings because that would contradict the value of local knowledge that my study emphasized. Instead, in qualitative research, consistency can be thought of as dependability within a specific context. One way to work toward dependability in a project is to make the researcher positionality clear in relation to various aspects of the study. I have discussed in depth my positionality in terms of each stage of this study and also made my positionality clear to the participants in the inquiry discussion group. Positionality is something I discussed openly with my participants by explicitly sharing my own positionality and also encouraging the participants to consider their positionality and how it related to the topics of our discussions.

The third aspect of trustworthiness is applicability or, in terms of qualitative research, transferability (Guba, 1981). Studies are deemed trustworthy if the findings can be applied or transferred from one setting to another. While I do not believe the local findings my study produced are exactly replicable in different settings, I do believe the findings from this study are useful for educators and researchers who are aiming to disrupt racial silences in other schools. To ensure transferability of findings, it is useful to use thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973, as cited in Guba, 1981) of the setting and to check with participants to get their input on these descriptions. In this study, I included some description of the school context in this chapter, and further descriptions of the setting and contexts are included in the Findings chapter.

One last aspect of trustworthiness is neutrality, which can be thought of as confirmability in terms of qualitative research (Guba, 1981). Neutrality means that the findings of the study come solely from the participants and the inquiry and not only from the perspective of the researcher. Again, this study was grounded in ideas that value subjectivity and local knowledge, so instead of aiming for neutrality, I aimed to ensure that my findings were confirmable. This means that I, the researcher, and the participants in the inquiry discussion group worked toward acknowledging our assumptions and perspectives and making them explicit from the very beginning of this study. This took place during the first meetings of the inquiry discussion group, where the focus was on personal positionalities and experiences in relation to racial understandings and racial silences.

One final limitation of this study is that it was carried out by myself, a white teacher-researcher, and mostly white participants. Five of the six participants identified as white, with one participant identifying as Black. A small number of educators of color work at Oak Tree Elementary School, but the vast majority of educators in this building are white middle class women. An important warning that emerges in this body of research is that whites should not work with just whites on issues involving race and the disruption of racial silences (Pennington, 2007). Julie Pennington warns against this because whites “can become isolated and validated by the very views we are attempting to disengage” (p. 111). Even though one of the participants of this study was Black, I was still conscious of this critique and similar ones when taking on a study as a white teacher-researcher carrying out a study about racial silences in a predominantly white setting. In order to respond to this warning, I incorporated the voices of many Black researchers and scholars when learning about the background of this problem. I also push back slightly on this critique to say that in this critical moment in our nation, it is important for white

people to stop relying on people of color to do this work for us. Yes, it is important to learn from Black scholars and researchers, but it is also time for whites to step up and do the hard work themselves (Wilson, 2020). Therefore, this inquiry discussion group incorporated the ideas and voices of Black researchers and scholars and was a setting where white educators began to do the hard work of disrupting racial silences and working toward social change themselves.

Chapter 4: “We Have to be Okay with Being Uncomfortable”:

Confronting the Challenge of Racial Silences

I undertook this dissertation project at a moment in which the United States was experiencing a reckoning on race in response to the murder of Black men and women by police and citizens acting as vigilantes. When I defended my dissertation proposal, the events involved with the murder of George Floyd were reverberating, and they continued to reverberate as I collected and analyzed my data. I am a product of the racial silences that were present in my personal life and in all of the mostly white educational settings I have experienced throughout my life. Thus, I approached this research project from my perspective as a white female educator with no experience talking about race until I pursued my doctoral studies. This positionality caused me to be interested in what happens when racial silences are disrupted in mostly white educational settings. After I began having explicit conversations about race and reading research studies related to racial silences, I also became interested in what keeps educators engaged in race work in schools past moments of discomfort, which are common. These experiences, both in and out of the academy, caused me to craft the following research questions to guide this study:

- What happens when educators at a predominantly white elementary school are invited to disrupt silences around race?
 - How do educators inquire into whiteness and racism within the context of a school-based inquiry discussion group?

- What ideas about whiteness and racism are surfaced, and how are these ideas engaged within the group?
- How do teachers move past moments of discomfort to remain engaged?

The above positionality also shaped my decision to choose Oak Tree Elementary School as the site for this study, since I had taught there for six years and recognized similar racial silences present in the school itself. This school is not immune to the tensions and debates of the larger nation. Eastville County in New York is home to 43 school districts that were at different stages of implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plans in 2022. These school districts were also experiencing different levels of community support and protest related to these initiatives. In 2020, in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the national response, Oak Tree Elementary School and the Garden Grove school district tried to form a DEI Committee by first holding forums to gather data from the community in order to establish goals for the committee. After the forums were conducted, no other committee meetings or next steps took place during the 2020-2021 school year. In the 2021-2022 school year, this school district added a new district goal titled, "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion," with three sub-goals: developing student leadership and empowerment activities; establishing a focus committee on diversity and equity; and reviewing and revising policies and protocols to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. In December of 2021, the school district sent out a new call for interested committee members, and in February 2022, the committee met for the first time. One example of the way some citizens in this county responded to these initiatives is the mission statement of the Eastville Chapter of an organization called "Save Our Schools":

Our intention is to exclude from the curricula any content based on the destructive, race-based Marxist premise that the U.S. and all white people are inherently racist, and that students should be re-educated to view themselves as either oppressed or oppressor. We, therefore, oppose the current obsessive push by school administrators, without

transparency and the support of the community at large, to impose curricula based on the following radical theories: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI), and Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (CR-S), in all of their various forms. (Save Our Schools, 2022)

So, while the school district in which this study took place was making specific attempts to work toward social justice, there was also resistance to the district's attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Oak Tree Elementary School is part of the Garden Grove School District, which is a mostly white district that is regarded as high-achieving. Like many similar schools in the United States, this school has been plagued by the ways national educational crises are blamed on teachers, leading to resolutions based on accountability through standards and assessments (Taubman, 2009). This leads school administrations to carry out these policies in ways designed to hold teachers accountable and make them feel as if they do not have agency. This top-down audit culture can be seen in Oak Tree Elementary School in various ways (e.g., standardized assessments, teacher evaluations, testing policies), but perhaps most relevant to this study are the ways in which professional development opportunities are presented to the teachers of this school.

One instance where professional development is available to the teachers in this school is at the two district-wide Superintendent Conference Days per year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The schedule for these Superintendent Conference Days has consistently been determined by administrators with little to no input from teachers. The Superintendent Conference Day in the fall always has a portion dedicated to "mandated teacher training," a term that suggests that the Board of Education and administration of this school believe their teachers must be forced and trained into learning how to implement new policy decisions. The use of the word "training" aligns with assumptions about teaching that claim "the knowledge that makes teaching a

profession comes from authorities outside of the profession itself” (Cochran Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 257). If a school district is mandating the staff to be “trained,” the underlying belief is that teachers are not capable of generating valuable knowledge about their own profession. The term “training” is also problematic because it is one that is commonly used in relation to domesticating animals. When used in terms of humans, it insinuates that those in need of “training” are lacking in some sort of acceptable behavior that “training” will correct. This sentiment of “training” teachers was also seen within the email the Board of Education sent out on June 5, 2020 to respond to the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Within this email, there was a sentence that stated: “We will ensure that our teachers and staff have access to adequate resources and training that will help identify, address and rectify implicit bias and other direct and indirect forms of discrimination.” Again, the use of the term “training” and the suggestion of a plan to “identify, address and rectify” behaviors in teachers further contribute to the way the district exerts control over the teachers. It is also important to note is that in the time between sending this email and writing this dissertation, there have been no such opportunities (mandated training or otherwise) to give the staff at the Garden Grove School District access to these “adequate resources” that address race or discrimination. Another issue related to professional development at Oak Tree Elementary School is the lack of opportunities at this school for teachers to engage in inquiry related to their own professional learning; even though the district encourages teachers to attend professional development courses of their choosing from local providers, oftentimes there is no one to cover their classrooms, which prevents this from being a reality. These examples highlight the ways the top-down audit culture contributes to a lack of agency among the teachers at Oak Tree Elementary School.

I had been teaching at this school for six years, and, as previously stated, I chose to carry out my dissertation study at this school because I felt the mostly white demographics and the racial silences present in this school district suggested that educators shared my lack of experience explicitly discussing issues of race, racism, and whiteness in education. I also believed that the teachers in this school district shared my frustrations with feeling a lack of agency, especially in terms of professional development opportunities. I wanted to work with these educators to address the racial silences that existed at Oak Tree Elementary School in ways that positioned them as inquirers so that we would not perpetuate these experiences for the students at the school and instead the teachers and students could become more fluent in talking about race and equity.

As described in Chapter 3, I recruited six participants, and we met in an inquiry discussion group from October to December 2021 via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, regulations were still in place in schools that kept us from gathering in larger groups, which at times prevented us from experiencing benefits of meeting in person, such as being able to physically view and interact with artifacts and fully experiencing forms of communication like body language and facial expressions. On the other hand, meeting via Zoom did lead to increased participant attendance because it accommodated for the participants' multiple schedules and allowed us to all log in to a virtual meeting space from various physical locations.

Opening Moves: Stepping into the Conversation

On October 21, 2021, the inquiry discussion group met for the first time, and all participants were present except for Hannah, who had to take her daughter to a doctor's appointment that first day. I logged in from my laptop computer while sitting on my living room

couch. My Zoom screen included a view of my living room wall and the mirror hanging behind me. I held a pen in one hand, and as I waited for other participants to log in, I nervously clicked my pen and read over one of the artifacts I had sent out for our first meeting, “10 Things Everyone Should Know About Race” (Power of an Illusion, 2003) and tried to gather my thoughts. **“Was I ready to facilitate an explicit discussion on race when I was still new to having these discussions?”** (Researcher observation journal, 10/21/21). I myself still felt I was not an expert on explicitly discussing race, something I hoped I had conveyed to the participants during our introductory meeting. I did not want them to think I was here to teach them or to “train” them. I really hoped I could foster an environment where we could be on a learning journey together.

Laura and Paige were the first two participants to join, and both logged in from Paige’s classroom computer, explaining that Laura’s classroom was being used for afterschool activities. I had a view of the small classroom space Paige was currently using as her classroom. This view, which included a narrow classroom and chairs stacked on top of each other off to one side, was a reminder of the construction project that was happening at Oak Tree Elementary School that had caused many teachers to move to temporary classroom spaces that year. As we waited for other participants to join, we chatted about the construction project. The effects of the construction and the COVID-19 pandemic served as backdrops for these meetings and seemed to weigh on the participants, something I made note of in my observation journal on several occasions and something that was evident in the statements of the participants themselves. For example, when discussing the construction project during our second meeting, Beth stated, **“And then COVID on top of it and, I don’t know today was a hard day—I felt—at Oak Tree for me at least, like there was just no—there’s no community when all your faculty has to eat in their**

cars, and on the floor, and I get that we're in an emergency, and in a bad way, but nobody's thinking of the community and what it feels like..." (Beth, 10/26/21).

Once everyone else had logged in from their respective locations, I began our meeting. As soon as the conversation switched from small talk about the school's construction project, the discourse began to feel more constricted as I noted, **"...less easy chatter once the real meeting began..."** (Researcher observation journal, 10/21/21). For the first six minutes of the first meeting, I was the only participant to speak. During that time, I reiterated what I had said in the informational meeting that the goal of our group was **"not necessarily that we're looking for answers or that we are trying to like solve racism or solve racial silences,"** but instead the goal was, **"to start a conversation at our school and to keep the conversation going"** in a way that **"could maybe positively impact our school community"** (Researcher, 10/21/21). During the first six minutes, I also presented norms for our meetings, which included: 'calling in instead of calling out,' 'Vegas confidentiality,' 'expecting and accepting discomfort,' and 'embracing a brave space, instead of a safe space.' As I spoke, I also paused at multiple points to invite the other participants into the conversation by saying, **"Any questions or comments so far?"** and **"Does anybody want to throw out their thoughts or ideas about that one?"** and **"So anyone wanna take a shot?"** After each of these invitations, the participants would smile, make eye contact with me, and nod or shake their heads, but did not offer any verbal responses. The first participant to speak up was Maria when I mentioned our first artifact, the article "10 Things Everyone Should Know About Race" (The Power of an Illusion, 2003) and asked the participants the question, **"What is race?"** Six minutes and one second into our first meeting, Maria said, **"Uh, I'm going to say that I don't know now anymore, because I read what you**

sent. You sent the article so it made me change-how I thought about it” (Maria, 10/21/21). And with that our discussions began.

For the rest of the first meeting, the participants used details from “10 Things Everyone Should Know About Race” (Power of an Illusion, 2003) and “What Census Calls Us” (Pew Research Center, 2020) as a springboard for our conversation. I had selected these artifacts for our first meeting because they included information about the history and social construction of race, which I felt was a good entry point for an initial discussion. Much of the conversation during that first meeting consisted of back and forth interactions between myself and a participant. These were instances where I would ask a question and a participant would respond, but other participants would not build on or ask questions of each other. Even when I would pause to allow other participants to respond, there was silence, which, I admit, made me nervous as the facilitator and caused me to continue to make statements or ask questions to keep the conversation moving. When participants did respond to each other, they did so in ways that suggested they were uncomfortable.

This was all evidence of what I noted during the first meetings: that all participants “seemed to have a lack of experience explicitly discussing race, which caused them to appear to be nervous and unsure of what to say” (Researcher observation journal, 10/21/21). Multiple participants confirmed these feelings in the exit interviews, making statements such as: “I was very kind of nervous in the beginning...”, “I was—I kind of—feeling like a little apprehensive” (Paige, exit interview); “I was a little uneasy...,” which “...mostly stemmed from sometimes just not knowing a lot about that—the topics” and “...to really come forward and, and speak your mind sometimes that’s a little unsettling” (Laura, exit interview). But over time, the discourse in the inquiry discussion group meetings opened up, and participants began

to build off of each other's ideas, ask questions of each other, and grapple with new ideas as we came "to a consensus that we want to see change in our school and even though we maybe don't know how that's gonna work out, at least we've started the conversation, opened the conversation up" (Paige, exit interview).

As the above vignette highlights, the initial meetings of this inquiry discussion group included many silences, hesitations, and qualities that would not align the group with qualities of oral inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). In these initial meetings, I struggled to act as a facilitator instead of a director, as I tried to encourage participants to engage in inquiry about our school and their own classrooms. I analyzed the extensive data produced in the inquiry group's ten weekly discussions, the majority of which included over eight hours of audio/video recorded Zoom meetings and the transcripts of these conversations (see Chapter 3 for details). In my initial reading of the data, I examined what the participants were saying and what they were doing while they talked. This analysis led me to notice a gradual shift in discourse and also a shift in the ways the participants evoked qualities of an oral inquiry group (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). As a result, I came to think of the ten sessions as three overlapping phases in order to make these shifts visible. Therefore, this chapter is organized into three phases in order to illustrate these changes in the group's conversations over time: discomfort of not knowing, embracing discomfort, and grappling toward change. In what follows, I have selected segments of the talk to illustrate the characteristics of the discourse that was present in each phase.

Phase One: The Discomfort of Not Knowing

During the first four meetings of the discussion inquiry group, my analysis of the talk showed that participants expressed discomfort in not knowing. In this section, I have selected segments of talk from the first four meetings because the discourse in those meetings represented

an overall discomfort with not knowing. This “not knowing” includes not knowing the history of the social construction of race or systemic racism, not knowing how to engage in an explicit discussion about these topics, and not knowing how to embrace the role of being an educator capable of producing valuable knowledge.

To get the inquiry discussion group started, I chose artifacts that invited participants to explicitly discuss topics such as the history, definition, and social construction of race and racism, as well as systemic racism and its implications (see Table 2). Artifacts included articles, autobiographical participant reflections, video clips, and memes that directly dealt with these topics. In these initial sessions, I encouraged participants to suggest or bring in artifacts for the group to discuss, but they did not take up this invitation during those meetings. As a result, I selected the artifacts that were the focus for discussions during the first four meetings, and also sent prompts (e.g., “*What stood out to you most in this article? What questions did this artifact raise for you? Which line or section stood out to you the most? Why?*”) for participants to consider prior to each discussion. I did this to encourage them to be prepared to share their own thoughts in order to try and invite participants to move toward “collaborative analyses and interpretations” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) that are characteristic of inquiry discussions. As the meetings progressed and participants began to embrace the role of teacher as inquirer, I stopped sending discussion prompts with the artifacts (see Tables 8 and 13) in order to encourage a more open discussion.

Table 2. *Phase One Meeting Artifacts and Prompts*

Meeting	Artifact	Prompts
Meeting 1 10/21/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ten Things Everyone Should Know About Race” (The Power of an Illusion, 2003) • “What Census Calls Us” (Pew Research Center, 2020) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>What is race?</i> -<i>What does ‘race is a social construct’ mean?</i> -<i>How is it possible that race isn’t biological, but racism is real?</i> -<i>What stood out to you most in this article?</i> -<i>What questions did this article raise for you?</i> -<i>Are there parts of this article that you agree with/don’t agree with?</i>
Meeting 2 10/26/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher’s autobiography in terms of race (Krill, 2017) • Participants’ autobiographical reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>Do you have any specific memories of becoming aware of race?</i> -<i>What are your experiences with discussing race?</i> -<i>What factors or circumstances do you think caused you to have the racial experiences that you did?</i> -<i>Is there anything that stands out from my racial understanding autobiography?</i> -<i>How did you feel when reflecting on your own racial understanding autobiography?</i> -<i>Was there anything surprising that came up when reflecting on your own experiences?</i> -<i>Do you think writing this kind of autobiography is useful? (useful as humans and/or useful as teachers?)</i>
Meeting 3 11/02/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What White Children Need to Know About Race” (Michael & Bartoli, 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>How did you feel when reading this article?</i> -<i>Which line or section stood out to you the most? Why?</i> -<i>The article states, “Yet few schools currently engage in conscious policies to support the development of positive racial identity...”. Do you think you have a positive racial identity? Do you think our school promotes positive racial identity for our white students? For our students of color?</i> -<i>The article asks, “What would the parallel process of positive racial identity development look like for white students?” Any thoughts on this question?</i>

Table 2 (continued)

Meeting	Artifact	Prompts
Meeting 4 11/09/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Systemic Racism Explained” (act.tv, 2019) • “#BLM How Can We Win?” (Jones, 2020) • “Social Inequalities Explained in a \$100 Race” (Link Year, 2018) • “What is Systemic Racism?” (Race Forward, 2015) 	<p><i>-Now that we’ve watched these videos, how would you explain what systemic racism is?</i></p> <p><i>-How does systemic racism relate to education?</i></p> <p><i>-Which video/part of a video stood out to you the most?</i></p> <p><i>-How can we work towards dismantling systemic racism?</i></p> <p><i>-What questions do these videos bring up for you?</i></p>

What is Race?

The following segments come from our first meeting on 10/21/21. During this meeting, participants were using details from the artifacts “10 Things Everyone Should Know About Race” (Power of an Illusion, 2003) and “What Census Calls Us” (Pew Research Center, 2020) as a springboard for an explicit conversation about the history and social construction of race. At this point in our conversation, Felicity, a white woman, was responding to the questions, “*What is race?*” “*What does race as a social construct mean?*” and “*How is it possible that race isn’t biological, but racism is real?*” and then Maria, Beth, and I, all white women, responded to Felicity’s statements.

Table 3. *Segment 1 (Meeting 1-10/21/2021)*

Felicity	Something...I think this is the biggest argument to me, what's going on in race relations is people are making it something and, you know, we make it an issue, we make it a division, we make it a...a problem when it doesn't have to be a problem and...and we-and we...we, I don't know. I think, but I think that's what you're getting at there, is that, okay, we defined race right we—we-we-we came up with that definition, and we've also come up with what it means to us and what it means in our country...and what it means in our relationships with people.
Researcher	And I think like I said, I think that goes with that next question too which is, 'how is it possible that race isn't biological?' - like it's like, Felicity, like you're saying like it's something we've created - 'but racism is real?'.
Felicity	Yes, we created racism too. So, yes, it's real...because we created it. We made decisions based on race and then you create racism.
Maria	So when you talk about social construct, like are we talking about the social lives of kids and just anybody? Because it does seem like, okay, each race definitely gravitates towards each other, because that's where they're more comfortable because again, we've also made it that way. Right? By having...
Beth	That's true in other countries as well, that's not just in America.

In this segment and all that follow, I bring a discourse analysis lens, which considers what the participants said and how they said it (e.g., word choice, syntax, and conversational moves). For example, Felicity hesitated multiple times when explaining that people make race relations an issue when it doesn't have to be and also that in our country we have defined race and come up with what it means in our relationships with people. This can be seen through the multiple ellipses and through her repetition of words (i.e., *we*), a conversation move that suggests she was trying to gather her thoughts as she repeated the word. The use of *we* also suggests that Felicity wanted to insinuate that her comments were shared by a broad group of people and not just her alone. Maria and I both avoided directly responding to Felicity's statements. I did this by restating a previous question instead of directly addressing something Felicity had said. Maria

also restated a previous question, “*What does race as a social construct mean?*” and began to respond to that question instead of Felicity’s statements. Beth then showed that she was deflecting an explicit discussion of racism in the United States by bringing up race relations from other countries instead. All of this is evidence of the “not knowing” that was present in the first meeting. Participants in the above segment, myself included, didn’t know how to explicitly acknowledge race and racism or how to engage in a collaborative back-and-forth of ideas as teachers.

At the conclusion of our first meeting, the participants started to discuss their reasons for signing up for the inquiry discussion group. I had expressed my concern that nobody would be interested and I wouldn’t have any participants. The segment below shows Beth’s response.

Table 4. *Segment 2 (Meeting 1-10/21/2021)*

Beth	I signed up because it’s a huge conversation in Blue Lake, all the time, and not in a bad way, but I think my, until this year, my son was the only Jewish kid in his class – and white looking skin, whether he’s white or not, it we don’t know, but um you know, and he walks around saying, “ <i>You know mommy, Max and I have the same color skin.</i> ” Max is from Guatemala, they do not have the same color skin, but I’m so glad he thinks that they do, and they don’t bat an eye. There’s very few white teachers in his school. And when you ask, “ <i>What does the teacher look like?</i> ”, he tells you by their weight and their height and that’s the way it should be, in my opinion, not, you know, not their ethnicity.
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In this segment, Beth was discussing her adopted son’s race and the way that her son responded to the race of his classmates and teachers (names of people and schools are pseudonyms). There was some hesitancy evident in Beth’s statement in the way she said, “*um*” and also said, “*in my opinion,*” a statement that provided the safety net of discerning her statement from a fact that could be debated. This segment further highlights the “not knowing” that was present during the first meeting. Beth’s statements seemed to be an attempt at aligning

with antiracist sentiments when in reality her statements were colorblind. This and her conversation moves reveal that she lacked discursive fluency in explicitly discussing race, something that was seen in many of the participants, myself included, during this phase.

During her exit interview, Maria reflected back on moments such as this one and explained that she didn't understand why some participants made statements that made it seem like acknowledging race was a bad thing, especially "*because that was the point of this whole discussion—this was called breaking the racial silences*" (Maria, exit interview). While this shows that not all participants in the group shared the same colorblind views, it is interesting that Maria was thinking this but not saying it aloud. This further highlights the "not knowing" in that Maria may have known how to identify colorblind talk, but did not know or feel comfortable directly acknowledging it within the discussions.

"We Live in a School District Where We Can Ignore It"

During the second, third and fourth meetings, participants continued to use various artifacts as a jumping off point for further explicit discussions of race and systemic racism. During this phase of meetings, I encouraged participants to feel free to suggest or bring artifacts for us to discuss. Toward the end of the first meeting, participants seemed "a bit shell shocked" (Researcher observation journal, 10/21/21), so I decided to choose the artifact for our second meeting. Our second discussion centered around my written autobiography in terms of race (Krill, 2017), which was a two-page document that discussed my experiences with race and explicitly discussed race throughout my life. I also encouraged participants to do some similar reflecting and writing about their own experiences with race and offered them some reflection questions as a starting point (see Table 2). These autobiographical activities served as an entry point for both the participants and myself. They gave the participants a chance to make a

personal connection to the topics and were an initial point of understanding the participant’s backgrounds for myself as the researcher. Beginning with personal self-connections is also consistent with the belief that starting with an understanding of personal white privilege gives whites an entry point into discussing topics of race (Lensmire et al., 2013). During the meeting, we discussed my autobiography, and each participant spent a little time sharing about their own experiences.

Segment 3 is taken from this second meeting on 10/26/2021, when all participants were present except for Hannah. During this meeting, we had been discussing my written autobiography (Krill, 2017) as well as the participants’ own autobiographical reflections in terms of experiences with explicitly discussing race, racism, and whiteness throughout their lifetimes. Toward the end of the conversation, participants began to make connections between their personal experiences and their experiences as teachers at Oak Tree Elementary School. At this point in the conversation, Maria was making a connection to our own school setting and was asking the group a question.

Table 5. *Segment 3 (Meeting 2-10/26/2021)*

Maria	So, do you think that we’re just trying so hard to be politically correct that nobody talks about anything?
Beth	Yeah I do.
Laura	Mhmm. I would agree with that statement too.
Paige	I think it’s easier to just ignore it than confront it.
Maria	Mhmm.

Table 5 (continued)

Researcher	And I think we live in a school district, where we can ignore it, because we don't have to have those conversations, because the majority of the teachers and the students are white.
Laura	Right.
Beth	And I have the most colorful class I've ever had in 18 years at Oak Tree, and it's still not talked about.
Laura	Mhmm.
Beth	I could check off every box in my class, and I love it, and that's what makes it so amazing, and Allie...having Allie come in, and Bianca come in, but it's not talked about. We can't celebrate all that...we just all have to be the same.
Maria	But, are you...are you can't because they won't let you? Like do you have no freedom whatsoever? I'm not...I'm the only one who's not a teacher so I'm not...
Beth	I don't know...I don't ever ask. It's just not something...
Maria	Yeah.
Paige	And I think your point Beth, then it becomes like, okay if you're celebrating, if you're going to highlight this culture, that culture...then you're going to have, " <i>well, what about mine, what about this, what about that?</i> " and then it becomes, you know...a thing.

Several things from the above segment stand out. First, this segment highlights the ways the participants from Oak Tree Elementary School felt they did not have agency as teachers in terms of explicitly discussing race or engaging with social justice teaching. After Maria, a white woman, asked the group why race is not explicitly discussed at Oak Tree Elementary School, Paige, a Black woman, pointed out that it is easier to ignore these topics than to confront them. Beth pointed out that even though there were more races and languages represented in her class this year, these differences were not explicitly discussed, even though Allie and Bianca (the technology and ENL teachers) had been in her room to offer support. Laura and Paige agreed that at Oak Tree Elementary School it was easier to ignore these topics so that it didn't become

“*a thing*” (Paige). When discussing these topics, the participants employed conversation moves (i.e., “*Mhmm*”—Maria, Laura) and specific words (i.e., “...*I would agree...*”—Laura) that showed they were agreeing with the sentiments expressed by other participants that race is not something explicitly acknowledged at Oak Tree Elementary School. The participants also employed conversation moves that were representative of hesitancy, such as the multiple ellipses that showed participants continued to hesitate and evoke a “not knowing” as they tried to come up with the words to explain the environment at the school.

It is important to highlight here that Paige, a Black woman, was the only participant of color. In the segment above, the other participants, all white women besides Paige, were trying to flesh out the reasons race isn’t explicitly acknowledged at Oak Tree Elementary School. Paige stated that it is easier to ignore these topics than confront them and also stated that if we did address these topics in our classrooms, then it could become “*a thing*.” These statements suggest that Paige finds it easier to avoid explicitly addressing race or race related issues. Even her choice to use the phrase “*a thing*” instead of being straightforward about what she means suggests that Paige, one of the few teachers of color at this school, was in the habit of avoiding issues of race in the school setting.

Also, Maria’s choice to use the phrase “politically correct” is important. The term “politically correct” has seen various meanings over the years. In the recent past, it has carried consequences, especially when used in terms of multiculturalism and diversity in the way this term has been used (Chow, 2016). When Maria asked if the participants believe that “nobody talks about anything” at Oak Tree Elementary School because they are trying to be “politically correct,” she was suggesting that trying to be “politically correct” is a goal that would prevent teachers at Oak Tree Elementary School from explicitly talking about the differences in race and

culture they see in their classrooms. This suggestion aligns with the ways the term “politically correct” has been co-opted in the recent past by politicians and the media to be synonymous with “invalid,” “hypersensitive,” and “cowardly,” when in reality the term originated as one that is associated with civil rights (Chow, 2016). Maria’s use of this term suggested to participants that being “politically correct” is counterproductive to the goal of explicitly acknowledging the racial and cultural differences seen in their classrooms.

What is Systemic Racism?

At the end of this meeting, I began to encourage participants to suggest artifacts or topics that we might like to discuss at our meetings. They all agreed with this idea, but did not suggest something for next time. Therefore, for our third meeting, I selected an article to help the participants make connections between the history of race, our own racial experiences, and our educational profession and setting, something the participants themselves had begun to do toward the end of the second meeting. I chose the article, “What White Children Need to Know About Race” (Michael & Bartoli, 2014), which examines the role of schools in supporting racial identity development and ways to work toward racially aware schools. This artifact allowed us to begin to talk about how race operates in a school building. The segment below (see Table 6) was taken from the third meeting on November 2, 2021. Beth and Felicity were absent, while Maria, Laura, Paige, Hannah, and myself were present. At this point in the discussion, multiple participants were contributing to an explicit discussion about systemic racism, which was mentioned in the article. Maria directed everyone’s attention to a section of the article about understanding systemic racism, and Laura admitted that she wasn’t sure what systemic racism was.

Table 6. *Segment 4 (Meeting 3-11/02/2021)*

Maria	That whole entire section, ‘Understand Systemic Racism’...because they don’t teach that, and that whole idea of how race is not biological. I think just right there, that’s a big thing that nobody can start knowing. I didn’t know until what, last week?
Laura	And we still left saying we’re not really sure if we know.
Maria	Yeah.
Researcher	That’s been a big part of this for me, for like coming up with this project was, I toyed with the idea of doing my study with kids, like I wasn’t sure if maybe I should do something with kids, but then I was like, I don’t even feel confident to talk about it...like I’m assuming most teachers don’t like, or feel the similar ways that I do so...I thought it was maybe more effective for all of us to try to figure some of this out, before we attempt it with the kids.
Laura	So I have a question...I hope it’s, you know I’ll probably embarrass myself by asking this...but when I was reading this part, about this systemic racism...I was looking for like a definition of it and, I don’t know if it really clearly said it, and I’m not really sure if I even know what that term means.
Hannah	It’s definitely um, a new thing like systemic racism...I didn’t really fully understand it, obviously after the George Floyd stuff was in the media...there was a really good video that helped me like bring, shed light...I think it was a Trevor Noah video explaining systemic racism. I don’t know if that’s something Jen can share for next week, but I thought it was...the way that he broke it down, it really um, helped me understand it in a different way...it just shows, like all the like, the ways that our system is built around like...even like the banks and why people do grow up in communities that are um, you know, built around you know...like they, the housing areas why the neighborhoods are built around it, why blacks will go to like black education schools, and stuff like that...so I remember that video really brought it to life...because when that-that term was coming into the media...I was definitely confused I didn’t know what it was.

Table 6 (continued)

Paige	Yeah it's definitely like a new, you, like you said Hannah, like it's something new that I really hadn't heard either, until you hear it now all the time...since everything that happened last year and, and when you think about it...like you're saying how all these sort of things that were put into place, yeah they were hundreds of years ago, but they have implications, even today, and they've set up um, you know...even though right, we don't have segregation, we don't have, you know, sit on the back of the bus, but a lot of those things set families back for generations and, so, you still see the implications of that, even today.
Maria	I don't think anybody realizes that, and I'm, and I'm speaking for 90% of my friends, they don't understand systemic racism at all , and they're, they're always like, " <i>Well that everybody has just as much chance as everybody else</i> ", right? How many times have you heard that? All the time...because they don't understand it, and I'm not very good at explaining it, I try to, this is where I'd be like, " <i>Wait you gotta talk to my kids. They can, they can explain much better than I can.</i> " Um, but now I know it, it's...just for me to get the words out, and explain it is difficult, but I'm telling you, in my age group, trust me 90% of them don't understand.

At the time of this study, Hannah and I were both in our 30s, Paige was 40, and Laura and Maria were in their 50s. Paige was a Black female while the rest of the participants from this segment were white females. This segment shows that regardless of age or race, all participants in the group displayed a similar lack of knowledge or “not knowing” related to systemic racism, as can be seen through a variety of conversation moves. For example, each of the participants was hesitant, which can be seen through the ellipses that represent pauses (all participants) and the use of “*um*” (Hannah, Paige, Maria). These conversation moves further suggest that participants were all new to these explicit discussions about systemic racism and were therefore hesitating when trying to come up with the right words to use to discuss this new idea.

When reflecting on this moment in my observation journal, I noted that I was “*thrilled Laura had been brave enough to ask an honest question about [systemic racism],*” and also noted that she had seemed “*genuinely grateful for the responses from everyone else*” to her question (Researcher observation journal, 11/02/21). Laura later confirmed these feelings in her

exit interview when she stated that *“I was almost like, embarrassed to say that out loud, that I didn’t really know what it was, but I was like I’m, you know, these are my colleagues, like what do I have to lose? And it turned out to be a really good thing, because from there, I learned what it was”* (Laura, exit interview). So, although this segment continues to highlight the “not knowing” that was present in the initial meetings of our discussion group, other data sources allowed me to see that participants were beginning to take risks and feel the rewards of engaging in the collaboration of an inquiry discussion group.

“What Would the Consequences Be?”

Later on, during the third meeting, participants began to discuss what specific sections of the article might mean in the school context. In the segments below, Laura made a direct reference to the article, while Hannah made a connection to the school setting and to an incident when a student had called her a racist.

Table 7. *Segment 5 (Meeting 3-11/02/2021)*

Laura	Yeah, and uh, one of the, uh, paragraphs I think it was in one of the skills, did mention that, that people don’t know what to do when they witness racism. We don’t know what to say...we don’t know how, um you know, we’re not empowered to kind to...to step in and be, be an advocate. So usually what we do is, we just walk away, right? Like we ignore it.
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Table 8. *Segment 6 (Meeting 3-11/02/2021)*

Hannah	Now I also feel like, especially in our district, that I feel pressured to bring any of these topics up, because our parents are you know...we don't have the diversity in our district, as many other districts around us do...and you know if we do have this big conversation, what would the consequences be? How would...if a student...if I did have a bigger conversation with that student calling me racist, what would have been the consequence? Like would the parents then come after me for like, " <i>Why are you bringing up this topic to a third grader?</i> ". Like not, like it's not appropriate...like what is the appropriate way to handle that situation, and at what age should we start to um, have this conversation with our students?
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The conversation moves in these segments continued to emphasize the fact that teachers at Oak Tree Elementary School weren't confident of how to put their thoughts about engaging with topics of race and racism in their classrooms into words. This is seen in the multiple ellipses (Laura and Hannah) and use of "*um*" and "*uh*" (Laura) as the participants spoke. The language choices also further highlight that the teachers in this school didn't feel "*empowered*" to be "*advocates*" in their own classroom spaces and instead chose to "*ignore*" these topics and be afraid of the "*consequences*." Hannah's point that a parent might ask, "*Why are you bringing up this topic to a third grader?*" is also important; it suggests that parents in this district might ask this question because they assume white children don't need to think about or explicitly discuss issues of race or racism.

As seen in Segment 4, Laura asked the group what systemic racism is, which led some of the other participants to reference artifacts they had seen that explained this topic. Therefore, for our fourth meeting on 11/09/21, I gathered the videos Hannah and Paige had mentioned as well as various other artifacts that could address Laura's question (see Table 2). During this meeting, all participants were present. Even though this instance was a sign that participants had begun to become more comfortable engaging in a collaborative analysis by contributing their own questions and artifacts to a joint inquiry discussion, the conversation in the fourth meeting on

11/09/21 still showed conversation moves that represented similar hesitancy and silences as were present in the segments from the first three meetings above. I even noted in my journal that participants “*seemed maybe even more nervous than they had during meeting three*” and wondered if it was because the discussion from our fourth meeting dealt explicitly with the implications of systemic racism. I had made note that all participants had logged in from their cars on their way to other locations that day and had their cameras turned off at various times. While there is no way to know for sure why this was, I worried that this was a sign that participants were “*shutting down and rejecting explicit talk*” (Researcher observation journal, 11/09/21). Interestingly, in her exit interview, Laura reflected on asking the question about systemic racism and stated that, “*as much as I was hesitant to say something, I was so happy I did*” because “*we had a whole meeting dedicated towards it*” (Laura, exit interview). So even though the “not knowing” was still externally present in the fourth meeting, participants had begun to shift internally toward a more open discourse and a more collaborative inquiry discussion group.

Circulating Discourses: Phase One

As James Paul Gee (2011) states, “We do not invent our language, we inherit it from others” (p. 176), and these Discourses “were here before we arrived on earth and will be here after we leave—and we can see them as communicating (discoursing) with each other through time and history, using us as their temporary mouthpieces” (p. 177). Therefore, after I unpacked what was being said and how it was being said in the segments above, I then considered what the participants were not overtly saying. Through this process, I began to identify the ways Discourses of race and Discourses of school were circulating and intersecting within the conversations of the inquiry discussion group. In particular, the discussion below will identify

some places where I saw Discourses of white supremacy, colorblindness, and antiracism operating, some places where Discourses of teacher-as-passive-learner and Discourses of teacher-as-knowledge-producer were operating, and the tensions that arose when these Discourses intersected within the conversations.

Discourses of Race

A colorblind Discourse includes words or ideas that suggest not acknowledging racial differences could somehow eliminate the presence of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This type of talk is problematic because it is more subtle than overt racist talk and therefore harder to identify and dismantle (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). One example of the presence of a colorblind Discourse was when Beth stated that she could “*check off every box*” in her class “*but it’s not talked about*” and “*we just all have to be the same*” (see Table 5). These statements suggest that at Oak Tree Elementary School, racial differences were not acknowledged, even though they existed. This lack of acknowledgement cannot lead to elimination of the real disparities that exist between students with racial differences. Another example of the colorblind Discourse that was circulating within the initial meetings of the inquiry discussion group was when Beth said she is so glad that her son thinks he has the same color skin as his classmate from Guatemala (see Table 4). In this instance, she was offering up a personal example that seemed to serve the purpose of allowing the other participants to view her as an antiracist or someone who does not raise her son to judge someone based on the color of their skin. Instead, Beth’s statement included words and phrases that were consistent with ideas from a colorblind Discourse. When Beth explained that her son described his teachers by their height and weight instead of by their ethnicity and stated that she believed that was the way it should be, she evoked the idea that being colorblind toward a person’s race was a positive step

toward being an antiracist and eliminating racism. This highlights the ways a colorblind Discourse was circulating within the discussion group and also within Oak Tree Elementary School at large.

Words and ideas that suggest racism is only on the individual level or deny the saliency of racism allow systemic racism to stay intact and are associated with a Discourse of white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013). Furthermore, when discussing race, whites will often respond in common ways, such as deflecting, ignoring, or getting angry or defensive (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009), and when whites do this, it can be understood not as a passive resistance, but instead an active protection of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2008; Picower, 2009). These conversation moves and ideas were evoked by the participants during the meetings of Phase One. This could be seen through some of the ideas present in Felicity's statements during the first meeting (see Table 3). For example, when Felicity was discussing racism, she stated that people are "*making it something and you know we make it an issue we make it a division, we make it a ... a problem when it doesn't have to be a problem*" (Felicity, 10/21/21). These statements are aligned with a Discourse of white supremacy in the way her statements suggest that racism is something that could be rectified if individuals stopped making it a problem. This is problematic because systemic racism creates very real implications, and when this reality is denied, systemic racism is left intact. Another way that a Discourse of white supremacy circulated was through the way Maria, Beth, and I avoided or deflected Felicity's statements and the way Paige and Laura were present, but silent, throughout this exchange. While the motivations for their silence are impossible to know, it does show that they chose not to engage with this explicit discussion of race. Instead of grappling with these ideas, participants avoided,

deflected, or were silent, all of which allowed the Discourse of white supremacy to circulate unchallenged.

Disrupting racial silences is hard and complex work. Having explicit discussions about race is complicated, especially when participants have spent their lifetimes remaining silent about these topics. That said, even if participants didn't intend to enact colorblind Discourse or Discourses of white supremacy with their statements, the words that were present called up these Discourses, and the lack of a direct or explicit response from the other participants (myself included) allowed these Discourses to circulate within the initial meetings of the inquiry discussion group.

Discourses of Schools

Discourses of teacher knowledge were also circulating within the initial conversations. One such Discourse present in schools is teacher-as-passive-learner. Schools often position teachers as passive receivers of knowledge from professional development or from curriculum choices initiated by administration. Teachers in these schools are not often put in the position to take on leadership and activism roles that could transform their own classrooms and schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). When assumptions like these become the norm, they result in the solidification of power dynamics over time (Foucault, 1975). Therefore, if a school consistently positions teachers-as-passive-learners who are not capable of producing their own valuable knowledge, this can result in teachers who don't feel they have the agency to make decisions about how to teach in their own classrooms. As discussed earlier, the top-down audit culture (Taubman, 2009) present in Oak Tree Elementary School positioned the teachers in this way.

Although there were multiple examples of these instances during the first four meetings, one was during the second meeting when Maria asked, “*Like do you have no freedom whatsoever?*” to which Beth responded, “*I don’t know ... I don’t ever ask. It’s just not something...*” (Second Meeting 10/26/21), to which Maria and Paige agreed. These statements, in conjunction with the hesitations that were present, show that a Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) was circulating within Oak Tree Elementary School and within the discussion group. The fact that Beth (and the other participants who agreed with her) suggested that she feels as though the teachers at the school don’t have freedom to explicitly talk about the racial differences present in the student body shows that teachers were not often positioned as knowledge producers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), especially when dealing with topics of race. When these Discourses intersected with the lack of experience the participants had with explicitly discussing race, teachers ended up feeling silenced and not empowered.

Another place this was evident was when participants were hesitant to engage with the idea of systemic racism, a new and complex idea to them. This can be seen in the third meeting when participants made statements such as “*We don’t know what to say ... we don’t know how, um you know, we’re not empowered to kind to ... to step in and be, be an advocate*” (Laura, 11/02/21) and “*and you know if we do have this big conversation, what would the consequences be?*” (Hannah, 11/02/21). Even though this segment is from the third meeting, this inquiry discussion group was one of the first times participants were invited to take on roles of leadership and activism within Oak Tree Elementary School, and these segments are just two examples that illustrate the ways a lack of experience explicitly discussing race in conjunction with Discourses of teacher-as-passive-learner caused the participants to converse in certain ways.

Further tensions arose when I considered the Discourses of race in conjunction with Discourses of teacher knowledge that were circulating. Oak Tree Elementary School didn't typically position its teachers as knowledge producers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Instead, participants in this study were used to being passive learners and implementers of curriculum decisions made by top-down initiatives. This inquiry discussion group was one of the first times participants were being invited to take on roles of leadership and activism to transform their own classrooms and schools. These existing passive behaviors and "not knowing" feelings were heightened by the explicit conversations about race that caused participants to hesitate, remain silent, and avoid a direct engagement with ideas within the first four meetings of the inquiry discussion group.

Phase Two: Embracing Discomfort

*On 11/16/21 I sat down in front of my computer to set up for our fifth meeting, and I was feeling apprehensive. For our fourth meeting, the participants had all logged in from their cars on their way to other locations and had their cameras turned off at various times. This worried me because our fourth meeting dealt explicitly with systemic racism, and I wondered if participants were beginning to feel uncomfortable and becoming disengaged as a response . On the other hand, Paige had reached out to me after our fourth meeting stating, **"So sorry that I did not get to participate in a meaningful way this week. I had so much to say about these videos and wrote tons of notes as I was watching them, but there was no way I could get around running those few errands on Tuesday"** (Email from Paige on 11/11/21). Paige identifies as a person of color, so this was interesting, because it made me wonder, "Is Paige responding differently, and if so, is it because she is a woman of color?" (Researcher observation journal, 11/11/21). If this was the case, it wouldn't be surprising. I knew previous*

research had identified behaviors such as being defensive, angry, or silent as common when white people are invited to confront racism. So, as I sat down for our fifth meeting, I had many conflicting thoughts. Were the white participants beginning to disengage? Was Paige engaged because she was the only participant of color? Was it possible that I was overthinking it and the participants were just busy and unable to avoid logging in from their cars for our fourth meeting, like Paige was? I was cautiously hopeful, but I also felt that the way I reacted to this potential discomfort was important. I wanted to keep the participants engaged.

Phase two includes segments from meetings five, six, and seven of the inquiry discussion group. These segments and meetings are grouped together because they represent a shift in topics and participant language use within these discussions. During these three meetings, participants began to shift from discussing the history and construction of race and systemic racism to talking about the ways these ideas are addressed or represented in school settings. More specifically, this included topics such as holiday celebrations in schools, diversity celebrations in schools, representation of different races in curriculum materials, and the white teaching force. The participants began requesting artifacts to help the group think about how to deal with these topics in schools. As stated earlier, during this phase of meetings, I stopped sending discussion prompts, as I felt it was constricting the possibilities, and I wanted to open up space for the discussions to be guided by the participants. As we began to discuss these topics, a shift in participant language also became visible. Participants began to make statements and use language in ways that showed they were beginning to embrace the discomfort that comes with disrupting racial silences and to embrace the role of an inquirer through verbal examinations of issues present in their own classrooms.

Table 9. Phase Two Meeting Artifacts and Prompts

Meeting	Artifact	Prompt
Meeting 5 11/16/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memes put out by @storysellercomics (2021) and @mariebeecech (2021) • “White Privilege” (Sociology Live, 2015) • “The Windows and Mirrors of Your Child’s Bookshelf” (Lin, 2016) 	<p><i>-The concepts of systemic racism and privilege are not easy to wrap your head around. How did you feel when watching these videos/looking at these memes?</i></p> <p><i>-What stood out to you the most?</i></p> <p><i>-How can the video with Grace Lin help us start to think about our classrooms/school in relation to these topics?</i></p> <p><i>-Do you have any personal stories that relate to these topics?</i></p>
Meeting 6 11/23/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When a First Grader is Called a Racist” (Turner, 2018) • “So, What Do White 4th Graders Have To Say About Race?” (Denevi, 2018) • Table of Contents from <i>Being the Change</i> (Ahmed, 2018) • Google Folder with book database 	No prompts this week
Meeting 7 11/30/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Heritage Months and Celebrations: Some Considerations” (Menkart, 1999) • “Holidays: An Anti-Bias Approach” (Bisson, 1995) • “A Native Perspective on Thanksgiving” (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1977) 	No prompts this week

“You Do Have to Be Careful with How You Approach This”

The segment below was taken from our fifth meeting on 11/16/2021 when all participants were present. During this meeting, we discussed some memes published by @storysellercomics (2021) and @mariebeecech (2021) and also a short video clip titled “White Privilege” (2015), all of which provided explanations of either white privilege or systemic racism that connected to the

conversation from our fourth meeting. I also sent a video of a Ted Talk by Grace Lin (2016) on the concept of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, terms originally coined by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) as a way of considering issues of representation in children’s literature. All of these artifacts allowed us to continue our engagement with ideas of race, racism, and white supremacy while also beginning to look at ways we could address these issues within our classrooms. I was hopeful that participants might be more engaged in a discussion that allowed them to contribute thoughts about teaching.

Table 10. *Segment 7 (Meeting 5-11/16/2021)*

Beth	But if you feel that this is something we can take under our wing, for this school year, I think it could be something positive, after a year of negative but, it’s going to take a lot of...I don’t know, stick-to-it-ive-ness? I know that’s not a word.
Researcher	And I mean, even if it’s just that we all do something small in our classrooms, and then hopefully that sparks some change like, like Felicity, if me and you are going to look at our classroom libraries, eventually...and then that becomes a fifth grade thing, you know? And then, maybe then, it leads down fourth grade, and then we can start there and...
Beth	Well Laura and I have third grade. So if you could get somebody in the middle, then we could do three through five.
Researcher	Yeah. Yeah I was hoping someone from fourth would-would be on board with this, but nobody seemed interested.
Beth	And there’s a lot of sports books, with people of different races, that we could certainly showcase from the PE department.
Laura	Right.

Table 10 (continued)

<p>Felicity</p>	<p>Yeah I do think that, um, that...starting with small changes in the classroom is a great idea, I think that, um...people view, um, this is definitely a topic that is not, um, an easy one, um, and you know some districts, I think, are doing very extreme things right now, and I think that, um, you know I think the best way to do it actually is, by what we're talking about and, um, not you know, uh, apparently today in Blue Lake, I don't know, um, Beth if you heard this, they are, um, rewriting the Pledge of Allegiance today in Blue Lake, or there's some some you know, equality training, where it's been decided that-that's what they're gonna do first...um, something like that would be upsetting, and I-that you know, that was how I read it, was by someone who was upset by it, um, and, so I do think that you do have to be careful with how you approach this, and how you bring it to people, so that it is accepted, because if you-if you try and go for too much, um, you could turn people off, and that's the opposite of what you want to do so-</p>
<p>Beth</p>	<p>I hadn't heard that. How did you hear that?</p>
<p>Felicity</p>	<p>It was on Facebook, that this teacher was gonna be in a training today on-on doing that, and so I'll-I'll have to follow up and, you know, see actually how it happened, but I guess that's how it was presented, and the teacher was, you know, horrified by that, and so turned off by it, and-and, so you know, I think that's unfortunately a lot of the things that we're hearing are, kind of people are feeling a little bit shaken by-by it...and so I do think that we need to be very cognizant of that...and that, um, when we bring these things to someone who's obviously not open to it, we have to be very careful with how we do it, so that we bring our cause forward, rather than turning people against...and I do think that working in a classroom library, um, little by little, it's a great thing.</p>
<p>Beth</p>	<p>It is, but we do also have to be careful because, also in Blue Lake...it's a fifth grade teacher assigned some book, starts with an R, like Rue or something, and it's about transgender and my friends-my friend's daughter brought it home, and she-she said, "<i>I just wasn't ready for that conversation at nine years old, and I would have liked a heads up before it was assigned</i>" ...like remember back in the day, when we showed that Sex Ed movie, and the letter went home, like she's like, I just would have liked to know...so I could have had my sentence ready.</p>
<p>Researcher</p>	<p>Yeah that's...</p>
<p>Beth</p>	<p>She's not wrong.</p>

Table 10 (continued)

Researcher	...with the gender sexuality stuff, I wonder even more about how early you can start those conversations?
Beth	You have to start early, because there are kids who know. Like we just built all these bathrooms that say ‘Girl’ and ‘Boy’ they should not say that.

In the beginning of this segment, Beth pointed out that if we wanted to try and make some real changes at Oak Tree Elementary School, it would require some “*stick-to-it-ive-ness*” in order to make that happen. I responded by saying that it would be good if we could even do something small, such as work on our classroom libraries. Felicity chimed in and agreed that starting off small would be good and then made a connection to equality training that she had heard was happening at a nearby district (Blue Lake, Beth’s home district), which she had read about on Facebook. At this training, teachers were apparently asked to rewrite the Pledge of Allegiance, something Felicity said the teachers were “*horrified*” by. When discussing these topics, the participants employed similar conversation moves to the ones employed in earlier segments that showed hesitancy (e.g., ellipses—Beth, Felicity and myself; the use of “*um*”—Felicity; word repetition—Felicity) as participants tried to gather the right words.

Another conversation move that was prevalent in this segment was Felicity’s use of strong emotion words as she talked about the equality training at Blue Lake (e.g., “*extreme,*” “*upset,*” “*horrified,*” “*shaken*”). Felicity was a participant I wondered about frequently in my researcher observation journal. She was often silent or had her camera turned off for our meetings, and when she did speak up, some of her statements even aligned with a Discourse of white supremacy (see Table 3). Felicity’s use of these strong words, whether intentional or not, set the tone of this conversation by associating equality training with feelings of fear. This would lead me to believe that she was not in support of this type of work in schools. On the other hand,

Felicity also stated that “*we have to be very careful with how we do it, so that we bring our cause forward rather than turning people against*” and “*I do think that working in a classroom library, um little by little, it’s a great thing.*” So while some of Felicity’s word choices suggested that she was not embracing the idea of racial work in schools, her explicit statements suggested that she was embracing the discomfort and looking for ways to work past the fear that can be associated with this work. This was further confirmed when I completed an exit interview with Felicity. When we were discussing the inquiry discussion group’s goal of working on building a library of books, Felicity stated:

I was afraid in the beginning, of what like we were going to bring, and how it was going to be received, because I do think there’s a lot of - a lot of people who are really, really militant.... I think, is the best word about how they want to bring this to white suburban America. And I just don’t think that they’re going to get the same kind of response that they want ... that we’re going to get when we say we want to share stories. (Felicity, exit interview)

Felicity’s statements further highlighted that she doesn’t necessarily agree with the way social justice work is being carried out in schools, but her use of the word “*we*” showed ownership and solidarity with the ideas and goals created within the inquiry discussion group.

“We Have to Be Okay with Being Uncomfortable”

During the sixth meeting on 11/23/2021, Laura, Paige, Beth, and myself were the only participants present, as it was the Tuesday right before Thanksgiving, and other participants had canceled due to Thanksgiving preparation plans. This meeting centered around the artifacts “When a First Grader is Called a Racist” (Turner, 2018) and “So, What Do White 4th Graders Have To Say About Race?” (Denevi, 2018). At this point during our inquiry group meetings, I continued to encourage participants to bring in artifacts for the group to discuss so as to share the responsibility of providing articles, videos, or documents as springboards for our conversations, but the participants were still hesitant to do so, a sign of the “not knowing” observed in Phase

One sessions that remained part of meetings from Phase Two. Therefore, I selected these two articles because the participants had expressed an interest in looking at ways to have these conversations with students during the previous meeting. In the segments below, the participants were explicitly discussing what it would be like to make actual changes within our classrooms in terms of having explicit discussions about race with students.

Table 11. *Segment 8 (Meeting 6-11/23/2021)*

Laura	Right, well, I definitely agree, starting small.
Paige	Yeah, I agree, because then you know, look how many weeks it's taken us to kind of be comfortable talking about it...you know? So, to just kind of, yeah, make it like " <i>Oh everybody has to do this</i> ", there would be, I think, definitely push back just from a level of comfort...not even that, you know, " <i>I don't want to do this</i> ", it's just, " <i>I feel ill equipped to do it</i> ".
Researcher	Mhmm. And I've been having these conversations for five years now, and I still don't feel fully comfortable. (all of us laughing) I don't know if anyone ever feels fully comfortable.
Paige	And I think that's okay. I think, sometimes we have to be okay with being uncomfortable, because I think that's when you learn, and that gives you space to grow.
Researcher	Absolutely.

Laura suggested that a good way to begin to implement this work was by making small changes within our classrooms. Paige and I agreed with her, pointing out that we ourselves had a hard time becoming comfortable explicitly discussing race and racism. Paige then stated that it is okay to be uncomfortable and that perhaps it is this discomfort that could cause people to grow, a sentiment with which I agreed.

While the participants were making these statements, conversation moves were present that showed a continued hesitation (i.e., the ellipses in Paige's statement), but conversation

moves and explicit statements also suggested that participants were beginning to embrace the discomfort that comes with explicitly discussing race and racism. For example, participants were laughing, which suggested a more relaxed environment. Also, Paige explicitly stated that it was okay to be uncomfortable, and in fact this discomfort could be viewed as a positive.

A similar engagement was seen in Segment 2, which was taken from the same meeting. At this point in the meeting, Laura was discussing her hesitation to use a certain short story with her students because she wasn't sure if the Japanese characters in the story were being portrayed in stereotypical ways.

Table 12. *Segment 9 (Meeting 6-11/23/2021)*

Laura	And I was worried about the other aspect. I showed this to Paige and I was-
Paige	Right.
Laura	-is this okay to give to them? Is anyone gonna be offended? Like thinking...the kids are gonna be like " <i>Oh kids from Japan all they eat is, you know, mi-miso soup</i> " or whatever, and she's like no, it's fine.
Researcher	Those are the exact questions I still ask myself where I'm like, okay, this is great because it's representation...but then I'm like, but is it stereotypical? Like-
Laura	Right. I was like oh my gosh, you know, is...are they gonna be offended by it? Am I...that's exactly how I was thinking about it, are they gonna think it's stereotypical? But hey, if they had a quick little conversation...(trailing off)

Table 12 (continued)

Researcher	But I don't think so, because I think cultural stuff like that is-is not a stereotype, it's a reality, right? Is that correct?
Laura	Mhmm
Beth	I also think it's comforting for some kids...(trailing off)
Researcher	Right, to see that.
Beth	It must be so hard to never read about anything that's like you, like your mirrors and windows

After Laura admitted her hesitation to use the short story and that she had consulted with Paige during the school day about it, I admitted to Laura that I wrestle with the same questions within my own teaching. We began to ask questions about the complexity of representation and stereotypes present in classroom materials. Beth chimed in at the end to make a connection to the concept of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) that we had discussed during our fifth meeting, a concept that suggests books can be ways for students to see themselves in literature and also can act as windows into other cultures, races, or ways of life.

Some of the conversation moves present in this segment were consistent with moves present in Phase One. For example, the ellipses (me, Laura, Beth) and explicit mention of being worried (Laura) showed that participants continued to hesitate or pause when finding the right words to discuss the ways race and racism could be addressed in the classroom. In this segment, participants also began to ask specific questions that could help them fill in the gaps of their knowledge. During Phase One, I (the researcher) was the one who posed most of the questions that we discussed. In this segment, Laura asked multiple questions (*Is this okay to give to them? Is anyone gonna be offended? Are they gonna think it's stereotypical?*) for the group to consider. This is another sign that participants were beginning to embrace the discomfort that comes with

disrupting racial silences and also embrace the collaboration and questioning that come with an oral inquiry group (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

“All We Do is Meet Resistance”

This final segment from Phase Two is from the seventh meeting of the inquiry discussion group on 11/30/2021, when all participants except Paige and Hannah were present. This meeting’s discussion centered around three articles taken from the handbook, *Beyond Heroes and Holidays* (Lee et al., 2006). The first was “Heritage Months and Celebrations: Some Considerations” (Menkart, 1999), the second was “Holidays: An Anti-Bias Approach” (Bisson, 1995), and finally, “A Native Perspective on Thanksgiving” (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1977). I had sent these articles in order to allow us to read more about the topics of holidays and celebrations of diversity in schools, which had come up during our fifth and sixth meetings. The segment below was taken from the end of our meeting discussion when we were wrapping up and talking about how these topics have impacted our teaching and would continue to impact our teaching beyond the inquiry discussion group.

Table 13. *Segment 10 (Meeting 7-11/30/2021)*

Beth	But it’s interesting, I just...I appreciate the filter, but I don’t know how we can do this for this year is the honest truth...cause I feel like all we do is meet resistance for everything we try at Oak Tree.
Researcher	Yeah, and honestly, like I’m not even in the classroom, obviously, right now and I feel like I’m just glad that we’ve been able to have these conversations, and that I’ve been able to like share ideas with other teachers in the school that I work in, and even if we just continue these conversations, and then try some things in September, like honestly if we’re...or even like looking at the second half of the year in terms of holidays.

Table 13 (continued)

Beth	Or even if we do, I mean this would take a lot of effort on all of our parts, but, um, if...like the first Friday of every month we gave up our lunch...if we had the same lunch, and we met and had this conversation in whatever the faculty spaces and people saw us talking, nobody sees any professional conversations anymore.
Researcher	Yeah. Well, we're all hidden away in our classrooms doing it.
Beth	But we're not really conversing...we're not. A lot of our colleagues are not trying to grow or change, they're just trying to get by.
Maria	I think that would have been an unrealistic goal, to think that you were going to make any changes this year anyway.
Researcher	Oh yeah which, like I said, like I don't need to do that in order to you know...my-my goal with this project was just being able to have these conversations with you guys, see what happens, and like I said, I've enjoyed it.
Beth	But we have changed on a personal level, I don't think any of us in this group would ever just buy books with white characters ever again, not that we did but...
Laura	Yeah.

This segment began with Beth reiterating that teachers at Oak Tree Elementary School often meet resistance when trying to make changes. Beth, Maria, and I then engaged in an exchange where we all agreed that it would have been unrealistic to think we could make big changes for the current school year. I suggested that we could perhaps try to make some changes for the following school year or just look at holiday celebrations for the remainder of the current school year, while Beth then suggested ways for us to continue the inquiry group discussions, even after we no longer needed to meet to fulfill my doctoral requirements, something she admitted would “*take a lot of effort*” on all of our parts. This segment concluded with Beth pointing out that even if we couldn't make large professional changes, we had all “*changed on a personal level*” and that we as teachers probably wouldn't ever “*just buy books with white characters ever again.*”

When discussing these topics, the usual hesitancy was present (e.g., ellipses—Beth, myself; repetition of word “*my*”— myself) at moments when participants were pausing to gather the right words to discuss the resistance teachers at Oak Tree Elementary School usually encounter. These hesitations showed a continued presence of “not knowing,” but when discussing the possibility of making real changes in our classrooms, participants used language to make specific practical suggestions. For example, I suggested that we “*continue the conversations*” or that we look at the second half of the year “*in terms of holidays,*” and Beth suggested meeting in “*faculty spaces*” on the “*first Friday of every month.*” These specific ideas show that participants were embracing the idea of continuing this social justice inquiry work, even though we had established that it might be uncomfortable.

Another way the participants were using language in the above segment was by employing the word “*just.*” Some examples of this are when Beth stated “*I just ... I appreciate the filter...,*” and also when I stated, “*I’m just glad that we’ve been able to have these conversations*” and “*my goal with this project was just being able to have these conversations with you guys see what happens and like I said I’ve enjoyed it.*” The use of the word “just” in these examples suggests that participants were setting low expectations or letting themselves off the hook. These low expectations were also seen when I stated “*I don’t need to do that...*” when Maria brought up the idea of making changes at our school that year. My statement served to let the participants off the hook from engaging with the challenges associated with racial justice work. So, while there were explicit statements and language moves present that showed participants were embracing the discomfort of racial justice work, there were also statements and language moves that showed the continued presence of “not knowing” how to engage with this

work, which highlights the complexity of disrupting racial silences in mostly white school spaces.

Circulating Discourses: Phase Two

Even though the same Discourses of race and schools were still present and at times were operating in the same ways as in Phase One of the discussion group meetings, participants also began to engage with these Discourses in some different ways.

Discourses of Race

Many characteristics and behaviors have been associated with an anti-racist Discourse. Kendi (2017) argues that “not racist” is not the opposite of racist; “antiracist” is the opposite of racist. In order to be antiracist, it is not enough for people just to claim they are not racist. Instead, to be antiracist, people must intentionally act to expose and eradicate racist ideas wherever they encounter them. Antiracists also understand and acknowledge the underlying causes of racism before applying antiracist approaches to teaching (Matias & Mackey, 2015). Finally, when educators “acknowledge there will be emotional discomfort in this type of work but nonetheless refuse to give up” (p. 3), those are the essential building blocks for cultivating antiracist teachers.

These characteristics and behaviors associated with an antiracist Discourse were present in Phase Two discussions. For example, when Paige (see Table 11) stated that “*sometimes we have to be okay with being uncomfortable because I think that’s when you learn and that gives you space to grow,*” she was refusing to give up in the face of the emotional discomfort associated with racial and social justice work in schools. Another example of an emerging antiracist Discourse was when Laura (see Table 12) shared with the group that she and Paige had spent time analyzing a text to check for racial and cultural stereotypes before sharing it with their

students. This showed that participants were beginning to understand and look for underlying causes of racism in their classroom materials in order to eradicate them.

It is also important to point out that while a Discourse of antiracism emerged, a Discourse of white supremacy was still circulating. For example, Beth's statement (see Table 10) that there were "*a lot of sports books, with people of different races, that we could certainly showcase from the PE department*" was reminiscent of a Discourse of white supremacy in the way her statement implied the stereotype that people of color are good at sports. This statement was also problematic because it suggested that simply including books with representation of people from different races could be a step toward addressing issues of racism present in schools, an idea that Critical Race theorists would regard as trivial and nonproductive (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Some of the phrases and conversation moves used by Felicity in the same segment were also reminiscent of a Discourse of white supremacy because she was suggesting that we would want to be careful in order to protect the feelings of white people. Research from the fields of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies point out that when discussing race, whites often respond in common ways, such as deflecting, ignoring, or getting angry or defensive (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009), and when whites respond in this way, it is an active protection of white supremacy. When Felicity pointed out that the teachers in the Blue Lake School District were "*upset,*" "*horrified,*" and "*shaken*" by the equality training, this was consistent with what research states will happen when whites discuss race. Felicity then suggested that we would want to keep this in mind when trying to do similar work at Oak Tree Elementary School, which was problematic because this statement suggested that we would want to allow teachers to engage in an active protection of white supremacy. Even though there is evidence in Felicity's talk that shows the intent of her statement was not to actively protect white

supremacy (“...we have to be very careful with how we do it, so that we bring our cause forward rather than turning people against...”), her language and language use aligned with widely recognizable traits from a Discourse of white supremacy

A strong emotional investment (i.e., rage) is necessary to work toward eliminating racism, and without this investment, white supremacy is left intact (hooks, 1995; Matias et al., 2014). Matias et al. (2014) call this an “emotional (dis)investment,” which is when whites act nonchalantly or without a personal emotional investment to topics of racism. This can be seen through the ways Beth and I (see Table 13) used the word “*just*” to imply that we were unconcerned if we would make actual changes past these discussion groups. The word “*just*” gave the participants permission to disengage from disrupting racial silences beyond the inquiry discussion group, especially since I, the researcher, was one of the participants using the word in this way. Even though I tried to share the role of facilitating the inquiry discussion group, I was the participant who started the group and invited the others to join; therefore, the fact that I was using language in a way that implied a nonchalance about racial work in our school was problematic and did the opposite of encouraging participants to embrace the discomfort associated with an antiracist Discourse. So, while an antiracist Discourse did begin to emerge in Phase Two, this did not mean a Discourse of white supremacy had disappeared, further highlighting the complexity of disrupting racial silences in a predominantly white school setting.

Discourses of Schools

The topics that were being discussed and the ways the participants engaged with these topics in Phase Two suggested that there had also been a shift in ways Discourses of teacher knowledge were being embraced. In Phase One, a Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner circulated and caused the participants to express uncertainty and hesitation. While that Discourse

was not gone from this phase of segments (as can be seen in the continued hesitancy and continued expression of worry), a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer was also present.

Ideas consistent with a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer believe that teachers

learn by challenging their own assumptions; identifying salient issues of practice; posing problems; studying their own students, classrooms, and schools; constructing and reconstructing curriculum; and taking on roles of leadership and activism in efforts to transform classrooms, schools, and societies. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 278)

These behaviors are evident in the above segments (see Tables 10 and 11) where participants were beginning to embrace the discomfort that comes with challenging their assumptions about race and posing questions and issues related to the use of potentially stereotypical curriculum materials with their own students. When teachers spend more time together within inquiry communities, “trust builds in the group and participants feel comfortable raising sensitive issues and risking self-revelation” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 294). These risks were evident through Paige’s suggestion to “*be okay with being uncomfortable*” and also through Laura’s willingness to reveal her uncertainty about using curriculum materials that may include stereotypes. This was also evident when Felicity (see Table 10) was nervous (i.e., multiple “*um*”s, ellipses, repeated words) to bring up the example of the equality training from Blue Lake, yet still felt comfortable enough to share with the group.

Even though this phase of meetings began to see this engagement with a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer, in a predominantly white school like Oak Tree Elementary School where a Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner had long been circulating, disrupting racial silences was complex work. This was evident when myself, Beth, and Felicity (see Table 13) all suggested that the changes we should make are small ones and also when Felicity (see Table 10) continues to state that we have to be careful. These suggestions and statements are complex because they suggest that participants were beginning to engage with a Discourse of

teacher-as-knowledge-producer because it was evidence that participants were beginning to embrace the idea of reconstructing curriculum materials and embrace roles of leadership in their own classrooms by suggesting that we could make changes in our classroom libraries. At the same time, the fact that we kept reiterating that the changes needed to be small ones and that we needed to be careful suggested that a Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner was still influencing the talk because this Discourse was causing participants to feel and speak as if they did not have full agency over making decisions within their own classroom spaces. When Beth stated, “...cause I feel like all we do is meet resistance for everything we try at Oak Tree,” this evoked the power dynamics of being surveilled (e.g., observed and evaluated by administrators (Foucault, 1975) associated with a Discourse of a teacher-as-passive-learner.

While the segments included in Phase Two of the inquiry discussion group show that an antiracist Discourse and a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer began to emerge through the topics, conversation moves, and ways the participants were engaging with the Discourses of race and schooling, the segments from this phase also emphasize that disrupting racial silences in a predominantly white school district is complex work. Discourses of white supremacy, colorblindness, and teacher-as-passive-learner continued to circulate and, in some moments, further solidified racial silences.

Phase Three: Grappling Toward Change

As I sat down to reflect on the group’s eighth meeting, I couldn’t help but feel a little sad that we only had two official meetings left. I was pretty confident that we would continue to meet past the conclusion of the ten meetings I had allotted for my dissertation research, but I had begun to look forward to our meeting time on Tuesdays. My initial nerves about facilitating our inquiry discussion group had quelled, and I was feeling optimistic about the ways the other

participants had begun to share the responsibilities of our group. Maria had even sent an article out to use as an artifact for our eighth meeting without any prompting from me. Also, in my researcher observation journal, I had jotted about a particular moment from our eighth meeting that had stood out to me. Beth had chosen to share a personal story in which she had decided to buy her son multicultural books for his last Hanukkah present. Laura's immediate response to Beth's story was, **"Did you add them to our list?"** (Laura, 12/07/2021), in reference to the running list of books we had created so we could order books to build a multicultural library. This moment stood out to me, and I reflected, **"The participants are allowing these topics to spill over into their home lives"** and **"Laura took the initiative to encourage Beth to share the multicultural titles with the group"** (Researcher observation journal, 12/07/2021). Overall, I was feeling confident that our group had found a rhythm and that from this rhythm we were on our way to making productive and positive changes.

Phase Three includes segments from the final meetings of the inquiry discussion group to represent shifts in topics and language use that were present in meetings eight, nine and ten. During these three meetings, participants began to discuss specific topics that related to implementing changes at Oak Tree Elementary School. These topics included discussions related to writing a grant proposal to apply for funding that would allow us to create a multicultural library, conversations about what specific books to order, conversations about Critical Race Theory debates, and conversations about what the future of our inquiry discussion group would look like. During this final phase of meetings, participants also began to use language to grapple with ideas related to race and education in a way that was more closely aligned with a true inquiry group. As was seen in Phase Two, the same Discourses of race and teacher knowledge were still present and at times were operating in the same ways, but participants also engaged

with these Discourses in some new ways, further emphasizing the complexity that comes with engaging teachers from a predominantly white elementary school in explicit discussions about race, racism, and whiteness.

Table 14. *Phase Three Meeting Artifacts and Prompts.*

Meeting	Artifact	Prompts
Meeting 8 12/07/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “6 Tips For Building a Diverse Classroom Library” (Blakenship, 2021) • “Expand Your Readers Palates With A Book Tasting” (We Are Teachers, 2021) • “Book Clubs: The Power of Giving Choice, Agency and Diversity in Reading” (Vandergalien, 2021) 	No prompts this week
Meeting 9 12/14/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Excellence Grant application • Book lists put out by The Conscious Kid (2021) and by Sara Cordova (2021) 	No prompts this week
Meeting 10 12/21/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Students Say Teach the Truth” (Kleinrock, 2021) 	<p><i>-Take a peek back at the artifacts we have explored during our meetings. Which stands out to you as the most impactful? Why? In what way do you think this artifact has impacted/will impact your personal or professional life?</i></p> <p><i>-As we near the end of our required time together, I am hoping that we will continue to collaborate in some way. What is one goal that you have for continuing these conversations/this work?</i></p>

Meaningful Changes

The segment below comes from the inquiry discussion group’s ninth meeting when all participants were present. This meeting’s discussion centered around an email that had gone out

to the staff at Oak Tree Elementary School regarding the Teacher Excellence Grant, a grant offered by the school that was “designed to support teachers in providing creative and enriching programs for students.” Beth had forwarded the email to the group and suggested that we fill out the application to ask for funds to support future goals of the discussion group related to building classroom libraries that could act as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) for all of our students. Participants also spent time during this meeting looking at book lists to help choose specific books to order. Book lists included ones put out by The Conscious Kid (2021) and by Sarah Cordova (2021), a local literacy consultant. At this point in the conversation, participants had begun to discuss what work the group could continue to do in the future.

Table 15. *Segment 11 (Meeting 9 -12/14/2021)*

Beth	Be cool to do like, an Expo right? Like, an Around-the-World.
Researcher	And so it’s meaningful. So it doesn’t have to be just like food, you know, like, anything that-
Beth	Yeah it does...it shouldn’t be food at all, it should just be everything except food.
Paige	Right, exactly that’s it...that’s what we were saying, like, it always defaults to, “ <i>Oh just bring in a dish from your country</i> ”, but we want it to be more meaningful than that.
Researcher	Right, and if it is a food, it’s the food, but like, you know, something that means something to you, that you want to share about your culture, it could be music, it could be food, it could be art, it could be whatever.

Table 15 (continued)

Beth	If they don't feel comfortable having parents, the parents could create a Zoom or, I mean a slideshow, or send in the information. There's no reason why Dave can't spend one year doing music from around the world. It would be great if it could be, like, a two or three year thing that we eventually create, and then you rotate.
Researcher	What do you mean rotate? Like in terms of teachers?
Beth	No, so like year one, let's say, year one is whatever, we do like, Writing-Across-the-World...so all the different languages, and then year two is, Math-Across-the-World, and year three is...I don't know, Reading-Around-the-World, and then you go back to year one, and then you go back to year two, you know, it cycles.
Researcher	That's a really good idea, because then it doesn't feel like you're forcing the math teacher, or the science teacher, to try to like fit ELA into their classroom, like at that point, it's like every teacher is looking at math, or looking at whatever it is, and it could be the subject areas...but could it could also be art, you know, like Art-Around-the-World or-
Beth	Or the fact...like some countries drive on the other side of the road, or in some countries, the girls don't go to school cause they're carrying the water, so they have water to cook, like there's so many differences and we always just go right to the food.
Researcher	Yeah.
Beth	But it's going to require, like, a ton of work. That's why the books are good segue in.
Researcher	And if we can get approved for this grant, then we can start there, and then in our meetings, come up with some ideas and try to get other people on board with the...whether it's a parent committee or whatever.

In this segment, Beth made a suggestion that the group might want to host an Around-the-World Expo to celebrate the different races and cultures present in our school, an idea Paige agreed would be good as long as we did it in a “*meaningful*” way. Paige, myself, and Beth then pointed out that the celebration should not be one where students default to bringing a food that is popular in the country related to their family’s race or ethnicity, an idea we had discussed from

the handbook *Beyond Heroes and Holidays* (Lee et al., 2006) during meeting seven. Beth then went into detail about an idea she had for what a celebration could look like: Oak Tree Elementary School could cycle through different ways of engaging with a celebration of diversity from year to year. As we discussed these ideas, conversation moves suggestive of hesitancy were still present (i.e., ellipses), although this segment is also representative of a shift where participants began to grapple with ideas related to a productive disruption of racial silences. I chose to use the word *grapple* to describe what I noticed in this phase of meetings to represent the moments in which participants were engaging in a back-and-forth struggle of explanations and exchanges of words and worked to get at a specific idea related to implementing a meaningful disruption of the racial silences present at Oak Tree Elementary School. This grappling was present in the above segment when Beth presented a practical suggestion and Paige and myself built off of it by adding on (“*We want it to be more meaningful than that*”—Paige) or asking questions (“*What do you mean rotate? Like in terms of teachers?*”—Me) that encouraged Beth to really flesh out the specifics of her ideas. Even though the specifics of these ideas were still a somewhat superficial celebration of diversity, this use of language to grapple with new ideas and take risks through making suggestions was in contrast to the “not knowing” that was prevalent in Phase One meetings, where participants’ language use and conversation moves showed they did not know how to engage in an explicit discussion about race and did not know how to embrace the role of being an educator capable of producing valuable knowledge.

“I Just Appreciate the New Lens”

This segment is taken from the group’s tenth and final meeting on December 21, 2021, when Felicity, Paige, and Hannah were absent, and Beth, Laura, Maria, and myself were present.

During this meeting, the conversation centered around some reflection questions I had asked the group to consider (e.g., *Which artifact or meeting stood out to you as the most impactful? How would you describe the emotions you've felt during these discussions?* and *What is one goal you have for continuing this work?*) as well as the article, “Students Say Teach the Truth” (Kleinrock, 2021), which included students’ perspectives on race and social justice education. At this point in our last meeting, Beth and Laura were reflecting on the questions I had posed and thinking back to the previous meetings and artifacts.

Table 16. *Segment 12 (Meeting 10 -12/21/2021)*

Beth	It's been great, thank you for hosting.
Researcher	Oh please, thank you guys for doing it, but I wanted to hear a little bit of your thoughts. Anyone have any feedback on...I sent you those three reflection questions, just how you felt about it, any of the artifacts that stood out things like that?
Beth	I was surprised I have a lot of the picture books we talked about. I didn't realize how many I actually have, so that was good.
Laura	I just got a couple of, um, I got a couple of books through Scholastic, some picture books, so I'll check if they're on that list. One is about, one said it was about, um, inclusion, or so, I didn't have a chance to read them yet, I just unpacked them, but when I read them, I'll see if they're on our list, if not I'll add them.
Beth	I just appreciate the new lens, and like it invigorates you, a little bit, to learn something new, and try it in a different way, yeah, and we've been kind of stale, because of the construction, and the COVID, and things like that, so it's nice to have a new focus.
Laura	Mhmm yeah, and I liked all those-that...I think my favorite week was the-the short little videos that we watched, just because I learned so much through them...so those were enjoyable for me.
Maria	Yeah.

In this segment, Beth pointed out that she appreciates having a new “*lens*” and “*focus*” for her teaching because it provides a “*nice*” contrast to the “*stale*” school environment that she supposed was due to COVID-19 and the construction projects at Oak Tree Elementary School. Laura agreed with Beth’s statements and made a connection to the week we watched the “*short little videos,*” alluding to the group’s fourth meeting when we watched multiple video clips that

explained the concept of systemic racism and how it impacts America's institutions. At the end of the segment, Maria agreed with what Beth and Laura had said. Even though this was the group's last meeting, Laura still displayed a hesitancy that can be seen in the ellipses that represent pauses while she was reflecting on the meeting about systemic racism and also can be seen in the repetition of the word "*the*," which suggests that Laura was repeating a word to buy time as she tried to decide what to call the videos. Beth employed the word "*just*," a language choice discussed in meetings from Phase Two that diminishes what comes after it. When Beth stated that she "*just*" appreciated the new lens and the opportunity to try something new in terms of her teaching, it diminished the value of the knowledge she had learned and applied from the inquiry group and suggested a lack of confidence in her statements. Beth's statement "*thank you for hosting*" also highlights the fact that even by the last meeting, participants still positioned me as the leader of the group.

The above segment emphasizes the complexity of the talk because, even though language moves that suggested uncertainty were still present, participants were also using language to embrace leadership roles ("*I'll see if they're on our list, if not I'll add them*"—Laura) and making statements that seemed positive on the surface ("*...so those were good*," "*It's nice to have a new focus*"—Beth ; "*...those were enjoyable for me*"—Laura). This points to a tension that emerged as the participants shifted from "not knowing" how to engage with these topics to embracing the role of teacher as valuable knowledge producer.

"We Have to Work on the Positive"

This segment was also taken from the group's tenth meeting on 12/21/2021. As stated above, this final meeting's discussion revolved around reflection questions I had posed to the group and an article (Kleinrock, 2021) that highlighted students' perspectives on race and social

justice education in light of the recent Critical Race Theory (CRT) debates playing out in the media. At this point of the conversation, Beth was reflecting on her overall feelings about the impact of the inquiry discussion group, which prompted Maria to make a connection to the article and to the CRT debates.

Table 17. *Segment 13 (Meeting 10 - 12/21/2021)*

Beth	But, to go back to your question about the group, I think it's opened up conversations across the board, and I...you know, like even about, not just race or religion, but how you teach, you know, smaller group instruction, who-whose needs are met...
Researcher	And it's made me...
Beth	...whether play should be incorporated, you know, like we just have to as a country change our focus here...this is not working.
Maria	Yeah well, which is like your-your letter...your article on the Critical Race Theory, right? I was kind of appalled that all these governors are trying to pass legislation not to teach it. I was like wait, what? Cause I don't watch the news, so when you hear things like that, like how could we be going backwards? Like, what is wrong with people? Like, it's not your fault that there was racism 400 years ago, nobody's blaming you, but hey (claps) let's move on, if we don't teach, we can't learn from our mistakes. I don't-I don't-just don't understand it, I don't know, is it just me? Why don't I understand why people go and bending over backwards to stop it?

Table 17 (continued)

Researcher	Well, I think-I think the problem is too, is that a lot of people don't understand it, and and I was one of those people, so recently like, until I started this program, I didn't have a clue about how to have any of these conversations, or like historical racism, systemic racism, and I didn't know any of that. So, I think the way that it's being presented in the media, is that they're convincing people that Critical Race Theory, or these kinds of conversations in the classrooms, are intended to make white people feel guilty, which is not the case, but when people who don't understand it hear that, I think the gut reaction is to say, " <i>Of course we don't want to do that</i> " and it's working...
Beth	I think the...
Researcher	...there are laws being passed.
Maria	But there's parents who don't want it taught in the schools.
Researcher	Yes, right.
Maria	Why, what-what's your problem? Why don't you want it taught to your kids? Now you're going to designate...look they're not happy if you do teach it, they're not happy with things that you don't teach.
Beth	I think it's fear I think...I've been listening to a podcast called The One You Feed it's about...it's based on this parable of two wolves, and one is fear, and one is happiness, and the one that survives is the one you feed, and this country is fed on fear, right? Like fear of COVID, fear of racism, fear of whatever, instead of, " <i>How can we make it better?</i> " If we teach these children how not to do this again: racism, slavery, the Holocaust, then it won't happen again, but if we make kids afraid, then it will keep happening.
Maria	Okay, but it's still happening, so obviously that theory didn't work.
Beth	Correct.
Maria	So we need to try a new...

Table 17 (continued)

Beth	So we have to work on the positive, not the negative, like let’s look at this TikTok thing on Friday. Everybody was upset, people kept their kids home, but nobody took TikTok away. TikTok did not come out with any announcements, TikTok didn’t shut down.
Maria	I know.

At the beginning of this segment, Beth pointed out that the discussions from the inquiry discussion group had prompted her to realize that changes needed to be made in many areas at Oak Tree Elementary because what we had been doing “*is not working.*” Maria then brought up the debates related to Critical Race Theory (CRT) that had been mentioned in the article to point out that she didn’t understand why people were “*bending over backwards to stop it.*”

Conversation moves that suggested hesitancy (e.g., ellipses—Beth, Maria; word repetition—Beth, Maria) were still present. even in this last meeting, but more pertinent was the way participants began to use language and conversation moves to grapple with larger issues related to race, racism, and whiteness. This is seen in the way Beth and Maria both engaged in exchanges in this conversation to get at the reasons behind why some people might not want CRT to be addressed in schools. Maria posed multiple questions (e.g., *How could we be going backwards? Like what is wrong with people? Why don’t you want it taught to your kids?*), trying to understand why people would not want race to be explicitly acknowledged in schools. Beth engaged with these questions by offering a connection to a podcast she was listening to and suggested that perhaps the CRT resistance comes from fear; she then connected the conversation back to school, stating, “*...if we make kids afraid, then it will keep happening.*” Beth and Maria both then agreed that what we need to do is make changes to focus on the positive instead of the negative. In this segment, Beth also used a strong emotional word (“*appalled*”) to describe her

feelings about CRT resistance and even clapped at one point while speaking to emphasize her point. During Beth’s exit interview, when we were discussing how difficult it can be to initiate new curriculum ideas if other colleagues or administrators are not on board, Beth stated, “...and I used to like, not do it because of that, but I’m going to be 50 years old, I’m gonna do what I want now” (Beth, exit interview). This confirmed that the grappling and suggestion to focus on the positive, even when met with resistance, that was discussed during the inquiry group conversations had stayed with Beth and was something she was planning to carry forward into her teaching practice.

We Will Make This Happen

This final segment was taken from the last moments of the final meeting of the inquiry discussion group on 12/21/2021. At this point in the conversation, Beth was making reference to an email I had received from Bryan, the superintendent of the school district, in regard to the Teacher Excellence Grant application the group had submitted together. The email included multiple follow-up questions about our application that the group interpreted as a sign that it was not going to be approved.

Table 18. *Segment 14 (Meeting 10 -12/21/2021)*

Beth	But listen, don’t spend too much time and effort on the Bryan thing, because he’s already setting the stage to tell you no.
Researcher	I had...I have a feeling, yeah.
Beth	We will put in the Book Source order through our classrooms, and we will make this library happen, but don’t lose sleep over this, yeah?

Table 18 (continued)

Maria	No, but I feel like you need to follow through, so he can't turn around and blame it on you.
Beth	Right.
Researcher	Not that he would blame it on me, but I do, just for my own personal, I want to be like...be able to say, like, alright well you guys district...are trying to do this and look, we tried so...
Maria	Yes.
Beth	So, we don't need to be paid hourly. Really, we don't need each our own set of books, we need a book...you know a collection for a bookshelf, right? Of probably 30 books, yeah.
Laura	Mhmm agreed.

Beth began this segment by explicitly telling me not to worry about the fact that Bryan might deny our Teacher Excellence Grant application and reassured me that “*we will make this library happen*” in regard to the books we had planned to order to ensure that our classroom libraries could act as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) for our students. Maria responded to Beth’s statement by encouraging me to follow up with Bryan if he did in fact deny our application. I agreed with Maria that I would do so if that was the case. Beth then circled back to give another suggestion of a way we could follow through with our ideas by making adjustments to our application (e.g., not requesting money to pay us hourly, creating one book collection to share instead of each requesting our own set of books), and Laura concluded this segment by explicitly stating that she agreed.

The hesitancy was still present (i.e., ellipses that suggested pausing to gather the right words), but also present was language that again highlighted a shift toward grappling with ideas. This can be seen when Beth and Maria go back and forth to flesh out ways to potentially respond to the Superintendent. Beth suggested that if he denied the application, we would just put the

book orders in through our classrooms, but Maria pushed back by insisting that we needed to follow through, which caused Beth to respond by coming up with specific ways we could revise the application to get it approved. Finally, the participants were making more powerful language choices during this phase. This can be seen when Beth stated “*we will*” twice and when Maria stated that I “*need to follow through.*” Both Maria and Beth were not making suggestions here, but using language to make firm statements about accomplishing our goals.

Circulating Discourses: Phase Three

The same Discourses of race and schools were still present and at times were operating in the same ways as in earlier phases of the discussion group meetings, but participants also began to engage with these Discourses in different ways.

Discourses of Race

The topics and conversation moves present in this segment represented the ways the participants in this inquiry discussion group began to use language to align their talk with a Discourse of antiracism. Critical Race theorists (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) have pointed out that “current practical demonstrations of multicultural education in schools often reduce it to trivial examples and artifacts of cultures such as eating ethnic or cultural foods” (p. 61), a critique that the participants directly acknowledged during this final phase of meetings (see Table 15). Paige pointed out that “*it always defaults to ‘oh just bring in a dish from your country’ but we want it to be more meaningful than that,*” which prompted Beth and myself to engage in a grappling of ideas that allowed Beth to propose an idea that would not be a trivial celebration.

As Ibram X. Kendi (2019) explains in his book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, one way to engage with being an antiracist is by consistently identifying and describing racism and then working to dismantle it. This is what the participants of this inquiry discussion group began to do

in this final phase of the inquiry discussion group meetings (see Table 17). Maria identified the problem of resistance to CRT in schools; Beth and Maria then grappled through a discussion that attempted to describe the reasons behind this resistance and even tried to work toward coming up with a specific solution that could work in their classrooms and school setting (“...*we have to work on the positive, not the negative...*”).

A Discourse of antiracism was also present in the final moments of our meetings (see Table 18). As stated earlier, antiracist work involves embracing the discomfort that comes with it. Maria, Beth, and Laura all agreed in this segment that we would figure out ways to work on creating a classroom library that accomplished our goals, even in the face of potential opposition from administration. This is an objectively uncomfortable situation, but one that does not deter the participants from engaging with a productive disruption of the racial silences present at Oak Tree Elementary School.

Even though a clear Discourse of antiracism began to take hold in the final phase of meetings, a colorblind Discourse was still present within the suggestion for the Around-the-World event. Even though participants (myself included) were trying to suggest ideas that were meaningful and not trivial celebrations of diversity, none of the discussion or suggestions addressed issues of power and racism in relation to people who immigrated to the U.S. from “Around-the-World.” This maintained a colorblind Discourse because the suggestions remained surface level and denied a direct acknowledgement of issues of race and racism. A Discourse of emotional (dis)investment (Matias et al., 2014) was also still present, as seen in meetings from Phase Two. When Beth stated that she “*just*” appreciated the new lens and when Laura stated that her “*favorite*” week was the one when participants explicitly tried to discuss and learn about systemic racism and its implications because it was “*enjoyable*” for her (see Table 16), these

language moves align with a nonchalance and emotional (dis)investment (hooks, 1995; Matias et al., 2014) that allows white supremacy to stay intact. It is problematic that Beth and Laura were white teachers who were able to reflect on systemic racism by stating that they enjoyed learning about it, and merely appreciated this new knowledge as a lens for learning instead of as motivation for the rage that is necessary to work toward a real dismantling of white supremacy (hooks, 1995). I believe this particular embodiment of a Discourse of white supremacy and emotional (dis)investment is further problematized by the Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner that also circulated in these meetings and at this school. When Beth highlighted Oak Tree Elementary School's "*stale*" school environment, it allowed the teachers to engage with the work of productively disrupting racial silences in nonchalant, insignificant ways.

Discourses of Schools

One important shift seen during the final meetings was that participants began to embrace leadership roles that are associated with inquiry groups and a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999). During the initial meetings of the inquiry discussion group, participants were hesitant to share the responsibilities of leading the group with me, even though I frequently invited them to do so. This was seen in the "not knowing" explored during Phase One and even emerged at points during Phase Two meetings. When teachers engage in inquiry groups, the aim is that teachers from across the professional life span will gather together to generate local knowledge with an emphasis on teacher agency (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). These qualities began to take hold during the final meetings of the inquiry discussion group. For example, for our ninth meeting, Beth had forwarded the email about the Teacher Excellence Grant to the group and suggested that we complete the application together. This was one of the first times (Maria had also found and forwarded an article to the

group to read for the eighth meeting) a participant had chosen to take the responsibility of selecting artifacts for the inquiry discussion group to engage with, something I had been encouraging participants to do since the first meeting. This Discourse was also present when Beth (see Table 15) made the explicit suggestion for “*a two or three year thing that we eventually create and then you rotate,*” and when Beth grappled back and forth with me about what the details could be for the event. Both of these examples align with a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer because they show that the participants were embracing leadership roles and making suggestions with the intent of improving their own classrooms and schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999).

As previously stated, ideas consistent with a Discourse of teachers-as-knowledge-producers believe that teachers learn best by “identifying salient issues of practice” and “taking on roles of leadership and activism in efforts to transform classrooms, schools, and societies” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 278). Beth and Paige were doing just that (see Table 17) as they used language to identify the salient issue of resistance against social justice work in schools and then embraced leadership roles by trying to identify the root of the problem and a solution to work toward combating it. This and also the way Maria used language (use of the word “*appalled*” and clapping to emphasize her points) are in stark contrast with the ways participants had been evoking a Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner in earlier phases of the inquiry discussion group.

Finally, the particular language choices present in Segment 14 (see Table 18) not only evoked a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer, but even explicitly pushed back against the Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner that had circulated throughout all of our meetings and the environment of Oak Tree Elementary School. As stated earlier, when assumptions about

knowledge become the norm over long periods of time, they can result in power dynamics (Foucault, 1975). A Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner had long been circulating at this elementary school, which had developed a power dynamic in which practitioners did not feel empowered to make decisions or have input related to curriculum choices. In the final moments of our last meeting, participants directly pushed back against this power dynamic and embraced ways they could reclaim the power to make changes in their own classroom spaces.

The segments highlighted in this final phase of meetings of the inquiry discussion group point to the ways in which participants began to engage with a productive grappling and push back against the Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner present at Oak Tree Elementary School. This allowed for an antiracist Discourse and a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer to take hold and set the stage for participants to make specific suggestions for a productive disruption of the racial silences present in the school. These segments also further emphasized the point that this is complex work. As James Paul Gee (2011) states, these Discourses “were here before we arrived on earth and will be here after we leave—and we can see them as communicating (discoursing) with each other through time and history, using us as their temporary mouthpieces” (p. 177). Even though the ways the participants used language began to evoke an antiracist Discourse and a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer, a Discourse of white supremacy and Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner were not completely gone. These Discourses continued to use the participants in this inquiry discussion group as temporary mouthpieces to endure. I point this out not to end on a note of discouragement, but to highlight the complexity and reality of race work that takes place in predominantly white settings.

Summary

The results of my analysis allowed me to consider the data produced in this study in terms of my research questions. The main research question that guided this study was, “What happens when educators at a predominantly white elementary school are invited to disrupt silences around race?” When the participants at Oak Tree Elementary School were invited to disrupt silences around race, they displayed many levels of “not knowing” that influenced their talk. This “not knowing” included not knowing the history of the social construction of race or systemic racism, not knowing how to engage in an explicit discussion about these topics, and not knowing how to embrace the role of an educator capable of producing valuable knowledge. The participants also evoked various Discourses throughout the discussions. A Discourse of white supremacy, a colorblind Discourse, and a Discourse of teacher-as-passive learner circulated throughout all of the inquiry discussion group meetings. As time went on and participants began to grapple with topics related to race, racism, and whiteness, they did so in ways that also evoked an antiracist Discourse and a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer.

Within my original broad question, I was also looking to find information to help me explore three sub-questions, the first being, “How do educators inquire into whiteness and racism within the context of a school-based inquiry discussion group?” I understood this question to mean *what do participants do* when inquiring into whiteness and racism within the inquiry discussion group. When inquiring into whiteness and racism within the inquiry discussion group, participants engaged with artifacts and used them as a springboard for the talk. This was seen through the discussions that surrounded the artifacts I provided to the group and the questions I posed for the group to consider. As time went on, this was also seen through discussions surrounding artifacts and questions posed by the participants themselves. As the participants

engaged in the discussions surrounding the artifacts, they employed a variety of verbal and non-verbal conversation moves, which included: hesitating, avoiding, deflecting, remaining silent, building on ideas, introducing new ideas, asking and answering questions, using strong feeling words, and grappling with ideas. These conversation moves further illuminated the meaning the participants were making within the discussions.

The second sub question was, “What ideas about whiteness and racism are surfaced, and how are these ideas engaged within the group?” The results from this study pointed out that many topics related to race, racism, and whiteness came up, and the participants engaged with these topics and ideas in a variety of ways. The participants discussed topics such as the history, definition, and social construction of race and racism, systemic racism and its implications, holidays in schools, diversity celebrations in schools, representation of different races in curriculum materials, the white teaching force, multicultural school libraries, books to order, and conversations explicitly related to Critical Race Theory debates. Broadly, the first phase of the inquiry discussion group meetings saw conversations related explicitly to the history and social construction of race and systemic racism. The second and third phases of this inquiry discussion group saw a shift to ideas related to how race intersects with educational settings.

The participants engaged with these ideas in ways that were influenced by a Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner and also by a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer. It is important to note that even though there were moments when participants were explicitly embracing discomfort and the role of knowledge producer, the Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner did not disappear. The teachers at Oak Tree Elementary School were consistently positioned as passive learners who were not capable of producing their own valuable knowledge, which resulted in teachers who didn’t feel they had agency to make decisions about how to teach

in their own classrooms. Even as teachers began to embrace leadership roles within the inquiry group, there were still moments when a Discourse of teacher-as-passive-learner permeated the talk and impacted the participant engagement.

When considering the second sub-question, “What ideas about whiteness and racism are surfaced, and how are these ideas engaged within the group?” it is important to highlight that as I set out to investigate this question, I interpreted it as asking how the group engaged with ideas as a whole. This led me to focus on what appeared to be collective trends over the course of the study, and I concluded that the inquiry discussion group as a whole experienced shifts in the discourse as well as in the ideas present in each phase of meetings. If I had instead focused on the ways individuals were engaging with ideas and discourse, I may have drawn different conclusions. In particular, it is possible that Paige, the only Black participant, was experiencing shifts in comfort and discomfort differently than the white participants.

Finally, this research project was looking to understand, “How do teachers move past moments of discomfort to remain engaged?” As the analysis showed, participants were uncomfortable when having discussions related to race, racism, and whiteness. This was evident in the conversation moves highlighted and in explicit statements made by the participants. Results from this research project suggest that participants moved past these moments of discomfort by embracing leadership roles associated with a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer. This inquiry discussion group was one of the first times the participants were invited to participate in a collaborative analysis and interpretation of ideas that could directly impact their classrooms. As participants became more comfortable in these roles, they began to make statements such as, “I think, sometimes we have to be okay with being uncomfortable, because I think that’s when you learn, and that gives you space to grow” (Paige, Meeting 6, 11/23/2021).

Participants also began to ask questions about the complexity of representation and stereotypes present in classroom materials (e.g., Is this okay to give to them?; Is anyone gonna be offended?; Are they gonna think it's stereotypical?—Laura, Meeting 6, 11/21/2021). These examples show that in order to remain engaged in a productive disruption of the racial silences present at Oak Tree Elementary School, participants embraced the invitation to be valuable knowledge producers within their own school.

In terms of this last research question, it is important to consider the impact I, the researcher, had on the participants' level of comfort. I posed the question, "How do teachers move past moments of discomfort to remain engaged?" because I wanted to gather information to find out how to keep white participants engaged in race work, even if it became uncomfortable. This desire may have been a detriment to my work in that I may have made the experience too comfortable for the participants. When I began to notice the participants' discourse opening up and their level of engagement increasing as we spoke about the practical classroom topics, I followed their lead and did not encourage an explicit carryover of the heavier theoretical issues (e.g., systemic racism, white supremacy, white privilege) from the earlier meetings. This is not something I consciously noticed at the time, but through my analysis and reflection on this research question, I realize that my desire to keep participants engaged may have gotten in the way of letting them get productively uncomfortable.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Possibilities

I entered into this study with the broad question, “What happens when educators at a predominantly white elementary school are invited to disrupt silences around race?” I also entered into this study predisposed to being hopeful for change. The results of my analysis were organized into three phases that represented a gradual shift in the discourse: discomfort of not knowing, embracing discomfort, and grappling toward change. Even though I also pointed out the ways Discourses of white supremacy and colorblindness circulated throughout the ten sessions of the inquiry discussion group, the use of this temporal frame may imply the participants shifted from discomfort to comfort in explicitly disrupting racial silences. In this chapter, I explore the complexity of talking about race with peers in an inquiry discussion group in relation to the school setting and the research literature on how teachers talk about race.

The discourse analysis I conducted clearly pointed to the ways participants began to use language to grapple with ideas related to race and education in a way that reflects the perspective of “inquiry as stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The complexity lies in the reasons behind this shift. One interpretation, discussed in depth in Chapter 4, is that this shift occurred because participants began to embrace the discomfort that comes with disrupting racial silences and embrace the role of inquirer, which led to increased comfort with collaborative analysis related to race issues to the classroom. One alternative interpretation of what happened is that I noticed this shift in participant comfort and engagement levels because the participants were more comfortable discussing topics related to school. During the first phase of meetings, artifacts and discussions dealt explicitly with topics related to systemic racism, white supremacy, and white

privilege. In the meetings of subsequent phases, the discussions focused more on school-related topics. This shift was in response to the participants suggesting that we begin to look at artifacts that would help us bring ideas about race into their classrooms. On the one hand, it is not surprising that as participants began to discuss what they regarded as practical and relevant, they began to employ discourse that displayed an increased level of comfort. Even though participants had engaged in explicit discussions about topics such as systemic racism and its implications during the first phase of meetings, these ideas did not explicitly carry over into the later phases of meetings. Participants did not appear to be making connections between systemic racism, white privilege, or white supremacy and their classrooms. As stated above, I entered this study in a spirit of hopefulness, and when I observed the discourse beginning to open up and the participants appearing more comfortable, I let go of the more challenging topics from the first phase of meetings and did not encourage participants to make the connection between those topics and the school-related topics. This sometimes resulted in participants making practical suggestions that evoked colorblind or White Supremacist Discourses. Based on these complex experiences and observations within this inquiry discussion group, I present a discussion of how this study aligns with literature in the field.

Reacting to Discussions of Race in Colorblind Ways

Colorblindness—statements or beliefs that imply that one’s race does not have implications—can be dangerous because it denies historical realities and, in doing so, works to maintain white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Many studies have shown that when participants who have not had experience explicitly talking about race are invited to do so for the first time, it is common for them to react in colorblind ways (Bell, 2002; Borsheim-Black, 2015; Boutte et al., 2011; Glazier, 2003; Hollingworth, 2009; Kailin, 1999;

Lewis, 2001; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009; Schultz et al., 2000). This research literature also points to numerous ways colorblindness can be dangerous when it is enacted in school settings. One dangerous way colorblind beliefs can manifest is that teachers who witness racist behavior by their white colleagues can choose to remain silent and not challenge the behavior (Kailin, 1999). Studies have shown that teachers who hold colorblind beliefs look for colorblind excuses for what they witness instead of confronting the racist behavior. Another way colorblind standpoints can be dangerous in schools is that these beliefs can end up transferring from classroom materials or from teachers to their students (Boutte et al., 2011; Hollingworth, 2009; Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

The results of this study aligned with this body of research at various points when participants made statements that supported neutrality toward race instead of explicitly acknowledging race and racial differences. For example, during the first inquiry discussion group meeting, Beth stated that her son described his teachers “by their weight and their height and that’s the way it should be, in my opinion, not, you know, not their ethnicity” (Beth, Meeting 1, 10/21/2021). Beth’s statement was colorblind in the way it supported the idea that it is better to describe someone by any physical quality other than their race or ethnicity. Also, during the ninth meeting when Beth, Paige, and I discussed suggestions for an Around-the-World at Oak Tree Elementary School (see Table 16), we made suggestions that maintained a superficial acknowledgement of race and left out any acknowledgement of issues of power and racism. Finally, at one point, Beth stated that she had “the most colorful class I’ve ever had in 18 years at Oak Tree, and it’s still not talked about” (Beth, Meeting 2, 10/26/2021). These examples point to the ways colorblindness was present within the participants and within the school setting, which aligns with the research literature.

One complexity my study contributes to the field is that when the participants made colorblind statements or suggestions, they did it in what I will call ‘*confident yet colorblind*’ ways. When Beth made the above colorblind statement about what her son said and when all of the participants (myself included) discussed the details of the Around-the-World event, we did so in ways that suggested we were confident we were actually making antiracist statements or suggestions. It is important to point out that participants may sometimes sound confident in their colorblindness because this way of talking is just as dangerous as other enactments of colorblindness. Confident colorblind statements and suggestions masquerade as positive change and may be less likely to be questioned. As the researcher in this study and the facilitator of the inquiry discussion group, there were moments when participants made colorblind statements in confident ways that left me unsure of how to confront them. This deters progress and leaves racial silences and white supremacy intact.

The Pervasive Discourse of White Supremacy

Previous studies similar to mine have pointed out that when racism or the normalcy of whiteness are questioned and problematized, whites can react in certain ways. For example, research shows that whites can deflect, ignore, get angry, or get defensive (Matias et al., 2014; Picower, 2009), behaviors I consider under the umbrella term of *discomfort*. When people react in these ways, it might not appear to be overt or intentional white supremacy, but scholars from the fields of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies would point out that these reactions can in fact be active protections of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2008; Picower, 2009).

My study confirms these participant reactions. For example, during the group’s first meeting, Felicity was discussing racism, and she stated that people are “making it something and you know we make it an issue we make it a division, we make it a ... a problem when it doesn’t

have to be a problem” (Felicity, Meeting 1, 10/21/21). These statements are aligned with a Discourse of white supremacy in the way they suggest that racism is something that could be rectified if individuals stopped making it a problem. Also problematic was the way Maria, Beth, and I avoided or deflected Felicity’s statements and through the way Paige and Laura remained silent throughout this exchange. This Discourse of white supremacy was present even when the talk began to shift and Discourses of antiracism began to emerge in the final meetings of the group. In the last meeting of the inquiry discussion group, Beth and Laura, both white teachers, were able to reflect on systemic racism by stating that they enjoyed learning about it and merely appreciated this new knowledge as a lens for learning instead of as motivation for the rage that is necessary to work toward a real dismantling of white supremacy (hooks, 1995). These examples highlight that work in this field is complex and a Discourse of white supremacy must be acknowledged as an insidious reality. Even if a Discourse of white supremacy is not overtly stated, it still permeates.

Positioning Teachers as Knowledge Producers

When teachers are positioned as knowledge producers, they are encouraged to question their school environments and teaching practices in order to produce local knowledge that can be used in their own classrooms. This idea counteracts the long-held belief that teachers are only technicians that are trained to be “faithful implementers of received knowledge and curriculum” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 2) that are created outside of the classroom contexts. Some existing research in this field indirectly positioned teacher participants as knowledge producers by inviting them to voluntarily participate in the disruption of racial silences instead of requiring them to attend a professional development session (Bell, 2002; Chubbuck, 2004). Other studies positioned teachers as knowledge producers by valuing their input in the studies (Glazier, 2003;

McDonough, 2009; Pennington, 2007; Skerrett, 2011). Finally, some of these studies positioned teachers as knowledge producers because the researchers were teachers themselves and used their own classrooms as sites to produce local knowledge (Hyttén & Warren, 2003; McIntyre, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Tanner, 2018). In a smaller body of research, researchers explicitly position teachers as knowledge producers when doing race work in educational settings. One particularly strong example of the benefits of positioning teachers as knowledge producers is Desiree Cueto and Susan Corapi's (2019) study in which they invited five elementary school teachers to participate in an inquiry group aimed at explicitly addressing controversial social justice issues in their classrooms. The researchers pointed out that during the study, teachers began to talk about themselves as curriculum developers and to take ownership over what was happening in their classrooms and that "inquiry provided the structure and support to challenge the status quo" (p. 40).

The results of my inquiry discussion group contribute to the small set of studies that have documented the benefit of embracing teachers as knowledge producers when doing race work in schools. The participants in the inquiry discussion group cited the negative effects of feeling they had no agency at Oak Tree Elementary School. For example, when discussing the idea of implementing race work in our classrooms, Hannah worried about what the consequences would be (Meeting 3, 11/02/2021). She asked the group, "...do I actually feel like our district would have our back, if something happened?" and "Like, what would our administration think, if there's this—conversations are being had at the elementary school level?" (Hannah, Meeting 3, 11/02/2021). These wonderings illustrate the ways that the culture of Oak Tree Elementary School caused practitioners to feel they would not have support if they made independent decisions to approach conversations related to race in the classroom. On the other hand, when

they were positioned as knowledge producers, perhaps for the first time in the inquiry discussion group, the participants began to embrace a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer, and from this, productive ideas grew. This was seen through Beth's forwarding of the Teacher Excellence Grant application to the group and through the collaborative effort to fill out the application to request funds to help us build a windows and mirror library (Meeting 9, 12/14/2021).

The Nice White Woman

While this study did have one participant who identified as Black, the majority of the participants and the majority of the staff at Oak Tree Elementary School were white women, which I believe impacted the discussions in certain ways. Judith Butler (1990) writes about gender performativity using notions of power from Foucault to posit that gender categories are learned performances that are influenced by societal expectations. It is worthwhile to consider this concept in conjunction with racial discussions. When white middle class women analyze race and racism, the emphasis often falls on personal changes rather than oppressive institutional structures or organizational change (Elkholy, 2022). This ends up underscoring a white woman's 'goodness' and shifts the focus to a personal instead of structural analysis of race and racism. I believe these ideas about being a white middle class woman impacted the conversations of this inquiry discussion group by deterring the white participants from further embracing productive disagreements around topics of race and education. Even though the results of my analysis showed that participants did begin to grapple with ideas, I feel the idea of what it means to be a nice white middle class woman who is analyzing race prevented the participants (myself included) from fully embracing potential productive disagreements about systemic racism, school policies, curricula, and teaching practices. As mentioned above, examples of this include

my failure to encourage participants to make connections between the theoretical concepts from phase one meetings with the practical concepts from phase two and three meetings and also the moments when ‘*confident yet colorblind*’ statements remained unchallenged. While the white middle class participants could have been encouraged to experience more productive discomfort, productive discomfort is not experienced the same way by all people. Paige, the one Black participant, was quite possibly on a completely different trajectory than the white participants in this discussion group and could have been experiencing comfort and discomfort in different ways.

While it is impossible to get into the heads of the participants of this study, the current cultural context, where there is backlash against anything related to race, is so intense that I believe this climate impacted what the participants chose to say and not say. This, exacerbated by what it means to be a nice white middle class woman, made it challenging to have explicit discussions about race that worked toward structural change.

Implications

This dissertation study led to implications for those working in K-12 schools, for teacher education programs, and for educational research.

For K-12 Schools

As Paige stated, “I think, sometimes we have to be okay with being uncomfortable, because I think that’s when you learn, and that gives you space to grow” (Paige, Meeting 6, 11/23/2021). This sentiment was reinforced by Laura during her exit interview when she was reflecting on admitting she didn’t know what systemic racism was. She stated, “I was almost like, embarrassed to say that out loud, that I didn’t really know what it was, but I was like I’m, you know, these are my colleagues, like what do I have to lose? And it turned out to be a really

good thing, because from there, I learned what it was” (Laura, exit interview). Teachers and other practitioners who work in K-12 schools need to be provided with experiences that support them in taking risks and being uncomfortable. Many schools in the United States are plagued by the ways teachers are blamed for national educational crises, which leads to policies and laws that increase accountability through standards and assessments (Taubman, 2009). This audit culture reflects assumptions about teachers, teaching, and learning that align with the idea of teachers as technicians (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 2). As this study shows, once teachers were given the opportunity to step out of their comfort zones, they were able to see the learning that could result from embracing these situations and began to produce local knowledge that could be used to work toward meaningful race work in schools. Administrators, and those tasked with the job of organizing professional development and learning experiences for staff members of K-12 schools, should incorporate inquiry opportunities for their staff, especially when it comes to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work.

The implications for K-12 schools I recommend must be considered in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers are feeling burnt out, and one way to remedy that is to ensure that schools are the site of stability, not chaos (Cucchiara, 2022). As Beth stated, when talking about the need to address race as schools reopen after the COVID-19 pandemic, “...but like we can restart now, we know what’s so much more important than what was, in my opinion, and we need to use this to help our children, because they’re going to change the world, and they need to know” (Beth, Meeting 2, 10/26/2021). Administrators and those who work in K-12 schools need to keep this in mind and take advantage of this moment in time where they have the opportunity to rebuild and breathe life back into their staff by giving them opportunities to embrace agency in order to address racial silences that exist in their schools. Providing inquiry opportunities in ways

that embrace a Discourse of teacher-as-knowledge-producer can lead to a more productive disruption of racial silences so teachers can be prepared to do DEI work with students.

For Teacher Educators

Even though the majority of the research literature reviewed for this study did not include research related to preservice teachers, my observations and experiences when conducting this study hold implications for teacher educators. During the sixth meeting of the inquiry discussion group for this study, the teacher participants acknowledged the lack of experience they had with explicitly discussing race and admitted that when they engaged in these discussions, they were uncomfortable at first. When discussing the level of discomfort associated with these discussions, Paige stated, "...look how many weeks it's taken us to kind of be comfortable talking about it" (Paige, Meeting 6, 11/23/2021). It took the participants weeks to begin to acknowledge and embrace the discomfort associated with explicitly discussing race, even with 10-30 years of teaching experience. It should not be possible for teachers to get this far into their careers without ever considering their own beliefs about race, racism, and whiteness and how these beliefs intersect with their profession. Considering about 79% of public school teachers in the U.S. identified as non-Hispanic White during the 2017-2018 school year (Schaeffer, 2021), teacher education programs should be encouraging future teachers to engage in an interrogation of their beliefs and understandings of race, systemic racism, and whiteness so they can enter the field already prepared to embrace this discomfort. This interrogation should not be through superficial add-ons that focus on multiculturalism or Black history for a short amount of time (Gorski, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Instead, teacher preparation programs should include multiple courses that challenge future teachers to interrogate their beliefs through meaningful reflections on their own personal experiences with race. This should

be in tandem with courses that look at the history of systemic racism, including an analysis of the structural issues that cause racial inequalities (Banks & Banks, 2016). Finally, teacher education programs should also prepare future teachers to continue this hard work as they go into the field. Teachers who operate from inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) embrace a lifelong commitment to learning across the professional lifespan, which is needed when it comes to interrogating racial beliefs. Race relations in the United States is not a static topic; teachers need to be prepared to continue to interrogate their beliefs along with the moving and changing climate.

Another aim of teacher education programs should be to prepare students to recognize the difference between being a knowledge producer and being a technician. Teachers who are knowledge producers are viewed as intellectuals who aim to question and critique what is happening in their schools in order to decide what curriculum decisions work best in their classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). On the other hand, teachers who are viewed as technicians are expected to disseminate knowledge that is produced outside of the classroom without any input from the teachers themselves. I was not aware of these differences until I pursued my doctoral studies, and the participants of this study did not seem to have ever been positioned as knowledge producers until they were invited to participate in this inquiry discussion group. Teacher preparation programs need to prepare future teachers to know the difference, to embrace inquiry learning opportunities, and should also prepare future teachers to recognize qualities of institutions that position teachers as technicians. These qualities include those of an audit culture (Taubman, 2009), such as standardized assessments, teacher evaluations, testing policies, and forced teacher training. Future teachers should be aware that

many United States public schools are plagued by these qualities and should be prepared to work within and against these systems.

For Educational Researchers

This study also has implications for researchers who want to engage in the disruption of racial silences in educational settings. Researchers should know that a voluntary inquiry group is a successful methodological choice when designing a study of this nature. Inviting participants to participate in an inquiry group in order to explicitly address issues of race can help teachers begin to think of themselves as curriculum developers and to take ownership over what is happening in their classrooms (Cueto & Corapi, 2019). This was also true of this study as evidenced by the shift in participant language use that showed participants beginning to grapple with ideas and embrace leadership roles that are associated with inquiry groups. Once participants began to embrace these roles and engage in a collaborative analysis of ideas, they started to make practical suggestions for ways to make changes in their own school setting and classrooms. During her exit interview, Laura stated:

It makes it more meaningful for us for teachers, when we really, when we have the investment, and when it's something we want to pursue, whereas oftentimes, when we're just told to do something and, you know, we do it because we're told by the administration, but if this is something that we know is important that we have a little invested interest in to begin with, I think it just helps. (Laura, exit interview)

If participants had been forced to attend a teacher “training” that required them to explicitly discuss race, racism, and whiteness, then I believe the outcome would have been different and participants could have shut down, which would have prevented any local knowledge from being produced in this study.

A second implication for researchers is to be prepared that the intersection of participants who are inexperienced with explicitly discussing race and inexperienced with being positioned as knowledge producers can come with some roadblocks. For example, in the inquiry discussion

group conversations, participants responded with silence, hesitation, and by deflecting or avoiding certain topics. If I were to conduct this study again, I would tell myself to be even more transparent with the participants about what it means to be in an inquiry group. Instead of just explaining what an inquiry group is during the informational meeting, I would explicitly share with the participants perhaps a short article about the history and purposes of inquiry groups and common behaviors associated with teachers who participate in one. If participants could have joined the study with a deeper understanding of what it meant to be in an inquiry group, then this might have brought some awareness and intentionality to their behavior or language choices rather than defaulting to the nice white woman identity mentioned above.

A third implication for educational research is that while this study consisted of participants that were practitioners from Oak Tree Elementary School, it might be worthwhile to consider broadening the participant pool to include families or other community members. The fact that this study only included teacher participants and that most of the participants were white begs questions about whose perspectives were considered during the discussions. As mentioned in Chapter 3, an important warning that emerges in this body of research is that whites should not work with just whites on issues involving race and the disruption of racial silences because whites “can become isolated and validated by the very views we are attempting to disengage” (Pennington, 2007, p. 111). One suggestion for future researchers would be to invite parent participants and other community members to partake, especially if there are parents or community members of color that are stakeholders in the school. Another suggestion related to this one would be that future researchers should make sure to incorporate resources from people of color, especially if they have mostly white participants. This was something I focused on in this study, as I was aware of research literature warning that whites “can become isolated and

validated by the very views we are attempting to disengage” (Pennington, 2007, p. 111) when they work with only other whites on race issues. Therefore, I made sure to incorporate multiple resources from people of color as a way to include voices of color without relying on people of color to do the hard work required when doing race work in predominantly white settings.

A fourth implication for future researchers working with mostly white participants would be to prepare for the likelihood that they would encounter colorblind Discourses, Discourses of white supremacy, and issues related to Nice White Women, as I did in my study. I suggest that future researchers be prepared to explicitly confront these issues. In hindsight, I believe having conversations or sharing articles with the participants about these Discourses or about common behaviors of white women who engage in social justice causes would have allowed the participants and myself to have open discussions and work toward evoking more productive Discourses such as antiracism or productive disagreements.

A fifth implication for future researchers who are interested in forming an inquiry group would be to spend time considering how the incorporation of ethical and/or professional norms (Campano et al., 2015) could help strengthen an inquiry group. In hindsight, this research project would have benefited from norms that would have encouraged the participants and myself to challenge one another’s ideas when citing Discourses of white supremacy or colorblindness. I often felt unsure of how to respond to what was said at such moments, and tended to ignore the statement, a common practice by “nice white women.” This might have led me to explicitly consider ideas related to systemic racism and white supremacy as we shifted to discussing practical classroom ideas. This research project also would have benefitted from norms that supported other participants in sharing the role of facilitator. As the inquiry discussion group from this study continues to meet, norms could help us better accomplish our goals of

productively disrupting the racial silences present at Oak Tree Elementary School. Researchers who would want to facilitate any group that explicitly discusses race should consider which initial norms could be established so that collaborative inquiry groups could accomplish their goals.

A sixth implication for researchers interested in doing this type of work would be to consider whose comfort is being prioritized. As I reflect back on this study, I know there were moments when I chose to include (or not include) artifacts or discussion questions in order to ensure that the white participants in the discussion group were not too uncomfortable. I also wonder what Paige (the only Black participant) would say in response to my decision to do this. I suggest that any researcher looking to do similar work should consider the implications of whose comfort is prioritized. I would also suggest that future research consider norms that could be established at the beginning of the inquiry group to encourage transparency in this field. For example, researchers could start off an inquiry group by having an open conversation about comfort and whose comfort is and should be prioritized in light of the history of systemic racism. Norms could then be established where all participants would be asked “*whose comfort was prioritized today?*” at the end of each session, which would allow for an open discussion about this concept at the conclusion of each meeting.

A final implication for future educational research relates to analysis. This study employed a discourse analysis while also considering theoretical ideas from the fields of Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies, and inquiry as stance. These lenses helped me make inferences and assumptions about what was being said, how it was being said, and which Discourses were present in terms of race and teacher knowledge. Researchers who conduct similar studies or researchers who are including a discourse analysis of talk related to race may

also want to consider incorporating a Foucauldian lens. The incorporation of such a lens would have allowed for a deeper analysis of the power dynamics present in the discussions and at Oak Tree Elementary School and could have provided a different perspective on the data from this study.

Limitations

As with all research, this study involved limitations. One limitation was my role as both a researcher and a teacher participant from the school. Even though I positioned myself as a co-creator of knowledge with my participants and not as an expert researcher in the field, the fact that I was pursuing my doctoral degree and was the one who presented the idea for this study caused participants to position me as an expert. This was a limitation because it prevented participants from fully embracing leadership or facilitation roles within the inquiry discussion group.

Another limitation was my own positionality as a white woman. My whiteness, along with the whiteness of most of the participants, likely allowed for limited perspectives to be incorporated in the inquiry group discussions. I was aware of this limitation before the study began, and to prepare for this, I incorporated the voices of many Black researchers and scholars when learning about the background of this problem as well as when selecting artifacts to use for the discussions. Even still, the fact that the conversations themselves involved participants who were mostly white and who worked in a predominantly white elementary school most likely excluded other perspectives.

A third limitation was that the inquiry discussion group meetings took place via Zoom. Meeting in person was not an option due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore meetings needed to take place virtually. Using the Zoom platform for meetings was beneficial because all

participants had familiarity with the capabilities, it allowed for the discussions to be both audio and video recorded, and participants could join from various locations, which accommodated their various schedules. On the other hand, the use of Zoom came with limitations such as the visual recordings only including a view of the speaker, which prevented me from viewing the nonverbal responses and body language of participants who were not speaking.

A fourth limitation was the short time frame of this study.

When teachers come together in inquiry communities, time is critical. Teachers need sufficient chunks of time to work and longevity over time. This gives ideas a chance to incubate and develop, trust builds in the group and participants feel comfortable raising sensitive issues and risking self-revelation. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 294)

The inquiry discussion group met for ten weeks, and during these ten weeks, there was a gradual shift in discourse and also a shift in the ways the participants evoked qualities of an oral inquiry group (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). If this inquiry discussion group could have met for a longer period of time, there might have been opportunities for deeper shifts as trust continued to build.

One final limitation was the use of snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) for participant recruitment and selection. This method involved me inviting the first participant who I thought would be interested, which was a limitation because this decision led to a particular group of people being recruited. This was limiting because this method in no way represented all of the people available from Oak Tree Elementary School or from the Garden Grove School District.

Concluding Thoughts

At the conclusion of this study, I have learned the value of embracing the discomfort that comes with explicitly discussing race in a predominantly white elementary school. I have also learned the value of encouraging teachers to embrace roles of teachers as knowledge producers.

Through this study I saw how this could lead to changes, and even if they were incremental, they were clear shifts that solidified my belief that it is important to invite educators to engage in conversations about race. As I think about what this work means going forward, I contemplate the ways in which I could share the analysis of this study with the participants. It would be worthwhile to do so in order to think about the Discourses that were present in our discussions and what this might mean for how we continue to engage with this work going forward. I also contemplate the ideas related to prioritizing comfort mentioned above and believe it would also be worthwhile to share these thoughts with the participants to invite them to share their input. I believe that having these transparent conversations will continue to build trust between the participants (myself included), which will allow us to strengthen the outcomes of our discussions. If teachers can work toward productive discomfort while ensuring that white women's comfort is not prioritized when having these conversations with each other, then we can be more prepared to discuss these topics with our students. Fostering these conversations can work toward growing a generation that can interrupt the racial silences in our society.

Coda

The inquiry discussion group from this study met for the final time on December 21, 2021 with hopes to continue our meetings (in some shape or form) in the future. This hope was confirmed in the exit interviews, with multiple participants stating that they would like to continue to gather, even if not for a formal weekly meeting. As I write this Coda, it is March of 2022, and our group has met one time since our last meeting to discuss the Teacher Excellence Grant money that was approved for our project to build a library of books that can act as windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) for our students. Even though participants were skeptical that our application would be approved, as shown in segments from meeting 10, the superintendent reached out in February to let us know that we were approved. As a researcher, a doctoral student, and a 5th grade teacher, I am excited to continue to engage in this inquiry discussion group and to continue to embrace discomfort as we productively disrupt racial silences.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

525 West 120th St. New York, NY 10027
212-678-3000 | www.tc.columbia.edu

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: Disrupting Racial Silences in a Predominately White School District
Inquiry Discussion Group Consent

Principal Researcher: Jennifer Krill, Teachers College
845-774-0638, jmk2266@tc.columbia.edu

Faculty Sponsor: Marjorie Siegel
ms399@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION You are invited to participate in this research study called "Disrupting Racial Silences in a Predominately White School District". You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are a practitioner at the Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School. Approximately five to eight people will participate in this study and it will take about 10 hours of your time to complete over the course of ten weeks.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE? This study is being done to determine what happens when teachers are positioned as intellectual knowledge producers in order to disrupt the silence that exists around topics involving racial inequities and white supremacy in educational settings.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? If you decide to participate, the primary researcher will ask that you participate in inquiry discussion group sessions via Zoom with your peers, produce artifacts that will guide discussions (i.e., write a short autobiography about your experiences with discussing racial topics), write short journal reflections at the end of discussion sessions and participate in a one-on-one exit interview with the primary researcher.

You will first be asked to participate in an inquiry discussion group where the primary researcher and practitioners like yourself will explicitly discuss topics involving racial inequities and white supremacy. You will also be asked to produce artifacts that will guide discussions. At the end of each discussion group session you will be asked to write a short journal reflection. These Zoom meetings will be audio and video-recorded and the primary researcher will be taking notes. The audio/video recording will be deleted after it is transcribed and analyzed. Everyone will be asked not to discuss what is being spoken about outside of the group but it is impossible to guarantee complete confidentiality. Inquiry discussion group sessions will take about one hour and there will be ten meetings.

Teachers College, Columbia University
Institutional Review Board
Protocol Number: 21-434
Consent Form Approved Until: No Expiration Date

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At the end of the inquiry discussion group, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one exit interview with the primary researcher. During the individual interview you will be asked to discuss your experience in the inquiry discussion group. This interview will be audio-recorded. After the audio recording is transcribed, the audio recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. The interview will take approximately thirty minutes. You will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep your identity confidential.

All of these procedures will take place via Zoom. All of the procedures will not impinge on classroom time. All procedures will be done at an agreed upon time during break times or outside of school hours.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might experience feelings of discomfort such as embarrassment or guilt when we discuss racial inequities and white supremacy. You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. Your information will be kept confidential.

The primary researcher is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and in a locked drawer.

Due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are inherent risks with in-person research. The researcher has put the following precautions in place to support participants.

- **RISK:** Person-to-person exposure is the most frequent route of transmission for infectious viruses and occurs via direct inhalation of respiratory droplets during close contact.
 - Infectious diseases are transmitted from person to person by direct or indirect contact. Certain types of viruses, bacteria, parasites, and fungi can all cause infectious disease.
 - If you have flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, etc.) please reschedule any in-person meetings.
 - If you experience flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, etc.) during the study activity, please immediately alert the researcher. The researcher will then stop all study activities. The researcher may provide you with information on where to get a COVID-19 test, or other safety and health information.

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- **WAYS TO MITIGATE RISK:** Social distance, wear face covering
 - Simple preventative measures, such as frequent hand washing, wearing a face covering, maintaining social distance, disinfecting the workspace can cut down on disease transmission.
- **(LIMITED) MANDATED REPORTING:** When required by law, information (including individually identifiable information) related to a research subject's COVID-19 tests results may be reported to a public health authority.
 - If you find out you have tested positive for COVID-19 and recently participated in a research study, please contact the researcher at your earliest convenience. If applicable, your name and contact information may be shared with the Environmental Health and Safety Office (EHS) to initiate viral contact tracing. The researcher will not share your research data with anyone outside of the research team.
 - When communicating with anyone other than the IRB or the researcher about your symptoms or your concerns about a potential viral spread, you DO NOT have to disclose the study title or topic. The researchers will only share your name and contact information, if appropriate for viral contact tracing.
 - The researcher will keep you, the research participant, updated on any next steps as they become available.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of teacher education to better understand the best way to disrupt racial silences in educational settings.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY? You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS? The study is over when you have completed the inquiry discussion group meetings and the one-on-one exit interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY The primary researcher will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio and video recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio recording will be written down and the audio recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

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For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED? The results of this study may be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING

Audio recording and video recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, **you will not be able to participate** in this research study.

___ I give my consent to be recorded _____
Signature

___ I **do not** consent to be recorded _____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow written, video and audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow written, video and audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

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The primary researcher may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial below to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

The researcher may contact me in the future for other research opportunities:

Yes _____ No _____
Initial Initial

The researcher may contact me in the future for information relating to this current study:

Yes _____ No _____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Jennifer Krill, at 845-774-0638 or at jmk2266@tc.columbia.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at the researcher's professional discretion. The researcher may withdraw me from the research if I intentionally contribute to other participants' discomfort when discussing racial inequities and white supremacy.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.

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- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Identifiers may be removed from the data. De-identified data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent from you (the research participant or the research participant's representative).
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature: _____

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Jennifer Krill – Interview Guide IRB#: 21-434

Interviews for this study will be individual exit interviews that take place after the 10 inquiry discussion group meetings. The following questions will be used to guide the interviews:

Starting question:

- What was this experience of talking about race like for you?

Follow up questions:

- What felt the most comfortable? Did anything feel uncomfortable? Why?
- Where there any moments when you found yourself working to stay engaged in the discussion? If yes, describe that time. What was it that kept you engaged in the discussion?
- Do you think this experience will impact your teaching? If yes, how might it impact your teaching? If no, why not?
- Was anything surprising throughout this experience?
- Which moments stayed with you the most?
- How do you think this experience will impact your teaching?
- Is there anything from your journal reflections that you would like to share?